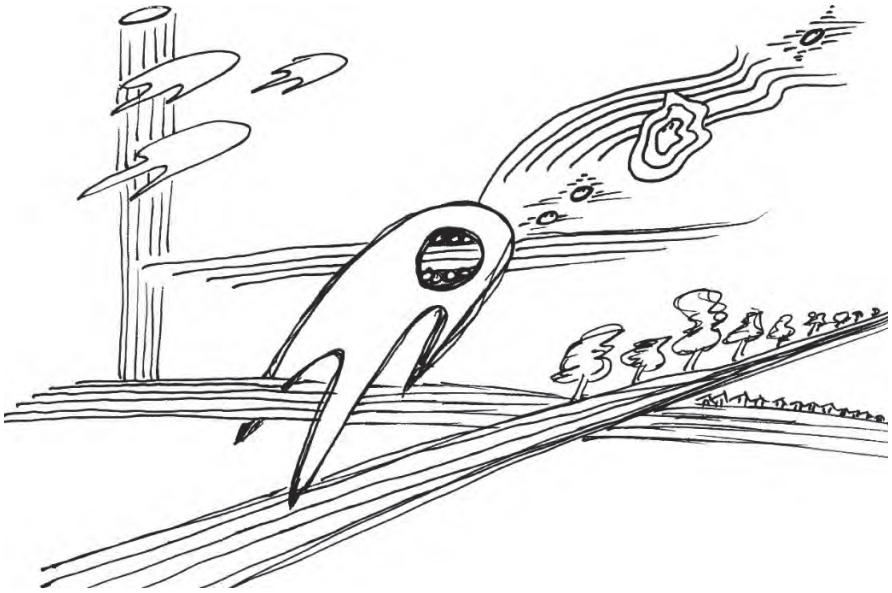
From the Pale of Settlement to Michigan – Stories of My Grandparents and Their Families (with supplements, 2021)

Dan Slobin



DIS

(See definition and map of "Pale of Settlement" on page 214.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

This document is primarily the story of those who came before me, but I have made myself part of the story in a number of places. I've told the story in my own words in an oral history of almost three hours, which can be found in the Yiddish Book Center's Wexler Oral History Project. The oral history can be viewed and downloaded from this website:

https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/oral-histories/interviews/woh-fi-0001354/dan-slobin-2020

As for myself:
I'm a retired UC Berkeley professor of psychology and linguistics. My research is devoted to relations between language and thinking, comparing many languages and cultures. I've paid special attention to studying how children acquire their native languages. In addition to academic writing, I write poetry, essays on the arts and history, travel memoirs. I also translate poetry from a number of languages. Along with creative writing, I'm a photographer, make pen-and-ink drawings, and play and improvise classical piano.

I was born in Detroit in 1939, and attended secondary school there and in Vienna. After a 1960 BA from the University of Michigan and a 1964 PhD from Harvard, both in psychology, I've spent my adult life in Berkeley, along with research years in Istanbul, Paris, and the Netherlands, where I lived in Groningen and Nijmegen. I've also done research in Russia, Germany, UK, Serbia, Croatia, Poland, Spain, Italy, Israel, Japan, and Chile.

Dan Slobin
Berkeley, California
November 23, 2021

2323 Rose St., Berkeley, CA 94708, USA
slobin@berkeley.edu
https://danslobin.academia.edu/

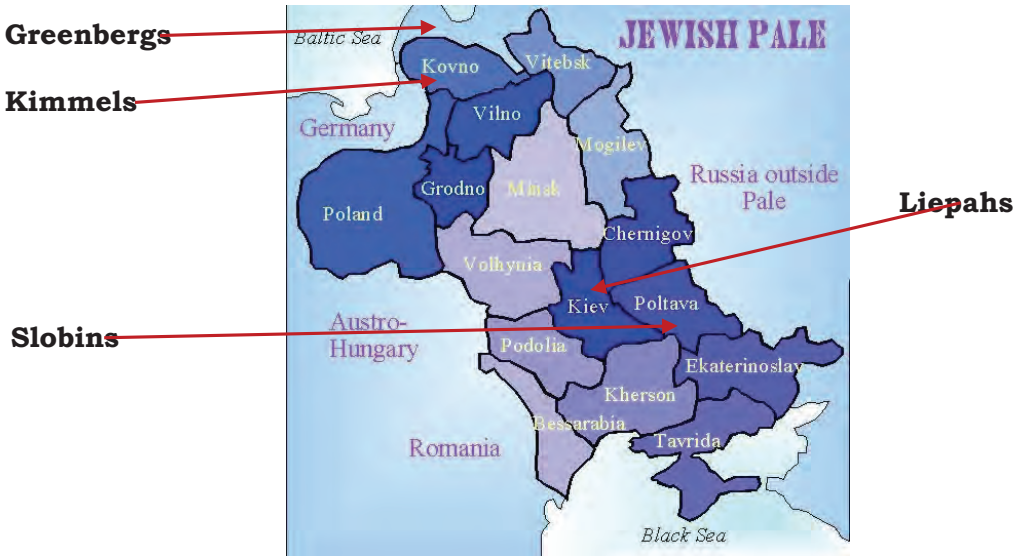
From the Pale of Settlement to Michigan: Stories of My Grandparents and Their Families

Dan Slobin
2016

Both sides of my family came from the part of the Russian Empire where Jews were allowed to live, "the Pale of Settlement." This was the homeland of Yiddish and the source of waves of immigrants to the New World. The story of my mother's side is told in Part One, *From Uman to Detroit: The lives of Simon Liepah and Sima Baker Liepah* (pp. 3-88). The Liepahs were part of the last wave, coming to the United States at the end of 1922. They all came together from Uman, a city in the Kiev district of Ukraine. I knew them well and can tell their stories on the basis of many letters and personal memories. My mother was born in Russian Ukraine and was part of a family that spoke Yiddish daily, as well as a good deal of Russian.

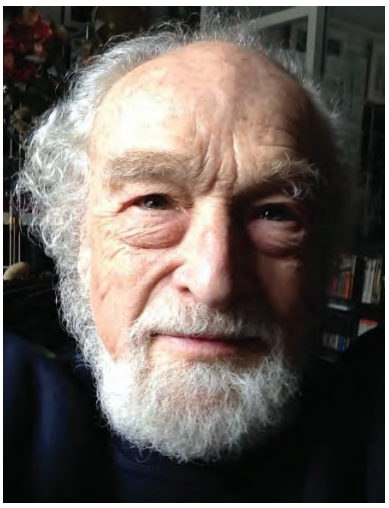
My father's side is related in Part Two, *From the Baltics and Ukraine to Southeastern Michigan: The lives of Samuel K. Slobin and Miriam Greenberg Slobin* (pp. 89-162). In contrast to the Liepahs, here we have two very different sorts of people and immigrant stories. My paternal grandfather, Samuel K. Slobin, came from the Ukrainian district of Poltava, arriving in America earlier, in 1905. The family of my grandmother, Miriam Greenberg Slobin, arrived in the previous generation, during the height of immigration in the 1880s. They came from the Baltics: the Greenbergs from Kurland in Latvia, just beyond the Pale in a part of the Russian Empire where Jews were also allowed to live, and the Kimmels from the Kovno district of Lithuania. I did not know my father's side as well, and have reconstructed their stories from various kinds of evidence.

My father and his mother were born in America and spoke native English, but the Greenbergs, Kimmels and Slobins were immigrant Yiddish speakers. The Yiddish of Kurland, next to Prussia, was influenced by German; the Lithuanians—the Litvaks—had a distinctive Yiddish, different from the Ukrainian Yiddish of my two grandfathers—Liepah and Slobin—and their families. The differences between dialects never ceased to be commented on and judged in my father's time. In a Postscript (163-168) I look back at these families through their portraits.



I am the oldest descendant of these four grandparents, and most of the surviving archives of pictures and letters and other documents ended up in my house in Berkeley, California. I grew up hearing many stories and have been in places in Ukraine and Michigan that figure in these accounts. The languages are part of my heritage as well, and I have delved into the Yiddish and Russian documents that are still available. And so the task has fallen to me to weave the ancestors' tale, to try to reconstruct their lives and times, their personalities and relations. The materials at hand are limited, but suggestive. I have tried to bring these nineteenth- and twentieth-century people to life, writing from an early twenty-first century vantage point. I was born in Detroit in 1939 and only knew three of my grandparents late in their lives. This account, therefore, is based more on archival materials than on personal memory. By profession I'm a psycholinguist—a retired professor of psychology and linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley. My brother, Mark Slobin (1943), is an ethnomusicologist—a retired professor of musicology at Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut. He is writing a book about the musical worlds of Detroit that we grew up in. The two of us are the only ones to bring together the lines of our mother, Judith Liepah Slobin (1909-2003) and our father, Norval L. Slobin (1911-1997)

Dan Isaac Slobin
Berkeley, California
July 2016
age 77



Dedicated to my parents,
who gave me their love of languages, history, and family –
and presented to my children and grandchildren,
so they can know these stories.

PART ONE – MOTHER'S SIDE

Part One presents the two halves of my mother's family, and thus two quarters of my own family history. The record begins in 1831 with one of my great-great-grandmothers in Russian Ukraine, and I continue the tale until the death of my mother, Judith Liepah Slobin, in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan, in 2003.

the one-year-old with his mother, 1940

Judy of the long red hair

From Uman to Detroit

The Lives of
Simon Liepah (Шимен Липа) (1885-1952) and
Sima Baker Liepah (Сима Пекарь Липа) (1888-1979)

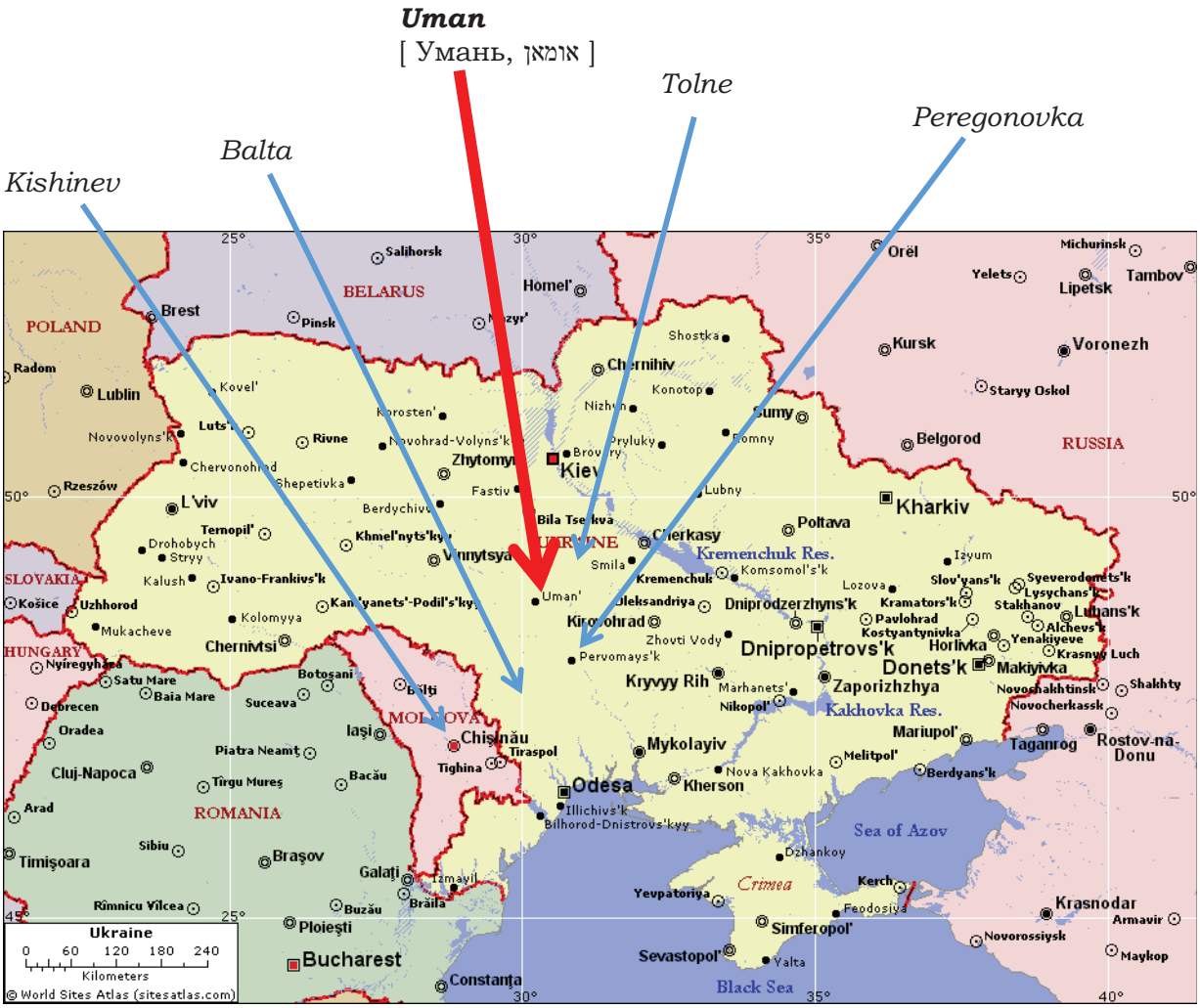
5th wedding anniversary, Uman, Ukraine, 1913

At the age of 76 I will weave the story of my maternal grandparents, as I remember them, as I heard their stories told long ago. My grandfather died at age 66, when I was 12, and though I have many vivid memories of him, I wish I had known him better later in life. But I knew my grandmother very well and was always close to her. She lived a long life, and when she died at age 91, I was already 39. My mother, Judith Liepah Slobin, was the older of their two daughters.

They were both from the town of Uman, which was then in the Pale of Settlement of the Russian Empire—that is, the fringe areas of the empire where Jews were allowed to live. Uman was not a *shtetl*, not a village. My grandparents always spoke of it as a *shtot*, a city. Uman is in the region of western Ukraine that had belonged to Poland, as part of the lands of the Pototski family. The city was, and still is famous for a pleasure garden, the Sofievka, that a Count Pototski built for his sweetheart, Sofia, in the 18th century. When my grandmother would talk of events that had taken place a long time ago, she would say "*dos is geveyn in pototskis tsaytn*" (that was in Pototski's times). Uman was the site of repeated massacres of Jews—by Poles, Cossacks, Ukrainians, Russians, and Germans. It became part of Russia in 1793, incorporated as a district city in the Kiev Government District. The town was an important wholesale grain center and the location of a horticultural institute. At the beginning of the 20th century, when my mother was born, Uman had a population of 29,000, of which 74% was Jewish. In modern times it has become a major Hasidic pilgrimage site, due to the fact that an important sage, Rebbe Nakhman of Breslov (1772-1810), is buried there.

Breslover Hasidim make annual Rosh Hashana visits to the grave of the Breslover Rebbe. No one in my family ever made mention of this, but now Hasidic tourism is a major source of income for Uman. The town is in southern Ukraine, halfway between Kiev and Odessa, where the Jews spoke a characteristic southern Yiddish dialect with occasional words derived from Turkish in addition to the basic German, Slavic, and Hebrew core of the language. Uman was on the edge of Ottoman territory and was also periodically raided by Crimean Tatars. The striking Central Asian features of Sima and her younger daughter, Ann, bear witness to some Turkic ancestry.

Where it all happened

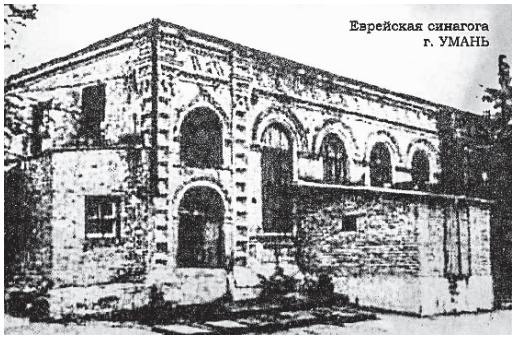


Pre-Revolutionary Postcards of Uman

Entrance to Sofievka Park

Ostrov Lyubvi (Isle of Love) – Sofievka Park

Uman synagogues



Ukrainian countryside[1]

[1] I visited Uman twice in Soviet times—in 1959 and 1966—described in my *Glimpses of the USSR and Russia in Four Eras*. These pictures are from 1966, but I imagine that views like these would have been familiar to my grandparents.

My grandparents came from two rather different families. The pictures on the following pages show the two families—Lipa and Pekar—in 1912. When Shimen and Sima fled Russia with my mother and her younger sister in 1920, these two pictures were among the very few things they carried with them. In the pictures you can see my two contrasting great-grandfathers, one apparently mild, the other severe.

Mordekhai Lipa

Yitzkhok Ayzik Pekar

Shimen's father, Mordekhai Lipa (1861-1913) was unlucky in business and died poor at age 52. By contrast, Sima's father, Yitzkhok Ayzik Pekar (Пекарь) (1865-1919), was a respected teacher and a published writer, who wrote in excellent Hebrew, and was killed in a pogrom at age 54.[2] The contrast between the two families goes back into previous generations.

[2] All of these names appear in my mother's family tree in Appendix 1. The Hebrew letters כ, ח, often transcribed as *ch*, are transcribed here as *kh*, following YIVO norms.

The Lipa Family — Uman, 1912

Shimen Lipa *Sima Pekar Lipa* *Yossel Lipa*
[Simon Liepah] *[Sima Liepah]* *[Joseph Liepah]*

Mordekhai Lipa *Khana Oradovskaya* *Rissel Oradovskaya Lipa*

Yokheved Lipa *Avrom Lipa*
[Judith Liepah Slobin]

The Pekar Family — Uman, 1912

Shimen Lipa
[Simon Liepah]

Moishe Pekar'
[Maurice Baker]

Yeshaya Pekar'
[Oshie Baker]

Sima Pekar' Lipa
[Sima Liepah]

Yitzkhok Aizik Pekar'

Yokheved Lipa
[Judith Liepah Slobin]

The old country

They look out at me
always
from these two frames –
his side
her side –
all they took with them
when they fled for their lives,
with their lives,
were these two windows
into the life they were leaving.
Already, in these images,
I see the ones they left behind
in the Jewish cemetery
to be leveled later
by Germans or Ukrainians.
The little girl in both frames
is my mother.
Now they are all gone.
But I am here,
seeking something,
seeking the moment just before
just after
the opening and closing of the shutter.

They had put on nice clothes.
They had come to a photo studio
where they were posed
and composed
into these permanent arrays,
his side into a cloudy heaven,
her side into an anonymous room.
They had planned this moment.
They wanted to freeze time
for unknown moments.

Indeed, they had different pretensions.
My Liepah great-grandfather looks out sweetly,
his hand relaxed.
My Pekar great-grandfather is grim,
his hands tightly balled up.
My beautiful Tatar-eyed grandmother
looks directly at the lens, proud, erect.
All the visible hands
tell their own stories.

What were my ancestors thinking,
in 1912,
a decade before they fled?
What did they do after the shutter clicked?

Was it a morning?
Did they go home together and have lunch,
the Liepahs one day,
the Pekars another?
Or did they scatter to their separate dwellings?

Who were these two compositions for?
Who paid for them?
Where are the other prints?
Where did they hang?

All I have are these many eyes
looking at me
or somewhere else
forever.

I grew up with those pictures. I've stared at them as long as I can remember. And now I'll try to weave a story of who those people were, what became of them and their offspring, following them until 1979, when my grandmother, Sima Liepah, died in old age.

I know little about my grandfather's forbears, and rely on what my great-uncle Joseph Liepah— Shimen's younger brother— remembered years later in Detroit in the 1950s. Mordekhai Lipa had been born Abramovich; his father, Refuel Abramovich (c. 1836-1907) had bought the name Lipa (Липа, spelled Liepah in the United States) for his son in order to avoid the *prizyv*, the czarist conscription of Jewish boys. (The sole supporter of a family was exempt from the draft, so the identity papers of such a boy were a valuable commodity.) Mordekhai's grandson, my "Uncle Joe," described him to me as a *shul yid*—a Jew who spent his time in the synagogue. Earlier he had run a *shenk*—a tavern—in another town, Peregonovka, where his wife, Yente (1838-1875), worked. Later he gave up the tavern and moved to Uman. For a while he traveled about selling *taleysim* (prayer shawls), and at 55 he gave up work and sat in *shul*, apparently until he died at 71. My Uncle Joe, who was a successful civil engineer in Detroit, remembered his grandfather Refuel from the Old Country and seemed to have little respect for him as a *shul yid*. He also noted that he had "lived with *goyim* (non-Jews)" in his youth. Although Joe didn't elaborate on this observation, it points to the strong social distinction between Jews and non-Jews at that time, with the implication that a good Jew didn't live with *goyim*. As for Mordekhai, the father of Joe and Shimen and Avrum (who died young), Joe described him as "a mild-mannered man."

Mordekhai married Rissel Oradovskaya (1862-1933), who emigrated to America and lived with Shimen and Sima in Detroit until she died in 1933. Joe described her as a housewife and seamstress who made quilts and clothes for the family. He remembered her as having had "a fine voice and an ear for melodies." My mother grew up with her and spoke of her as *di bobe Rissel* (Grandma Rissel). She didn't learn English in the last ten years of her life that she spent in Detroit, and is reported to have tried to speak Ukrainian to non-Jews as she had done at home. There is a family anecdote that she didn't see the need to learn English because it seemed to be a variant of Yiddish to her—as she was said to have put it: after all, "a *hoyz* iz a *house*."

The record goes back just one more generation. The Lipa family picture shows a very old lady, Khana Oradovskaya (1821-1913), who was Rissel's mother. She died a year after the picture was taken, at age 92. Joe described her as "the business lady of the family." She ran grocery stores in Uman and in another town, Tolne. Shimen was named after her husband, his grandfather, Shimen Oradovsky (c. 1830-1884). He was a *melamed*, a teacher, in Tolne. Joe described him as a *skverer khosid*, that is, a Hasid following a lineage going back to Rabbi Yitzkhok Tversky of Skver. According to Wikipedia, "Skverer Hasidism stresses Torah study, prayer, and abstention from excessive earthly pleasures in order to achieve purity of heart and mind." (When I asked my grandfather, in the 1950s, if his family had been *khasidim*, he said they had been neither *khasidim* nor *misnagdim* (opponents)—"just ordinary people.")

Shimen Oradovsky was supported by his wife's grocery business; they moved to Uman because business was bad in Tolne. Shimen Lipa's two grandfathers, Refuel Abramovich and Shimen Oradovsky, had met in a bath house and made a match of their children, Mordekhai and Rissel—the eventual parents of Shimen, Joe, and Avrum. Alas, this is all that is known of the generations that preceded my grandfather, and there is no one living who could tell more. Strange how whole lives are reduced to names, dates, a few anecdotes.

As I said, my grandparents came from two rather different families. In contrast to *shul yidn* and unlucky businessmen, Sima's father, Yitzkhok Ayzik Pekar (Пекарь), was a teacher and a writer, who published Hebrew commentaries on the Bible. (See a sample in Appendix 2). He married the first daughter of Khaim Nokhum Muchnik, my great-grandmother Yokheved Muchnik. What is known of this father-in-law deserves a separate little story:

wooden synagogue of Tolne before 1914

Legend and Lore of
Khaim Nokhum Muchnik (1843-1915)

These are bits and pieces of the life of my great-great-grandfather, Khaim Nokhum Muchnik, who lived and died in Ukraine in the time of the Russian Empire. There were two famous family stories: his life story and his attempt to avoid involvement in a civil case in court.

Every descendant of "Khaim Nokhum Shoykhet" had a version of his life story to tell. He ended up, apparently, being a man of distinction in Uman—a *rov*, a *shoykhet*, a *khazn*, and a *moyl* (rabbi, ritual slaughterer, cantor, circumciser)—if one is to believe the stories. (For some reason he was referred to by only one of his occupations.) It seems that it took him a long time to get to Uman. A family story, which I heard from two of his daughters as old women (Pupa and Golda), from a granddaughter (my grandmother, Sima Liepah), and from my mother (Sima's daughter), has earmarks of "birth of the hero" tales. This is what I was able to piece together, many years ago:

> *Early in his life he and two siblings were walking home from school and were lost for three days. His big sister got them back. After the death of his father, the children moved to Balta, where his parents had a flour mill. (This is probably the origin of the family name, Muchnik, meaning 'flour merchant' in Russian.) At the age of eight he and other Jewish boys were taken by Tsarist recruiters to serve 25 years in Northern Russia. On passing through Tolne, the Tolner Rebbe bribed the recruiter to let all of the boys go. The Rebbe was struck by Khaim Nokhum, who seemed to be bright, and took him into his house and raised him to be a rabbi, perhaps because he had no son of his own. The boy learned well and the Rebbe married him off to his own daughter and found him a job as a rabbi in Uman. Some years later he went from Uman to Balta to arrange a wedding and give a dowry* (nadan) *for his daughter, Perl (known by descendants as "di Mimi Perl—Aunt Pearl"). At the wedding a woman claimed to recognize Khaim Nokhum as her brother, whom she hadn't seen for 39 years. It turned out to be his sister, Nekhamah,*

who proved the connection by remembering the time when they had been lost in the woods. In the most legendary version of the story, her proof was a scar on his shoulder where, as a little boy in the woods, he had been scratched by a bear, or, in a somewhat less legendary version, where he had been scratched by a dog as a child in Balta.

Remarkable how even a little family story can take on tinges of epic myth in one or two generations!

The other story take place in his late fifties. I've reconstructed his court testimony from various relatives (his daughter Golda, his granddaughter Sima, and my father, who married into the family). He was facing a Russian judge, around 1900, in Uman, and felt uncomfortable being in court. He didn't want at all to be involved with the case, involving a neighbor and a goat, preferring to settle it privately out of court. The testimony, as it has been passed down, is a mixture of Russian, Ukrainian, and Yiddish. This version, with stress marking, is transcribed from a recitation by my father Norval Slobin, who never met Khaim Nokhum, but heard the family story as passed down through his mother-in-law, Sima Liepah, who was—as mentioned—Khaim Nokhum's granddaughter. I'll leave it to polyglot readers to dope it out, and to sociolinguists to chuckle.

Pany mirovóy, ya nichó ni znayu – eto moyó umglik. Di mayse derfun is azoy: Kólo méne voynt a shokhn. To on máye asóro ízim. Shtukhn bukhn in máyim dakhn. I ya yemú kazhe, a on sebje lakhn. Nu, panye mirovóy, shto vi kázhete na móyo umglik?

This story was referred to in family discussions by the shorthand, "*eto moyo umglik*," as I heard it growing up in Detroit in the 1940s and 1950s. This key line begins in Russian and ends in Yiddish: "This is my [Russian] misfortune [Yiddish]." Generations later, people were still amused by his mixed language, wondering if he thought he had been addressing the judge in Russian.

Otherwise, all I know about my great-great-grandfather is that he was respected by the family, and apparently by the community. He produced a prodigious amount of offspring—some four children by his first wife (my great-great-grandmother Sima Verzub, who died young of smallpox) and another seventeen or so by his second wife, "the bobe Khaya," who survived him into the 1950s in Brooklyn, dying at age 103 or 104. Perhaps ten or eleven of these many children lived into adulthood, settling in Brooklyn, Detroit, Montreal, and Israel.

The picture reproduced here is the only one that was ever taken of him. He was *frum* (pious) and considered photography to be a violation of the commandment against graven images. But he gave in to the pleadings of two of his favorite grandchildren, Moishe and Oshie (Sima's younger brothers) when they set off for America in 1913. They knew that they would never see each other again, and he consented to let them take a graven image with them to the New World. He looks distinctly unhappy in the picture. Khaim Nokhum died soon thereafter, in his early seventies.

A bridge from Uman to Detroit

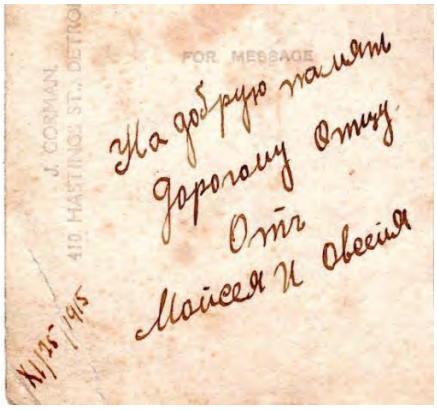
I'll briefly sidestep to the New World before going on with the story of the Old World. Moishe and Oshie ended up in Canada, which was apparently a more welcoming port of call in 1913. In 1914 Henry Ford acted on his insight that in order for industrial capitalism to work, the laborers would have to be able to buy the products of their labor. He raised the daily wage from $2 to $5 and advertised widely for workers for his assembly lines. The papers heralded a "gold rush" and the two young immigrants from Uman were sucked up into it. Henry Ford recruited workers in Canada and facilitated their entry into the U.S. And so it was that Detroit became the end-station of the descendants of that marriage arranged in a bath house meeting between Refuel Abramovich and Shimen Oradovsky, as well as descendants of Khaim Nokhum "Shoykhet," and so it came to be that your present narrator was born in Detroit.[3]


'GOLD RUSH' IS STARTED BY FORD'S $5 OFFER

Thousands of Men Seek Employment in Detroit Factory.

Will Distribute $10,000,000 in

By the end of 1915 the two brothers, looking prosperous, sent a postcard from Detroit to their father in Uman. Their greeting was written in Russian, not Yiddish. This suggests that Russian was their preferred language. Moishe brought two thick books with him when he emigrated: the complete works of Pushkin and Lermontov.



A good keepsake
to dear father
from
11/25/1915 Moisyey and Ovsyey

[3] Also thanks, of course, to the immigration tale of my other grandfather, S. K. Slobin, leading from the Ukraine to Michigan, and an earlier tale of the migration of my other grandmother's family from the Baltics in the 19th century. The life journeys of my paternal grandparents are summarized in *Part Two – Father's Side: From the Baltics and Ukraine to Southeastern Michigan.*

Meanwhile, back in the Old Country...

Shimen and Sima had already been married for five years when Moishe and Oshie set off for the West. The brothers were young and impatient with the hard life of both Tsarist Russia and Jewish Uman. (My great-uncle Moishe complained to me of the boredom of the *kheyder*—Hebrew school—and said that he had no respect for the boorish and harsh teachers.) They had other goals, and after serving in the U.S. Army in World War I—and gaining citizenship thereby—they both ended up as businessmen in Detroit. My Uncle Joe—Yossel Lipa—also left for America before World War I. He studied at the University of Michigan and became a civil engineer working for the City of Detroit. You can see them all in the 1912 family pictures, taken shortly before the young men emigrated.

Shimen and Sima, on the other hand, were a flourishing young couple, with a small business and a pampered and promising four-year-old daughter—my mother Yokheved (Judith Liepah Slobin). She's the little girl in both 1912 family pictures, the Lipas and the Pekars. The Lipas remained in Uman—Shimen, Sima, Shimen's mother, and youngest brother, Avrum. Before they too abandoned Europe for the New World, a second daughter, the eventual Ann Liepah Borden, was born, and Avrum had died young of typhus during the emigration. Shimen narrowly escaped death several times between 1916 and 1920. And Yitzkhok Ayzik Pekar had died in a pogrom in 1919. Those are the harrowing adventure stories I grew up with, vividly told over and over by my grandmother.

Grandma's adventure stories

Grandma (that is, Sima) did not shy away from telling stories about The Old Country. Although she had left Russia (she never said she was from the Ukraine) when she was 32, the reference point was always life *in der heym*, "at home we used to..." And that was a world tinged with both nostalgia and horror.

The nostalgia was for a world of status and relative comfort. Her mother had been the first child of Khaim Nokhum, and Sima was the first child in the next generation. She had status both through her grandfather and her father, who was a scholar and a writer. And her father educated her in enlightened fashion in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. He wanted her to be literate not only in Yiddish and Hebrew, but also in Russian, so he hired a tutor to teach Russian to Sima and a few of her girl friends. To the end of her life she spoke lovingly of both Yiddish and Russian literature, and remained an avid reader of fiction and the American and Yiddish press. Even in old age—and she lived to be 91—her posture was erect, her discourse intelligent, and people treated her with respect and came to her for counsel.

She was the first generation that did not have to submit to an arranged marriage. To be sure, there was a *shadkhn*, a matchmaker, who arranged pairings, but the young woman was given veto power. Grandma told me of promenades in the park, awkward meetings over tea in public places—and it appears that my very existence is due to a chance incident and her nineteen-year-old assessment of character. I remember the story she told me often about her courtship years:

> *It would be arranged for me to go for a walk in the park with a young man. It seemed that we were alone, but you can be sure that an aunt was hiding in the bushes to see what was going on! There was one young man that I particularly liked. He was handsome and well-mannered and we went out to have tea together in the public garden one afternoon, with an aunt as chaperone. When the waiter brought tea to the young man some of it had spilled into the saucer. The fellow picked up the saucer and carefully*

poured the tea back into the cup. And I crossed him out right away. That fellow had already shown that he was a miser, so I didn't want to be married to him.

Instead, she accepted the match with Shimen (though I don't think with much passion), and they were married in 1908, when she was 19 and he was 23. A year later, my mother was born. Here is their wedding picture, with Sima's unusually jaunty hand on hip pose. She will have some authority in this marriage.

Such amusing and nostalgic stories were mixed with painful memories. She told me repeatedly, when I was a boy, that there were things too terrible for me to know about—and yet she told frightening tales. In some, she was a heroine. In 1916 Shimen was serving on the Western Front in the Czar's army. (My mother remembered him as a gentle man who would never have shot a gun.) Apparently he had been entrusted with guarding a German prisoner who escaped when Shimen fell asleep. Sima was notified that he was to be court-martialed and would face execution. So she went to the front to plead for his life. She was 28 and strikingly beautiful with her Tatar features, pale blue eyes, and dignified bearing, as can be seen in the two family portraits and wedding picture. Her story is so ingrained in my memory that I will attempt to convey it in a paraphrase: "I put on my best dress and coat and rode the troop trains to the front. Everyone thought I was foolish to do such a thing, but I was determined. I had to sit between tired and filthy soldiers who were scratching themselves all the time, covered with flea bites. I came to the garrison where Grandpa was being held prisoner and I demanded to see the commanding officer. They told me that this was impossible but I marched up to his barracks and saw the officer at his desk, through an open door. A guard stopped me from going in but I caught the commander's eye and he let me in. I pleaded with him for the life of my husband. I explained that my husband was a meek and gentle man who would never have willfully let a prisoner go. I said that I would hold the commander in my heart and pray for him forever if he would let my husband go. And so Shimen was released." (In writing this, some sixty years later, I'm struck by how similar it is to the story of Queen Esther pleading with Ahaseurus. Another embellished family myth—and how much was in Grandma's retelling, how much in what my child's memory wove around the tale?)

She told me that when Shimen came home from the front he was longing for home cooking, but there was nothing to be had under the severe wartime conditions. So she fried some onions in in a pan and, for a moment, he dreamed of fish. Still, the aroma made him happy.

The years of provisional governments after the fall of the Czar in 1917 were full of violence. She told me of seeing people lying on the pavement and being hit on the head with stones; stories of Cossacks on horseback terrorizing the Jewish population. My mother remembered hiding from pogroms. Religious music always reminded her of Easter sermons, when the priest would end his sermon with *Byey zhidov, spassay Rossiyu* "Kill

the yids, save Russia," and mobs would take up the slogan, storming out of the church looking for Jews to beat up or kill.

Sima told me again and again of the death of her beloved father, Yitzkhok-Ayzik, in a 1919 pogrom. As she told it, he had been hiding in his cellar when a mob set his house on fire. He came out in order to save his manuscripts from burning and was shot in the head. She was notified and rushed to his side. For the rest of her life she couldn't shake off an image that she told me many times, holding back tears: "I put a hand-kerchief to his head and tried to keep his precious brains from coming out." Those brains meant so much to her. She obviously revered him, and after the death of her young mother she had spent her girlhood in the special role of being her father's partner and surrogate mother to her two younger brothers, Moishe and Oshie. (She didn't ever speak of the pain and jealousy she felt when her father took a second wife; this I learned only from her daughters—my mother and my Aunt Ann.)

My middle name, Isaac, was in honor of her father, and it has always seemed to me that she had a special relationship with me as carrying his heritage. She treated me as a confidante from a very early age; referred to me as "Yitzkhok-Ayzik'le" in writing to my parents. Late in her life she told me a transformative dream that seemed to have finally removed her from those terrible days in Uman. She had many loving epithets for me as a child, but what I always found puzzling was *Mir zol zayn far dayne beyner*, meaning something like "I should be a sacrifice for your bones."[4] It all became clear to me in her dream. In 1972, shortly after my son, Shem, was born we brought him to Detroit to be introduced to his great-grandmother. One afternoon she woke up from an afternoon nap with an ecstatic look on her face. "I had such a beautiful dream! There was a green hill and my father and you and Shem were playing together in the sunshine. I was watching from the top of the hill. And I was so happy to see the three of you together. As long as I've been in America I felt that I had abandoned my father because I hadn't brought his bones with me. I felt that he was reproaching me. But now that heavy feeling of guilt is finally gone when I see you and Shem together here."

But back to the heroic tales of Uman and the harrowing trek of refugees. By 1919 civil war spread across the Ukraine, with shifting rebel bands, Cossacks, and provisional governments. Tens of thousands of Jews were massacred, villages destroyed, homes and shops looted. By 1920 Soviet power was established and although many Jews had emigrated, Shimen had hopes for the new communist government and opted to remain. He subscribed to a Russian newspaper from Kiev, and had traveled outside of the Pale of Settlement, to Moscow and St. Petersburg, before the war. I think he still felt at home in the new Soviet Union, in spite of the turmoil. But then his shop was confiscated as the government sought to remove an independent middle class and peasantry. The world was divided into "bourgeoise" and "proletariat." *Burzhui* was an epithet meaning something like "scoundrel." Shimen had a small dry goods business next to the *bazar*, the central marketplace. He was a *burzhui*.

---

[4] Our Southern Ukrainian Yiddish has elements of Turkish in it, and there are similar expressions in Turkish. *Kurban olayım* (may I be a sacrifice) can be used as a declaration of love or strong affection; similarly, *Canım sana feda olsun* (may my soul be a sacrifice for you). This wish for self-sacrifice to benefit a loved one must have more general Middle Eastern origins.

I took this photo in 1959, when I made a clandestine trip to Uman, reported in detail in my *Glimpses of the USSR and Russia in Four Eras* (excerpted on pp. 178-190). My mother said that Shimen's shop was on the street facing this entrance to the marketplace.

The next stage in the drama of 1920 was that members of "the petty bourgeoisie" were arrested and summarily executed. Shimen disappeared and Sima found his name on the wall of the police station, where the next day's executions were posted. She rallied friends and family, desperately trying to find a way out. A friend of Shimen's said that the two of them had once worked together as employees in a large store, where they had been union members. The best hope would be to search for Shimen's union card. Sima found it and took it to the police station—after midnight, as she told the story—and, once again, presented herself boldly to authority in order to save her husband's life. She presented the union card as evidence that Shimen was a member of the proletariat and not a capitalist. It worked, and he was released that night. He came home, shaken, and declared that he had no more faith in communism. It was time to escape the country.

I don't know how Shimen organized the logistics of illegal emigration. I was twelve when he died and never got to hear stories from him. He must have liquidated assets and taken cash and portable items of value. He arranged to leave with another family and they hired a peasant who had a cart with a false bottom where the two families put their possessions—valuables, family pictures, my mother's schoolbooks, some clothing and blankets. Shimen and Sima were in their thirties with two daughters—my eleven-year-old mother and her four-year-old sister. The other family had one daughter, who was my mother's best friend. The goal for refugees was Kishinev, in Romania (now Chişinău, the capital of Moldova). My mother, in her memoir, recalls "a long tedious journey, with scares and fears all along the way." Her report is the only record of the escape, recounted in detail in the following pages. She tells of another event in which Sima saved Shimen, this time by giving some of her jewelry to marauders who were ready to shoot Shimen.

The family spent 18 months in Kishinev, which was difficult for Shimen and Sima, but a fine time for my mother, who flourished with other budding teenagers. For Shimen it was a matter of trying to make ends meet, appealing to local family and Jewish relief agencies, and waiting for a visa from America. With whatever means he had smuggled out of Russia he became a sort of small-scale merchant, going daily to the marketplace and selling this and that. Although people were crowded together, it seems that they had enough to eat and had the cameraderie of a large population of Yiddish-speaking refugees in similar conditions. There were schools and scouting activities for the children, and no doubt endless discussion groups meeting around a samovar. At some point visas to Argentina became available, and although some friends took that route, Shimen and Sima waited to go to America, where each of them had brothers.

At this point I'll turn the narrative over to my mother. In her last years she worked on her life story, from Uman to Detroit, intended for her grandchildren. My brother Mark and I prepared it as a memoir after her death. We are lucky to have a first-person account for the period of her childhood and emigration. She takes the story to 1922 and I'll pick it up again after that.

MEMOIR: JUDITH LIEPAH SLOBIN[5]

FROM BIRTH IN RUSSIA, APRIL 1, 1909, TO ARRIVAL IN AMERICA, DECEMBER 10, 1922

Sima & Yokheved - 1912

I am Judith Liepah Slobin, generally called Judy. I was born in Uman, Russia, in the southern part, the Ukraine, near the big city of Kiev. My name there was Yokheved in Yiddish (יוכבד). Generally in Russian I was called Kheivusye (Хейвуся); that's the way I was registered in school, and it was the name by which I was known to my friends. I was an only child for seven years. I was the oldest grandchild and great-grandchild. I was born into three languages. Of course, my parents spoke Yiddish at home and to some of their relatives and friends. To other friends and to people in the street, they spoke Russian. We had a maid in the house who spoke Ukrainian. I also heard Ukrainian if I was taken with my mother to the open market, where people had brought goods from their villages and were selling them. To these was added a fourth language, Hebrew. When I was about five, my parents and one of their friends hired a Hebrew teacher, a young woman who came from Palestine, and she taught the two little girls to speak Hebrew and sing songs. It was lots of fun. Sometimes we met at our house, sometimes at her house. If at my house, I would walk my friend home; if at her house, she would walk me home. All we went was halfway and turn around.

By Russian standards, Uman was a big city, not a shtetl. There was a big park with a band, and my mother used to take me there to hear the music. I would take along a ball and a big hoop that children would roll with a stick. There were very nice sandy paths.

We lived in a very nice house, not a big one, the way some houses are now. There was a big backyard in which we played. Every fall, when fruit ripened, we used to make jam outdoors and put it in jars for the whole winter. We used Italian plums. A tripod was set up with a fire under it, on which stood a large vat with fruit and sugar, and my mother would cook and stir it. It was a lot of fun to watch that.

The house stood on a slope with a ravine beyond it, and more of the city beyond. In the same yard, friends of my father would get together and build a *suke* [temporary hut for eating outside during the holiday of Sukkes]. There was always a blessing. It was almost eerie, because there was a full moon. You blessed the full moon and placed the first stake for the *suke*, and we would eat meals there during the holiday unless it rained.

A very sentimental custom I shared with my grandmother [Rissel Lipa] happened at twilight late on Saturday. She sat in front of the house with me and sang lovely songs. We looked at the sky until you could see the first three stars, which meant that Queen Sabbath was going away, and the song mentioned *a gute vokh*, a good week, and she would put her arm around me. She came with us to this country, lived to seventy, and was present at my wedding and died the following year. She was able to read, and I have a story from a good friend that when she lived close to a library, she used to walk over and get books, and he was impressed that she was interested in reading books outside the prayerbook.

My father had a wholesale dry goods store. For a long time, he worked in a wholesale store, where there was a strike in which he took part. My father was also a mediator, settling problems among Jews. He would hear both sides and suggest a settlement. He had special permission to travel outside the Pale [the region of Russia in which Jews were confined] to go on buying trips to Moscow and St. Petersburg. From

---

[5] This memoir is based on a transcription of a videotaped autobiographical interview made by her thirteen-year-old grandson, Shem Slobin, in Southfield, Michigan, in 1986, and edited by Judy in the last years of her life in the beginning of the 21st century, with help from her sons, Dan and Mark Slobin. Judy's record was not in written style, but was an oral story told to her grandson. Notes of clarification in square brackets have been provided by Dan. Mark's translation of Judy's Russian travel diary from 1922 is in Appendix 3. Judy died in Southfield, Michigan, at age 94, on November 25, 2003.

each trip, he would bring me wonderful and unusual toys. I had a doll that had a porcelain head with three faces. She wore a bonnet so you could always just expose one face. One face smiled, one cried, and one was sleeping. He also brought me a very unusual writing set, since we used an inkwell. I had to leave everything behind when we fled.

The Lipa home on Bazylyanskaya Ulitsa in Uman (photograph by Dan Slobin, 1959)

A street in Uman (1959)

I was born into a warm home of love and friendship. I can remember friends of my parents coming into the house. There was a table on which there was always a samovar filled with hot water and some tea essence in a little pot on top of the samovar, along with something to eat. There were lively conversations and happy holidays. I liked Chanukah, with games and singing and latkes. There were no presents the way we have them here, but relatives came over. We had a lot of aunts and cousins. They brought what they called *Chanukah-gelt*, coins that were given to me. We played games of dreydl the way we do here. The latkes were not potato latkes, but some sort of wheat latkes, and just as enjoyable. There was a card game we played for Chanukah. Each card had a Hebrew letter on it. Of course I loved Passover most of all. I learned how to ask the four questions at the seder. The house had a ladder to an attic, and my father would bring down the Passover dishes that we hadn't seen since the year before. What I liked best was a little red glass with a crystal handle; that was my special cup. Before Passover you went to a shoemaker and a dressmaker who made new things for you. Matzos were delivered a couple of weeks before Passover and were kept in a cupboard waiting. There was singing and a lot of fun.

Yokheved age 5, Uman

During this period I kept asking my mother for a little brother or sister. Finally in March 1916 I got my wish, a little sister named Khone, called Khonele by all the family [Ann Liepah Borden]. I was very very happy.

World War One had started in 1914, when my sister was still a little baby. My father had to go into the army, so my sister didn't get to know him until years later, when he came back. It took a little while to get used to him, to smile at him, play with him. When she was only six months or so, my father, who was stationed not too far from home and who wasn't really a good soldier, was guarding a German prisoner who somehow ran away. My father was imprisoned, and he didn't know what punishment he would get. My mother was an unusually brave woman. She went to the store and got a beautiful shawl and all sorts of presents, and got on a troop train. She went to where my father was stationed and begged the commander to release him, and she succeeded. My father's mother stayed with us, and my sister was missing my mother badly; she was crying.

While my mother was still away, pleading for my father, along came 1917 and there was a revolution in Russia. When I was born there was a tsar, Nicholas II, who was thrown off the throne. Suddenly the country was all upset. There were different groups rising. I can remember Kerensky [the leader of the provisional government before the Bolshevik revolution] speaking on a balcony in Uman. Things became terribly upset. There were groups of peasants and others that would invade different sections of the city and would kill and rob, Jews especially. I can remember writing notes and cards to my mother about the revolution.

Balcony where Kerensky spoke in Uman (photograph by Dan Slobin, 1959)

My formal education began at age eight. You had to pass a very large and important exam. They expected you would know how to read, write, spell, and do simple arithmetic. Also you had to have memorized a poem which had to be recited. Much of the education was memorizing poetry and reciting it. In order to prepare for this exam, about a year before, I was given a tutor to teach me all this. My tutor was a cousin of my father's, named Manya [Pelekh]. I had the additional handicap of being Jewish—only 2% were permitted to enter the school. The exam was very, very strict. I remember a

room with people asking questions. We had a special lined notebook and I remember that I was worried because the notebook had margins, and one of my words went a little across the margin. The names of kids who passed were posted. I had a terrible stomach ache while I was waiting for the results. Manya went to look at the list. Some time passed. I could see her running down the street, shouting, yelling and smiling that I passed, so I was able to start school.

The poem I recited was by Pushkin, *Tyucha*, a cloud. Throughout school I learned poems at night–the first line, first and second together–and when I got up in the morning, I knew the poem. [She still could still recite those poems in her eighties.-DIS] I loved reading and had quite a collection of books. I made little membership cards, like for the library, and I would give them to my close friends and lend them books. Much later the desire grew to be a librarian.

My father had a much younger brother named Abraham [Avrom Lipa] who was a very lively individual. He used to go to musicals and come home and tell me about it and sing those songs for me. I remember some of the words, and only as an adult did I realize they were really risqué, but as a little girl it was very joyful for him to sing to me; more about him later. (He died young in emigration.)

I was ready for school. We had to wear a uniform with a pinafore on top. In our school it was brown, and the pinafore was black; but for holidays and special events we wore a white apron with lace at the bottom. The apron was tied at the back, and at the top there was something like a large bib, like what choir boys wear now. The uniform was high-collared and long-sleeved. Sometimes it could be gotten also in wool, not just sateen. My hair at the time was long [and red], which I wore parted in the middle with two braids on either side with bows at the ends. The custom at school was to curtsy every time you encountered a teacher. I lived within walking distance of school, and between school and home I passed the house of my very good friend Lyolya. I used to pick her up on the way. In addition to what I was learning at school, I took private lessons in embroidery, where I learned how to do Russian or Ukrainian cross-stitching. I started at age eight. I also took lessons in Russian folk dancing, which included the waltz and the folk dances called *krakowiak* and *vengerka*.

[*The school uniform remained essentially unchanged through the 20th century. I took this picture on the first day of school in Kiev in 1966: "first time in first grade."* -DIS]

Another girlfriend, whose name I don't remember, must have been very wealthy. Their home had a telephone and she had a governess. We used to come there to play, and the governess would serve hot chocolate and cookies. When I was nine years old I also started learning French from a tutor..

I will only briefly summarize the three years between the revolution in 1917 and when we fled in 1920. It was a strange time, alternating between going to school and serious interruptions. The government was in turmoil, with various groups ruling. In 1918 the First World War was over. My father came home. There were many pogroms, which meant that the peasantry, or other forces, would suddenly stage an attack. They would go into town just for the sake of robbing or killing Jews. Some of the groups were characterized by green caps with the visor in the back. They were called "green" something.[6] They would do all their evil business and then go away. During one of the pogroms, in 1919, my mother's father was killed [Yitzkhok Ayzik Pekar]. He was 57 at the time. He had been a teacher of teenage boys in a preparatory school. He was also a writer; some of his things were published. The neighbors said that some people came in, asked for money which he didn't have, and not only killed him, but took some of his papers and tore them up. Many, many Jews were killed. Relatives had to take them to gravesites and dig graves themselves. Among my grandfather's surviving things was the second edition, from 1900, of a book he published in 1897, sent back by the publisher for revisions–a commentary on the *Song of Songs* and *Ecclesiastes*. It was called

[6] The Civil War was a color-coded era. The red armies fought for communism against the white armies that wanted a return to the monarchy; peasant green armies fought against government controls of their land; black armies fought for anarchism.

Melamed leho'il [Instruction for use]. We took it along with us when we ran away, and many years later that book was finally donated to the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem.

We had people break into the house. They pointed a gun at my father and took things. My mother was holding my little sister. She was very scared, but she understood that she should put her hands up. My mother got on her knees and begged these people, in a very eloquent speech. Somehow it had an influence on them. They took what they wanted and went away. That fearful moment remained in one's memory and affected one for a long time. The next morning you could get up and go to school. Maybe in the middle of the day there would be shooting or bombing because another group came in. There was one dictator, Petliura, who really took over and ruled for a long time. He demanded that the *gymnazia* [school] go on, but we had to learn everything in Ukrainian, and talk Ukrainian; so it says on my third grade report card that I could do Ukrainian. There were many times when in the middle of the school day there would be bombing, gunning, and school would be closed and we would run home to hide in the cellar. It was a period of insecurity, with the communists trying to take over. There was a very great shortage of food. Carrots would be grated and fried and made into a kind of tea. Sometimes we had no electricity, so I did my homework by candlelight.

There was a time, still during World War One, when the Germans occupied Uman; you could hear the bombing. Parents would rush to school and bring their children home, and you'd stay at home for a while, hiding in your cellar. But somehow in the middle of all of that you kept on living and being glad you were alive and eating whatever there was to eat. Very often we were hungry because you couldn't go to the market to buy anything. A lot of shopping would be in the open market from the peasants.

In 1918, like people all over Europe and America, we had that terrible influenza, in which thousands of people perished. Fortunately, we made it. There was one time during a pogrom that we escaped by going to another part of town. We had friends there, in a non-Jewish area, and we thought we could hide there and wouldn't be found. So my grandmother, my mother and father, and my sister, who was still a babe in arms—we ran over there. We saw Cossacks on horseback shooting in the street. We hid in somebody's backyard, and when the Cossacks went away we finally got to these people. They lived in a gorgeous home with a big backyard. They even had peacocks and dogs; and I got very friendly with a dog that then bit me on the hand. There was no way of getting to a doctor. That night we hid in the attic. There were a lot of people there together, and through the windows of the attic we could see houses being burned. We waited a few days to see what would happen. Eventually those bands would be dispersed by whatever legitimate government there was, so you could go home. About 400 people were killed in that pogrom.

It was during that time that my father was arrested. He was arrested after his store was taken away, and under communism he was a capitalist to be gotten rid of. The usual procedure was arrest, execution, and then a notice in a public place that these people were disposed of for "the good of the nation." People we knew were taken away at night and killed. When they arrested my father, my mother and close friends ran around and got evidence of how he had been on the side of labor and helped settle a strike while he was working for a large wholesale store, so they released him because he wasn't a complete capitalist. When my father came home, he said, "We're not staying anymore; we're leaving."

My mother had two brothers who, when their mother died, were nine and seven. My mother was eleven, and she raised them. They went to America in 1912 to avoid military service. The older, Moishe [Maurice Baker][7], came to America with a violin which he had played; and he continued to be interested in music. The younger [Oshie Baker] played the cello, but he went into a different profession, becoming a jeweler. Eventually the plan was that he would bring the family, but the war and pogroms interfered.

Leaving a country was not by permission, so it meant we would have to escape. There was another family, the parents of my best friend, Edith [Deutsch], who left with us. Leaving meant you left everything at home, because no one was supposed to know you were going. You left all your belongings, locked the door, and walked out. In 1920 my mother was 32, I was 11, my sister 4, and my father 35. Our family and the other family hired a wagon with a false bottom. That's where they put whatever money they had so if we were stopped by robbers, they wouldn't take that away. We took along a change of clothes, jackets, blankets—especially to cover up the youngsters—and we set off to the border to see if we could make arrangements to sneak across. They called it "stealing across the border."

[7] The family name Пекарь (Pekar' = baker) was translated as Baker in the U.S.

Here is a map of our escape route. It was a long tedious journey, with scares and fears all along the way. After a few days we reached a little town—I imagine it must have been a lovely little town in peaceful times. It was Kamenka, on the river Dniester, which was the border between Russia and Bessarabia, which had become part of Romania after the First World War. We had to get safely to Romania, which was a different country with a different government. It was a small town with a river on one side and mountains on the other side. At the top of the mountains there were a lot of vineyards. We stayed there, and it was wonderful. There was enough food, and for the first time in many years we had enough bread; especially we had some nice white bread that everybody liked. And sometimes we'd go bathing in the river. We had to stay there a couple of weeks because Edith and I had gotten the whooping cough, so we had to wait until that was cured. And then arrangements were made to sneak across. That was a dangerous thing too, because you got into a boat and you had to depend that the smugglers were going to get you across to the other side. They said that if children cried or made noise, they just wouldn't bother with anything, and just pick up the child, the baby or whatever it was, and toss them into the river. So we had to make sure that Ann, who was little at that time, wouldn't cry, and that those of us who were cured of the cough wouldn't cough when we were not supposed to.

But even then, when we got to the other side—they must have had it prearranged—we were caught and arrested and spent a couple of days in a hot, hot barn (this was July of 1920). There were some animals—cows and horses or whatever—on the other side, and the smell was terrible. We stayed in there, and my mother gave the men who were holding us her wedding ring and her beautiful gold chain with a gorgeous little watch. The front of it was gold and the back of it was mother of pearl. She gave them that and they finally let us go.

We escaped to a small town and stayed there. The people were very nice. We came tired and hungry. They found a place for us to stay and made arrangements for us to go on, because our objective was the bigger town in Bessarabia, called Kishinev [now Chişinău, the capital of Moldova], where my mother had an uncle and aunt. That was the place where refugees went at that time. We hired a wagon; then took a train; and we finally got to Kishinev to this uncle's house. We stayed with him for just a couple of days because he lived in a little tiny house and he already had a widowed daughter and some children staying there. Some of the people in the town were very receptive and they took us to a family that let us stay there for a little while until they found a house where we could continue staying. It was a very large home of some wealthy people. Their home was very much like an estate. In front here was a big gate and a garden, and in the

The refugees in Kishinev – 1922:
Ann, Judy, and parents;
Jeanette Zbarsky and parents

back of their house they had a little room that they used as a private synagogue–a prayer room that they used just for their family. And that's where we stayed. Now when I say "we," I mean my mother, my father, my sister, myself, my grandmother [Rissel Lipa], my uncle (my father's younger brother [Avrom Lipa] who came also with his wife [Rukhel Carpenter], and another cousin whose name was Nadia (she was a dentist). We all stayed there in a very small room–and it was a very cold room–but at least it was a room and we could all be together for a while. And at that point we had to wait to notify the relatives in the United States that we had escaped and tell them where we were, because they had to send us papers requesting our coming to America, and send us tickets because we did not have any money. And then we'd have to get permission, because there was a quota; only so many people were permitted because there was a big influx of immigrants in the 1920's. So we stayed there.

Now the problem was also to make a living. My father would go to the market place and try to sell things. In Uman he had a beautiful store, where he made a very comfortable living. The only thing he could do in Kishinev was get a few yards of goods of one kind or another to sell to the peasants who would come into town to buy things. So he made somewhat of a living. It was a very poor living–we were not starving, but there was very little of anything. I remember for a long period having only one pair of shoes that I saved for bad weather and for cold weather, for winter, when it was really cold. My parents, of course, had to struggle. There was a whole organization of refugees, and they would all get together and try to figure out what to do and where to go and how to make a living. There were organizations in the United States, like HIAS (the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), that helped refugees. They would bring clothes, sometimes food, sometimes some money. My father became an active member of the Kishinev Relief Organization.[8]

For us children, it was a very interesting period, because they organized schools where we learned all the subjects: literature, history, geography. The school ran on a double track, with courses in Yiddish for those who knew Yiddish, or in Hebrew for those who knew Hebrew. I knew enough Hebrew to be in the Hebrew track. We had some wonderful teachers. They were also refugees. One of them, Yokhanan Tversky, became a well-known writer and teacher in Boston, years later. I made tremendous numbers of friends. We were 11, 12, 13 years old, and had long, serious discussions. Somebody had a wonderful idea, to organize us as scouts–except that we were called *Shomer* [Guardian]. We were Jewish scouts. We also learned about Palestine and the hope that someday it would be a Jewish land. I had a group which I led as a scout, about ten girls, they were called the "Swallows" and I was their head.[9]

"The Swallows" (קבוצה דרור- kvutzah dror) *in Kishinev, 1921. Yokheved Lipa (first row center) headed the group from June 1921 to November 1922.*

[8] The following reminiscence of her father was found in Judy's papers after she died: "June 8, 2000 – Father's Day: My FATHER. I think much of him today—I look at his picture—smiley, warm, kind—matching my memory as adult, as child, as refugee in Kishinev. Sad that he died so young, 66. He loved life. He was respected by many — He was a leader among the Uman refugees in Kishinev. I can remember meetings in our one room house, talking, discussing our situation as homeless refugees. He headed the group. A large picture of various groups has him as head of the Uman group. A copy of that picture is at Yivo in N.Y. (I sent it there). Even in peace, while still at home, he was a mediator. Individuals in dispute would meet with him—he'd hear both sides and bring peace."

[9] Yokheved's scouting notebook is in Appendix 4.

The rules we learned were the regular Baden Powell scouting rules, used by scouts all over the world. We learned the rules in Hebrew and Russian. We had to pass the same tests as scouts everywhere; we had the same games, the same contests. [*Yokheved's scouting notebook is in Appendix 4.*] The city had a very large park and there were times when we went camping overnight—setting up tents, cooking outdoors and singing around a fire.

For me the time we spent in Kishinev was heaven. I was amidst children who were also refugees from various parts of Russia. We had a wonderful time. We learned, we played, we talked, discussed, grew and matured at an early age: 11-13. The school was very good. The children and the teachers had a lot in common: no one had a home or a country. All fled, seeking country, security, freedom, peace. The adults were real teachers with a lot to give us. We felt secure, surrounded by friends and loving family. We learned a lot, and we gave plays and musicals. We had no money: we didn't need any money. We had the school, we had all the activities, and so on and so forth. Kishinev is a big town. It had an excellent library, where I was able to read Russian books. Since Bessarabia had only recently been taken away from Russia, most of the people spoke Russian.

During that time, we had a tragedy in the family. My father's brother Avrom, who was only 21, got typhus and within a few days died, leaving Rukhel [Carpenter], his very young, pregnant wife. He was the father and Rukhel was mother of my cousin, Sarah Nemon, who was born after her father died. She was born in Bucharest, and my father was there.

Rukhel Lipa [Rachel Carpenter] *Shimen Lipa* [Simon Liepah]
baby Sarah Lipa [Sarah Nemon]
Bucharest, Romania, 1922

At this point I'd like to interrupt my mother's narrative to include an event that Grandma told me about, years later, because it highlights both Grandma's character and the values of the culture. When Avrom died, Rukhel was left alone as a young widow, with no family—and pregnant. She came to Sima and said that the family shouldn't risk their chances to get to America because of her, since she was no longer part of the family. She told Sima that she was planning to get an abortion and find her way on her own. Sima was very firm and told her sternly that she wasn't to think of such a thing. As Grandma told it to me, she said to Rukhel: "If you have an abortion you're all alone in the world, and what will become of you then? But if you go ahead and have that baby, then she is one of ours and you are too. So we're not leaving until the baby is born." Sima's determination and the force of her personality won out, and baby Sarah was born in Romania and joined the long exodus through the Black Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and across the Atlantic to Ellis Island and eventually to Detroit, where she became the matriarch of a large, closely knit, and supportive family. –DIS

However a year followed a year and we did not get into the United States. Since the quota was already filled to go to the United States, and we didn't know just when there might be an opportunity, there was a possibility to go to Argentina. Some of my parents' friends did go there, and my parents were thinking about it, but then they decided against it, since my mother had two brothers and my father had a brother in the States. By then my grandmother, with this young widow and my little baby cousin, were able to get in earlier because my grandmother had a son in America [Joseph Liepah, brother of Shimen and Avrom]. That gave her preference over us, since my father was only a brother of someone in America, not a mother. So we kept on waiting and it almost looked like we might have to remain in Romania. We didn't know quite how we would make a living, or how anything would be done, because we were refugees and were not all that welcome within the country. By then even the Jewish community was a little tired of taking care of us; there just weren't any jobs. It was very difficult. We were joined by other relatives, who eventually got to New York, except for my aunt Golda [Zahava Driz], who went to Palestine. And then fortunately, in November of 1922, we got permission to America. We very quickly took the few belongings that we had. I was very sad to say good-bye to all my friends that I had gone to school with, and the scouting friends, knowing that I may never see them again—because who knew when they would get to the United States. But we went on. We went to Bucharest to get an exit visa. I remember that it was the first time I ever rode in an automobile.

CONSULAT DE RUSSIE A BUCAREST

PASSEPORT

Il est porté à la connaissance de tous ceux à qui il appartient que le porteur du présent citoyen russe Shimon Lipa âgé de 37 ans originaire de Umane district ——— gouvernement Kiew ~~est domicilié~~ se rend en Amérique accompagné de sa femme Sima âgée de 32 ans

~~s~~ fils		s~~a~~ fille 5	
.....	âgé de . . ans	Haiva	âgée de 11 ans
.....	âgé de . . ans	Hana	âgée de 4 ans
.....	âgé de . . ans	———	âgée de . . ans
.....	âgé de . . ans	.....	âgée de . . ans
.....	âgé de . . ans	.....	âgée de . . ans

En foi de quoi lui a été délivré le présent passeport par le Consulat de Russie à Bucarest.

Valable pour un an,

Bucarest, Le 20 Avril 1/13/E 1922.

LE CONSUL A. Paramonoff

Le Consulat de Russie, certifie que la photographie et la signature ci-dessus sont celles du ~~titulaire~~ présent passeport.

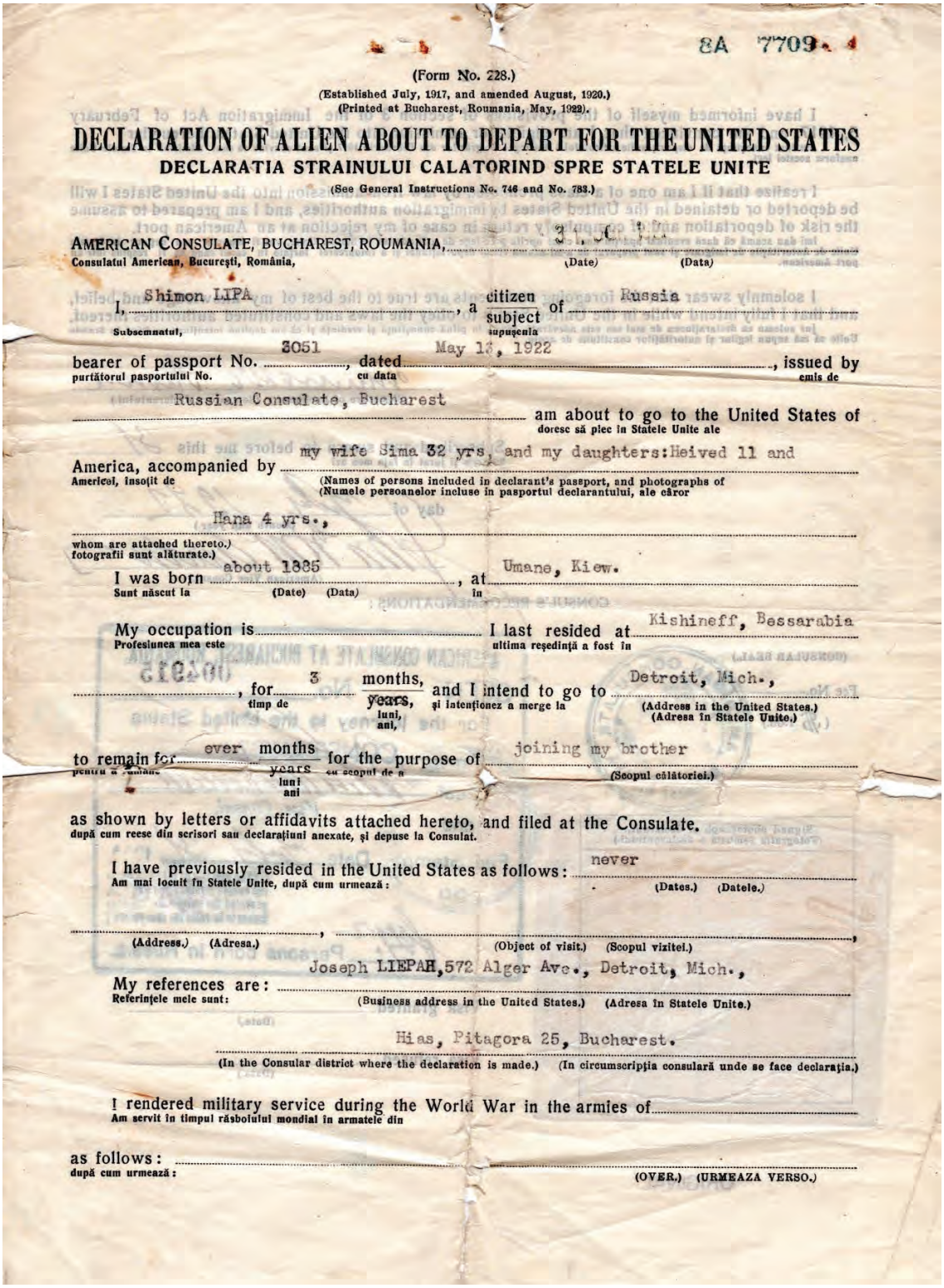
Bucarest, le 13 Mai 1922

LE CONSUL Redkine

VISAED BUCHAREST

Exit Visa issued by the Russian Consulate in Bucharest

The long-awaited permission from the United States to go to Detroit "to remain forever, for the purpose of joining my brother, Joseph Liepah," signed in Cyrillic by Shimen Lipa who did not yet know English



8A 7709.

(Form No. 228.)
(Established July, 1917, and amended August, 1920.)
(Printed at Bucharest, Roumania, May, 1922).

DECLARATION OF ALIEN ABOUT TO DEPART FOR THE UNITED STATES

DECLARATIA STRAINULUI CALATORIND SPRE STATELE UNITE

(See General Instructions No. 746 and No. 783.)

AMERICAN CONSULATE, BUCHAREST, ROUMANIA, 2 [illegible]
Consulatul American, Bucureşti, România, (Date) (Data)

I, Shimon LIPA, Subscmnatul, a citizen subject supuşenia of Russia

bearer of passport No. 3051, dated May 13, 1922, issued by
purtătorul pasportului No. cu data emis de

Russian Consulate, Bucharest
am about to go to the United States of
doresc să plec în Statele Unite ale

America, accompanied by my wife Sima 32 yrs, and my daughters: Heived 11 and
Americei, însoţit de (Names of persons included in declarant's passport, and photographs of (Numele persoanelor incluse în pasportul declarantului, ale căror

Hana 4 yrs.,
whom are attached thereto.) fotografii sunt alăturate.)

I was born about 1885, at Umane, Kiew.
Sunt născut la (Date) (Data) în

My occupation is Profesiunea mea este I last resided at Kishineff, Bessarabia ultima reşedinţă a fost în

[illegible], for 3 months, years, luni, ani, and I intend to go to Detroit, Mich.,
timp de şi intenţionez a merge la (Address in the United States.) (Adresa în Statele Unite.)

to remain for ever months years luni ani for the purpose of joining my brother
pentru a rămâne cu scopul de a (Scopul călătoriei.)

as shown by letters or affidavits attached hereto, and filed at the Consulate.
după cum reese din scrisori sau declaraţiuni anexate, şi depuse la Consulat.

I have previously resided in the United States as follows: never
Am mai locuit în Statele Unite, după cum urmează: (Dates.) (Datele.)

, ,
(Address.) (Adresa.) (Object of visit.) (Scopul vizitei.)

My references are: Joseph LIEPAH, 572 Alger Ave., Detroit, Mich.,
Referinţele mele sunt: (Business address in the United States.) (Adresa în Statele Unite.)

Hias, Pitagora 25, Bucharest.
(In the Consular district where the declaration is made.) (In circumscripţia consulară unde se face declaraţia.)

I rendered military service during the World War in the armies of
Am servit în timpul războiului mondial în armatele din

as follows:
după cum urmează:

(OVER.) (URMEAZA VERSO.)

2

I have informed myself of the provisions of section 3 of the Immigration Act of February 5, 1917, and am convinced that I am eligible for admission into the United States thereunder

Am luat cunoştinţă de dispoziţiunile articolului 3 din legea imigrărilor din Februarie 1917 şi sunt convins că sunt admisibil în Statele Unite conform acestei legi.

I realize that if I am one of a class prohibited by law from admission into the United States I will be deported or detained in the United States by immigration authorities, and I am prepared to assume the risk of deportation and of compulsory return in case of my rejection at an American port.

Imi dau seamă că dacă eventual aparţin unei clase oprite prin lege de a fi admisă în Statele Unite, voi fi deportat sau deţinut în Statele Unite de Autorităţile de imigrare şi sunt preparat de a-mi asuma riscul deportaţiunei şi a întoarcerei forţate în cazul când aş fi respins într'un port American.

I solemnly swear that the foregoing statements are true to the best of my knowledge and belief, and that I fully intend while in the United States to obey the laws and constituted authorities thereof.

Jur solemn că declaraţiunea de mai sus este adevărată, făcută în plină cunoştinţă şi credinţă şi că am deplină intenţiune ca fiind în Statele Unite să mă supun legilor şi autorităţilor constituite de acolo.

Minnow Anna

(Signature of declarant.) (Semnătura declarantului.)

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 31

Subscris şi jurat în faţa mea azi

day of July 1922

(Month and year.)

John H. M. Coudert

(American Vice Consul.)

CONSUL'S RECOMMENDATIONS:

(CONSULAR SEAL.)

Fee No.

($ 1.00.)

AMERICAN CONSULATE BUCHAREST ROUMANIA

AMERICAN CONSULATE AT BUCHAREST, ROUMANIA

SEEN No. 004915

For the journey to the United States

Via CONSTANTZA

Seal John H. M. Coudert

Vice Consul,

and

Stamps Date July 31, 1922

(The validity of this visa expires [illegible] provided the passport ... ceases to be valid for travel.)

[illegible] Persons born in Russia.

Visa granted

(Date.)

Visa refused

(Date.)

ORIGINAL

We got on a boat in Constantza, on the Black Sea. It was sort of a boat that carried both cargo and people. And it took 28 days to get to the United States. We stopped in what was then still called Constantinople, instead of Istanbul. We had to get off the boat to get all cleaned up and I guess leave all the germs and bugs and so on in Turkey before we could go on to America. The boat stopped in Smyrna [Izmir] to load up with figs (which we were given to eat for the next weeks). Then we stopped again in Algiers, where my father and I went to the city. We were permitted to go in a small boat that took us to the city for half a day. I remember that trip very vividly. Then we got back on the boat and after that we were just really seasick all the rest of the time, except for my father. He was not seasick and he was very helpful to all of us.

S.S. Braga

[*Yokheved's on-board diary of the trip is in Appendix 3.*]

Finally, on December the first, 1922, we arrived in New York. My father had relatives in New York, some of whom he hadn't seen for many years, and they thought that maybe we might stop for a visit in New York before we went on to Detroit. However because of the fact that our papers were for permission to go to Detroit, we were not allowed to stop on the way. We were sent to Ellis Island instead, where we spent about a week. There was plenty of food and it was very highly disciplined there. We were always counted. I don't know where they thought we could escape: It's an island. We had to get up at about 4:30 in the morning so that everybody would have a chance to the bathroom; we were counted on the way to the dining room for breakfast and away from the dining room after breakfast. Since it was early December—by then it was Christmas season—we, the children, were taken to a place where we would be making paper chains and decorations for Christmas trees. I don't know what they meant to me then. And we were shown little movies. The rest of the time was just boring, waiting to be permitted to leave. Finally, labels were put up—labels for us that said "Detroit, Michigan"—and we were taken off the Island and put on a train that went to Detroit.

LIST OR MANIFEST OF ALIEN PASSENGERS FOR THE UNITED

S.S. Braga Passengers sailing from Constanza, November 19 22

Ship manifest of the S.S. Braga, listing Shimon and Sima Lipa, arriving in New York on December 3, 1922, on the way to their brother Joseph in Detroit; listed as neither polygamists nor anarchists, and intending to remain in the United States "forever."

On December 10, 1922, we were met by my mother's older brother, Moishe Baker, and his wife Paula and daughter Adele, age 9, and my father's brother, Joe Liepah and his wife Vera. We were met at the grand Michigan Central Station. We had come to the United States. Our long, hard journey was over. We were home, free.

Safe in Detroit: Rukhel (seated), Sima, Judy and Ann, Sarah (in front)

Judy in Southfield, Michigan, at about the time of telling her life story

Starting life in Detroit

The grateful refugees did, indeed, intend to remain in the United States forever. They had come to the city that has been described as "the greatest working-class city in the most prosperous country in the world."[10] They were part of a flood of external and internal immigrants in the 1920s, doubling the population to a million. And they aimed at becoming Americans. Shimen and Sima went to night school and worked on mastering English—spoken and written. The children were placed in "Americanization" classes. Judy, turning thirteen, acquired native American English.

Judy's picture of the Americanization class at the Dwyer School, shortly after arrival in 1923. She has indicated herself with an arrow. I imagine these children spoke with each other in Yiddish.

Yiddish remained the language of everyday discourse, but more and more English was used as discussions spread to local politics and economics. There were three Yiddish daily newspapers, divided by ideology. The Liepahs preferred the social-democratic *Forverts*, with its banner proclaiming Marxist slogans on either side.

THE LIBERATION OF THE WORKER IS AN AFFAIR OF THE WORKER ALONE

WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE

[10] Mark Binelli (2013). *The Last Days of Detroit: Motor Cars, Motown and the Collapse of an Industrial Giant.* London: The Bodley Head, p. 3.

Recent immigrants gathered into *Landsmanshaftn*, social groups based on place of origin, because each Yiddish-speaking region in the Old Country had its own dialect and cuisine and customs. So there was an *Umanyer geografisher gezelshaft*, an Uman Geographical Society, where people could reminisce about their hometown and help each other to find a way in the New World.

Detroit already had an established population of German Jews who had to cope—with some ambivalence—to floods of Yiddish-speaking Jews from Eastern Europe. From 1910 to 1920 the Jewish population jumped from about 10,000 to about 35,000. The Liepahs, settling in at the beginning of 1923, had arrived just under the wire: In 1924 Congress virtually halted Jewish immigration. Relief and welfare agencies sprang up. Many Jews continued the trades they had practiced in Europe, especially dry goods (fabrics, linens, clothing). Large companies provided employment to immigrants—Jews hiring Jews, thereby avoiding the widespread anti-Semitism and discrimination of the surrounding community. Two such companies were headed by leading philanthropists and social organizers—Julian Krolik and Simon Shetzer. Moishe and Oshie began as salesmen for Shetzer, and Shimen began at Krolik's. Oshie soon saved enough money to set up his own jewelry shop. Moishe eventually also set up his own business, in wholesale drygoods. (My first job, at sixteen, was as a stockboy in his store on Jefferson Avenue.) But Moishe's business, like many immigrant ventures (including those of my paternal grandfather) didn't survive. Grandpa—that is, Shimen—worked for Krolik until the early end of his life at 66. He was a sales representative, taking samples to clothing stores around the city and bringing orders back to Krolik's. It must have been a hard, but secure life, especially as the Depression closed in by the late 1920s. Shimen worked 51 weeks per year, taking an all-too-short one-week summer vacation when he would join the family on Crystal Lake in Northern Michigan. He cherished that week—swimming, hiking, resting. And then back to work for another year. He was a member of the Teamsters' Union, but didn't seem to benefit much from their representation. His brother, Joe, was a successful civil engineer. Other men of his generation became lawyers or teachers. But they had come before World War I. Grandpa was the only one who didn't own a car or his own home. He and Sima always rented a flat in a two-family house, and rented out one of the three bedrooms to earn a bit of extra income. Still, I think he was happy with his life—after what he had gone through in Russia and Romania. He was very proud of the successes of his two daughters, Judy and Ann. And he and Sima had created a strong and supportive social group in which he was much respected.

The immigrants were deeply patriotic. One couldn't say a bad word about the United States. The Jews were a solid bloc of Democratic voters. Franklin Roosevelt was revered. I remember, as a small child, the hush that would fall over the living room when FDR was speaking on the radio.

Within five years Shimen and Sima became citizens, successfully studying and passing the requisite examination. His 1928 citizenship document describes Simon Liepah as age 44, white, 5 feet 4 inches, with blue eyes and brown hair, formerly a citizen of "The State of Russia" (apparently the USSR was not yet treated as a political entity). His naturalization also applied to his minor children, Judith 19 and Ann 12, but not to his wife. Sima had a separate document.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

No. 2733069

TO BE GIVEN TO THE PERSON NATURALIZED.

CERTIFICATE OF NATURALIZATION

Petition: Volume 130 Number 31452

Description of holder: Age, 44 years; height, 5 feet, 4 inches; color, White; complexion, fair; color of eyes, Blue; color of hair, Brown; visible distinguishing marks, none

Name, age and place of residence of wife:

(NOTE: AFTER SEPTEMBER 22, 1922, HUSBAND'S NATURALIZATION DOES NOT MAKE WIFE A CITIZEN.)

Names, ages, and places of residence of minor children:
Judith 19; Anna 12; At Detroit, Mich.

ORIGINAL

EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN, SOUTHERN DIVISION, ss:

Simon Liepah
(Signature of Holder)

Be it remembered, that Simon Liepah then residing at number 2230 W. Euclid Street, City, Town, of Detroit State of Michigan, who previous to his naturalization was a citizen, subject, of The State of Russia, having applied to be admitted a citizen of the United States of America pursuant to law, and at a Regular term of the District court of the United States, held at Detroit, on the 30th day of July in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and 28, the court having found that the petitioner intends to reside permanently in the United States, and that he had in all respects complied with the Naturalization Laws of the United States, and that he was entitled to be so admitted, it was thereupon ordered by the said court that he be admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.

(SEAL)

In testimony whereof the seal of said court is hereunto affixed on the 30th day of July in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and 28, and of our Independence the one hundred and fifty-third.

ELMER W. VOORHEIS
Clerk, United States District Court,
Eastern District of Michigan.
By Cornelius W. Smith, Deputy
(Official character of attestor)

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

The 1930 census lists Simon Liepah as a wholesale dry goods salesman and Judith Liepah as a Hebrew teacher. The census pages for Ward 10, Block 83 are informative. Virtually everyone is recorded as a native speaker of Yiddish, born—with few exceptions—in Russia, Romania, or Poland. The heads of household tend to be 45-50. Most households have two parents and two children, with no generational depth. These are young households with growing children and immigrant parents who are making do. And it is an exceptionally homogeneous neighborhood in country of origin, language, and range of occupations. With the exception of one architect, no professions are listed: driver, mechanic, cashier, salesman, odd jobs. These people seem to be lucky: In 1932 unemployment was 50 percent in Detroit and two-thirds of the population lived below the poverty line.

The Jewish immigrant world of Detroit

The Liepahs, by nature and culture, kept a Jewish home, but religion was simply part of identity rather than a daily practice. Grandpa did not *leyg tfilin*—didn't perform ritual morning prayers. They didn't go regularly to *shul* on *shabbos*, but always had a Friday night dinner for the immediate family. Here I can build on my own memories of the 1940s. Shabbos dinner included my parents, me and my brother, Moishe. Grandpa would sing the kiddush. Grandma would make gefilte fish or baked fish, with two kinds of knishes for dessert—little round ones with cheese and S-shaped ones with sweet rice. Friends and family would come after dinner for tea and cakes (especially Grandma's inimitable strudel), card games and smoking, political discussions and gossip. Shimen and Sima couldn't afford to be members of a synagogue, but they always went to shul for the two days of Rosh Hashonah and the fast day of Yom Kipur, bracketed by family feasts. On Purim, Grandpa would read the story of Esther, the *megillah,* rapidly in his strange Hebrew, and we had to listen carefully to drown out the name of Haman with noisemakers (*graggers*) every time we heard it. (This was a challenge because in his dialect *Háman* came out as *Úmen*.) And the two full nights of Pesach were a high point of the year, with hours of chanting and singing, eating and drinking. Grandpa and Joe chanted the entire *hagadah* in their Ukrainian Ashkenazic Hebrew while my parents would do it in their modern Ashkenazic Hebrew. Mark and I would steal the *afikomen* and negotiate with Grandpa for a reward that he already had waiting in his pocket. The kitchen had two sets of dishes for *milchik* and *fleyshik*—milk and meat, and another two sets for Pesach. Grandma remained kosher to the end of her long life, though she was a non-believer. I once asked her why she kept kosher, and she said it was, first, because that was her husband's way, and then in the decades after his death she continued the customs in honor of her father. She told me that she thought Shimen believed in God, but that she did not; neither did she believe in an afterlife. She explained—almost in Quaker fashion: "To me, God is what I feel when I help someone else." Essentially, God is love. She had a simple moral rule, which she repeated often to me: "If you do something for someone else, forget it immediately; if someone does something for you, remember it forever." Shimen, too, was oriented towards the social rather than the religious world, going all the way back to his role as a mediator in Russia and in Romania. During the war he volunteered to serve as an air raid warden. On blackout nights, when there were fears of an enemy attack on the city that was the center of the defense industry, he would patrol the neighborhood to make sure that blackout curtains were drawn and that lights were out. I think he was proud of his public service, with his badge and gas mask and authority. Unfortunately I didn't get to know him well enough for philosophical discussions; he died when I was twelve. (But he drilled me in my Bar Mitzvah preparation, as did my father.)

My grandparents' generation was full of energetic, intelligent, interesting people—all of them speaking fluent English with Yiddish accents. There was everything from card-carrying Communists to ultra-orthodox believers. There were people who went to Reform, Conservative, or Orthodox synagogues, or to no synagogue. But there were no Republicans, no one who had guns, no divorces. Most people smoked, and individuals were identified by their brands—Lucky Strike for Isaac, the feisty lawyer; big cigars for Oshie, the jeweler. But Shimen and Joe and Moishe did not smoke. Having lived through the prohibition era, they did not drink either (except for Moishe's one shot of schnaps before shabbos dinner). Everyone seemed to live intensely. Literature, music, the arts were highly valued. I cherish memories of literary evenings of *deklamatsiya*. My great-uncle Joe, Shimen's brother, was admired for his declamation of dramatic Russian poetry and his reading of Sholem Aleichem in Yiddish. There were many musicians, and certainly everyone was a music lover. Grandma and Grandpa had a piano and their daughters took

lessons. Grandma took me to my first symphony concert—an afternoon matinee—when I was about four. She treated it as a sacred event. At home, songs were sung in Yiddish, Russian, Hebrew, often around the piano or to the accompaniment of a mandolin. My parents' generation included members of symphony orchestras and chamber music groups, music teachers, painters and architects. Successful businessmen were respected for their wealth, especially if they were contributors to Jewish causes; but higher status went to the professions—doctors, lawyers, teachers. The children—my parents' generation—all had higher education and most of them entered into professions.

The immigrants clustered in Jewish neighborhoods where shops and synagogues and community centers and religious schools were all within walking distance. In my time, in the 1940s, there were only two or three non-Jewish children in my elementary school classes. In fact, I was shocked to learn, when I was six, that most people in the world were not Jewish, since everyone I knew was Jewish.

The men went off to work and the women were what they called "homemakers," proud of their cooking, their husbands, and especially their children. My grandmother, like most women of her generation, was active in various Jewish social organizations—in her case, the Zionist and left-wing Pioneer Women, where the women referred to each other as *khavera*, "comrade." Grandma was "Khavera Liepah." After the State of Israel was established in 1948, she and her comrades were active in raising money by selling certificates for the planting of trees in Israel. These were given to people on special occasions, from births, Bar Mitzvahs, and weddings, to funerals. And even before 1948 she had a collection box for Palestine—the familiar little blue metal box from the Jewish National Fund in which we children were encouraged to drop coins.

The Jewish community in Detroit moved northwest every generation or so, eventually ending up in the suburbs. The Liepahs came when a new area was being developed around Twelfth Street (later gutted in the 1967 race riots).[11] There were no New York style tenements, but separate brick houses, with front and back yards. The houses were built in the 1920s following an enlightened urban plan of mixed-income neighborhoods. There were blocks with four-family homes, two-family homes, or one-family homes, interspersed with broad boulevards with mansions. The streets were lined with stately elms that formed leafy tunnels. Every few blocks there was a major thoroughfare, like Twelfth Street or Linwood Avenue, with a full range of shops, gas stations, movie theaters. On the corners of these thoroughfares there were apartment buildings where people of lesser means could find housing—young or elderly couples, widows, single working men. There were no shopping malls or freeways yet. (Detroit—thanks or no-thanks to General Motors—was to introduce that urban plan to the country later, in the 1950s.) A full range of public and parochial schools was available in each of the neighborhoods. The thoroughfares were lined with synagogues of all sizes and denominations. No one (yet) had to ride on the Sabbath.

---

[11] The neighborhood in which they lived, in which I grew up in the 1940s, lies roughly between Linwood to the west and Woodrow Wilson on the east, from about Euclid going northward to Boston Boulevard. The next center was immediately to the north and west, extending along Dexter to Davison. Twelfth Street—the heart of the world I grew up in—is now Rosa Parks Boulevard, barely recognizable since the demolitions and clean-up after the 1967 race riots. The neighborhood now is a mixture of empty lots, boarded-up businesses, and well-maintained homes.

The Liepah family lived on the first floor of this house, on 2254 Hazelwood, in the late 1930s and 1940s (photo 1966). In 1932 my parents were married in the attic, which at that time was the art studio of Minna Agins. She and Jack Agins, the family doctor who delivered me and Mark, owned the house then. His office was two blocks away, on the corner of Hazelwood and Twelfth Street, above the drugstore.

Lifestyle was very much like that in the Yiddish worlds that the more urban immigrants would have been familiar with in Europe. On holidays one would stroll the avenues and greet friends and family. In the days before air conditioning and television, people would sit on their front porches and interact with passersby. I remember shopping with my mother when I was little. We would walk two blocks down Hazelwood to Twelfth Street where everything could be found in a stretch of a few blocks. At each shop there would be time to stop and chat. In the bakery they'd give me a cookie. In the grocery store run by the two Golub brothers and their sister it would be a pickle from one of the barrels on the sawdust-covered floor. The air was fragrant with hanging salamis and spices. Mr. Perelman, the fishmonger, would offer the best fish for Mom's fishloaf. The butcher sold chickens (kosher, of course) that were turned into Grandma's amazing soup in which rich and solid little egg yolks would float about. There was a drugstore on the corner, with candy bars and comic books—and our family doctor had his office on the second floor. On one corner across from the drugstore there was Neisner's big dime store, and on another corner was Boesky's dark and smoky delicatessen, where the infamous Jewish gangsters, the Purple Gang, used to hang out during the prohibition era (when they weren't down the street at the Cream of Michigan cafe). Great Uncle Oshie had his jewelry shop on Twelfth Street. When I went with my father to get gas (for our 1937 Plymouth), it was to Gorman & Rubens on Linwood—again, a Jewish establishment where there would be friendly talk (and where they would fill the tank, check the oil, and wash the windows). In short, it was an entire, compact Jewish world, repeated again a mile or so further north in the Dexter-Davison neighborhood. As my Aunt Ann once said, "We grew up in a Ukrainian village in Detroit."

Well into my childhood in the 1940s there was a rag and bones man with a horse and cart who went through the alleys that separated blocks of houses. An iceman brought ice upstairs to Grandma's kitchen, picking up a huge block of ice with metal tongs and putting it into the lead-lined interior of her lovely oak ice box. The eggman came to the front door with a bucket of eggs and would scoop out a half-dozen at a time, three in each hand, without ever breaking one. Every house had a milk chute where the milkman would drop off bottles of milk before we were up in the morning. Coal was delivered through a basement window into a coal bin, and every morning Grandpa, and later my father, would go down to the basement to stoke the furnace before the family was up. There was an old wine press in Grandpa's basement, because Jews were given permission to make sacramental wine during prohibition. Dirty clothes were dropped down a clothes chute to the basement laundry room, where there were wash tubs and clotheslines near the furnace for the many days when the weather made it impossible to hand clothes outside to dry. It wasn't until after the war that the Liepahs had a washing machine (but there were no dryers yet) and an electric refrigerator.

I'm painting this picture retrospectively, from my own childhood. I was born in 1939 and these images are from about 1943 to 1953. The Liepahs arrived in 1923 and the twenty years before were certainly not easy. At first the immigrants lived with another

family, and then in a basement apartment. My parents, to the ends of their long lives, were marked by the economic and social uncertainties of growing up in the depression. At the same time, anti-Semitism and racism were strong in Detroit. The Jewish Virtual Library provides this overview:

> Racism and antisemitism may have been common features of the American cultural landscape in the 20th century, but their malevolence in Detroit was unmatched anywhere else. Father Charles Coughlin's vitriolic anti-semitic national radio broadcasts in the 1930s, Henry Ford's anti-Jewish newspaper campaign in the *Dearborn Independent* during the 1920s, the Black Legion's night-riders and lynching, Gerald L.K. Smith and others, still evoke fear and anger in Detroit Jews. The 1930s also saw Detroit's German American Bund become fairly active. Along with news of the events in Europe, more subtle actions like department store ads from J.L. Hudson's that read "only Gentiles need apply," and public swimming pools that did not allow Jews to swim, or restrictive covenants that prevented Jews from purchasing or renting houses in Pleasant Ridge or Grosse Pointe or Birmingham, appreciably increased anxiety among Jews in Detroit. (http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Detroit.html#1915)

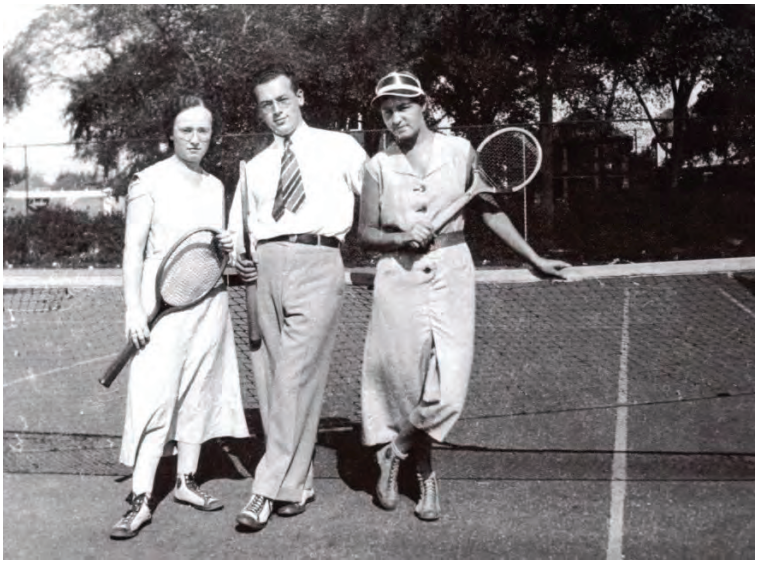
Jews hunkered down in their enclaves. Before the war, the community was divided over Zionism. Mainstream Jewish organizations emphasized assimilation to American norms and reluctance to arouse more anti-Semitism by supporting the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine. However, in the thirties, some of my parents' friends were trained in agricultural life in farms in New Jersey and emigrated to British Mandate Palestine to establish advanced agricultural collective farms (left-wing *kibbutzim*). My parents were not tempted to take that path. (After the war, Zionism of one form or another became the norm.)

Through the pre-war years Judy and Ann were growing up as high-achieving, English-speaking Americans. Judy already had 18 months of Hebrew language experience in the school and scouting group in Kishinev, and by 1924, only a year after arriving in America, she was teaching a class in United Hebrew Schools. Here she is with her first class, at age fifteen, with her eight-year-old sister Ann at her right side. And by 1928 my father entered the picture. Norval Slobin and Judy Liepah met in the new high school of the United Hebrew Schools, where they were learning modern Hebrew as a spoken language. They even used written Hebrew in their courtship correspondence.

The Expanded Family

Norval spent more and more time in the Liepah home, seeking refuge, I think, from his own dysfunctional childhood home (described in my biographies of his parents). His father had left the family and his mother felt abandoned by Norval, her oldest, with three younger siblings to deal with. And Norval's father rejected this involvement with an immigrant girl. He himself had worked his way up in the world from an immigrant peddler in 1905 to marrying my grandmother, who had been born in New York. He could not countenance this decline of status, as he saw it, for his son. When Norval and Judy married four years later, he did not attend the wedding. Undeterred, the young lovers went on, studying together at the City College of Detroit (now Wayne State University), receiving B.A. degrees in 1931—she in English and he in history. They got married in 1932 in the house on Hazelwood, bought a second-hand 1928 Chevy, and took the requisite honeymoon trip to Niagara Falls, continuing on through the Finger Lakes of upstate New York to visit members of the Uman family who had settled in Brooklyn.

When they returned to Detroit Norval moved into the three-bedroom Liepah household—as was the practice in those lean depression years—displacing teenage Ann to a cot in the dining room while the third bedroom was rented to a long-term tenant, an elderly Dr. Goldflam who had been a dentist in the Old Country. All six of the residents of 2254 Hazelwood took turns using the single bathroom. Norval got a teaching certificate but there were no jobs until the New Deal and eventual war economy got Detroit booming again, eventually converting the Motor City to the mainstay of the defense industry. His sole source of income—and thereby his contribution to the Liepah household—came from substitute teaching. Sub calls were rare, sometimes only a few per month, and the whole family was alerted not to use the telephone in the morning in case a sub call came in. He told me that the city had no cash, and so he was paid in scrip which could be used to pay for taxes and city services. He would exchange scrip for cash from Uncle Joe, who did have a paying job. Both Judy and Norval went on to obtain M.A. degrees—unusual in those days. She had hoped to become a librarian (following the little childhood library she described in her memoir of Uman), but there were no positions in the depression. Instead, she trained as a social worker and found work in that profession in 1936.



Judy, Norval, and Edith Deutsch,1932. Judy and Edith had been friends in Uman; the Deutsch and Liepah families escaped together. (Judy wrote on the back of the picture: GOOD GAME)

Here is a picture of the family in 1932. It is the last picture with Rissel, the mother of Shimen and Joe. She died the following year, after seeing her granddaughter Yokheved graduate college and begin married life. In the picture we also see Joe's wife—my Great-Aunt Vera, as well as considerably more grown-up Ann and Sarah. Family was centrally

Sima Ann Judy Norval Joe

Shimen Rissel Sarah Vera

important, and I'm sure that Sima saw to it that the web of relations was maintained with minimal friction. There was gossip, to be sure, and sometimes strong criticism behind people's backs, but solidarity was maintained through the years.

The New Deal brought some economic recovery, as did preparations for war. Norval had a full-time teaching position and in 1938 he and Judy were finally able to move into an apartment of their own and begin a family. My arrival a year later, on the eve of the war, undoubtedly brought joy to the little family and Shimen and Sima became proud grandparents. World War II began in Europe on September 1, 1939, but when I was born on May 7 the coming course of events was already coming into focus—and already with the fateful number of six million:

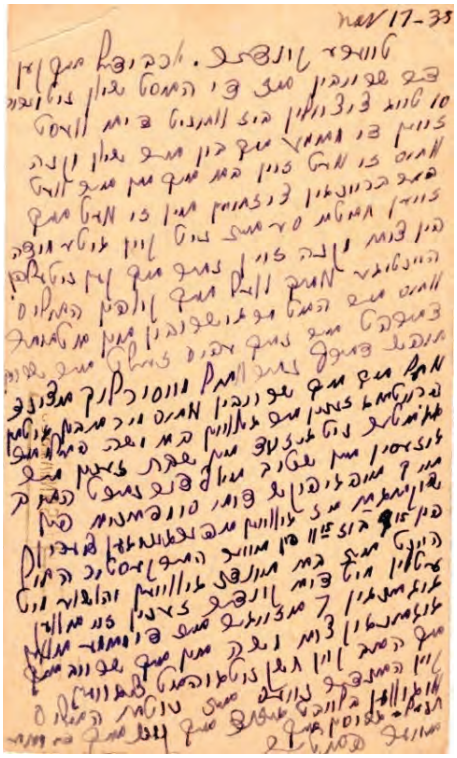
> ...the May 7,1939 "Allied Jewish Campaign News" emphasized European developments. With photographs of Jews being humiliated in Memel, victims of a pogrom in Poland and of the Hlinka Guards in Slovakia, it graphically depicted the rising threat to European Jews. In their introduction to this publication, Wineman and Butzel stated, "Six million Jews overseas face persecution, pauperization. Where, but to us, can they turn for help?" The Campaign sought $790,000 to aid and support fifty-two local, national, and international agencies, including the United Palestine Agency and the joint Distribution Committee. ... In addition to providing lengthy lists of names of campaign leaders, the directors of the women's project, committee chairs, and speakers, there were separate articles about the United Palestine Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee, the agencies aiding the rescue of Jewish refugees from Europe. It seemed then, that the Allied Jewish Campaign had begun in earnest, and that its supporters were aware as much as was possible of the Nazi threat-four months before the German invasion of Poland ushered in World War II.[12]

Shimen, Danny, Sima 1940

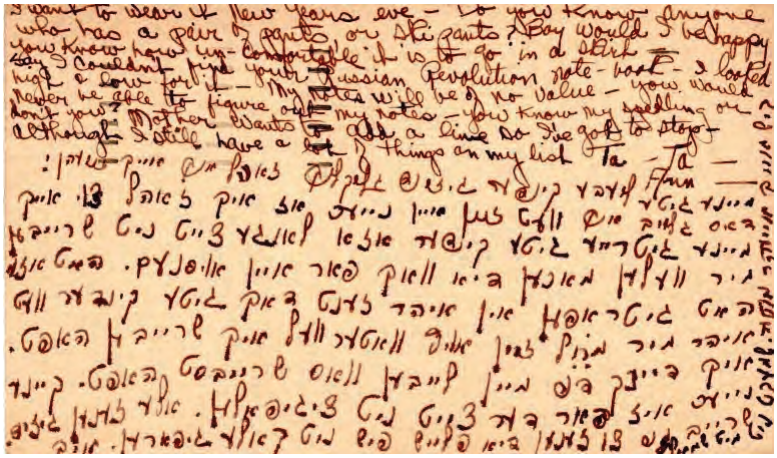
Norval received an M.A. from Wayne University and went on to work for a PhD in history and was accepted as a graduate student at the prestigious University of Chicago. Judy helped him perfect his Russian; he already had mastered German in 1930 as a nineteen-year-old student in Berlin (an adventure that calls for a separate story). His studies were prolonged, with trips to Chicago to work in archives and meet with advisors. Judy and Norval spent 1935-36 in Chicago, where he took seminars and she worked as a secretary.

Shimen sent letters and postcards to them, of which a few survive. On the next page there is one from November 17, 1935, from Shimen addressed to Judy at 6106 University, in the Hyde Park district of Chicago. I include it as an indication that Yiddish was

[12] Sidney Bolkosky, *Harmony & Dissonance:Voices of Jewish Identity in Detroit, 1914-1967. Wayne State University Press, 1991, p. 235*



Shimen's written language (though I can't make out much of his idiosyncratic cursive). Sima's correspondence was also in Yiddish, though more legibly written. I don't have any letters from Judy to her parents, but I imagine they would have been in Yiddish in early years and later in English. Ann was a college student in Detroit while Judy and Norval were in Chicago. She wrote to them almost daily, squeezing as much as she could onto a penny postcard ornamented with "gosh" and "golly" and "swell," and signing off with "ta-ta." (Long-distance calls would have been out of the question.) I found one postcard she wrote on December 19, 1935, leaving room for Sima to add a note in Yiddish. Sima's note is a long affectionate greeting with apologies for not having written, promises to write more, and a report that everyone is in good health. As for languages of correspondence, a relative in Israel—Zahava Driz, the youngest daughter of Khaim Nokhum—corresponded with Sima in Yiddish, with my parents in Hebrew, and later with me in Russian. In my childhood in the 1950s my parents wrote to Grandma in English and she responded in Yiddish.



Norval finally finished his dissertation and received the doctorate at the end of 1942. The title was *Soviet Disarmament Proposals 1917-1935*, building on his M.A. dissertation from Wayne University, *The Disarmament Policy of Soviet Russia 1922-1929*. He used to talk to me about that research (and dinner-table talk was full of history and politics when Mark and I were kids). After laying out the devastation resulting from World War I, he discussed the pervasive war-weariness. Nations feared a new war and they could not afford rearmament. But Norval came to an unhappy conclusion: "The difficulty lay in the fact that no nation was satisfied to leave its relative strength unaltered; it wished to increase it. Every disarmament conference therefore became, in effect, an armament conference, in which each nation strove to induce others to reduce their armed strength in a greater proportion than its own. Disarmament discussion based on such mutually exclusive premises were foredoomed to failure."

Judy's M.A. dissertation, in English, was an exploration of how the character of Shakespeare's Shylock, in *The Merchant of Venice*, reflected attitudes towards Jews over the past several centuries. (Judith L. Slobin, *A History of English Criticism of Shylock, 1709-1935*. Wayne University, 1937.)

In 1942 Norval and Judy bought this house up the street at 2288 Hazelwood (the yellow brick house in this 1966 photo) and rented the upper floor to Shimen and Sima. Mark was born in 1943 and this is where we spent the formative years of our childhoods. Shabbos dinners and holidays were always celebrated upstairs with Grandma and Grandpa. My father now had a stable teaching job in the Detroit Public Schools, a house and two children, aging in-laws upstairs. His own father had died in 1941 leaving his widow, my grandmother, dependent on her four children. Norval's hopes of an academic career didn't come to pass. He had responsibilities in Detroit and Judy wasn't willing to leave it all for an uncertain future in an unfamiliar place (although there were apparently offers from universities in Nebraska and Oklahoma). So Dr. Slobin became a respected high school teacher of social studies (and Mark and I did become university professors, and married university professors).

The inside world and the outside world

Norval, Danny, Marky
Belle Isle 1943

Norval began teaching at Miller High School, in the core African-American neighborhood. He was full of enthusiasm, setting off with two good friends, also social studies teachers, also Jewish. He joined the NAACP and took part in civil rights actions in the days when blacks and Jews had common purposes and common enemies. In 1943 there were serious race riots in Detroit, with many deaths and injuries and property destruction. Wikipedia summarizes the situation in distressingly familiar terms, echoed in the 1967 Detroit riots and in current demonstrations against police shootings of young black men: "The NAACP identified as causes longstanding problems in the city of housing and job discrimination, lack of minority representation in the police, and police brutality." We had spent the afternoon of June 20, 1943, on Belle Isle, the large island park in the Detroit River. It was there that the riots began, growing out of tense and eventually violent confrontations between whites and blacks. Judy wrote on the side of this picture: "riots started after we got home." Eventually the National Guard was called in and I remember going to school with armed soldiers at the entrances.[13]

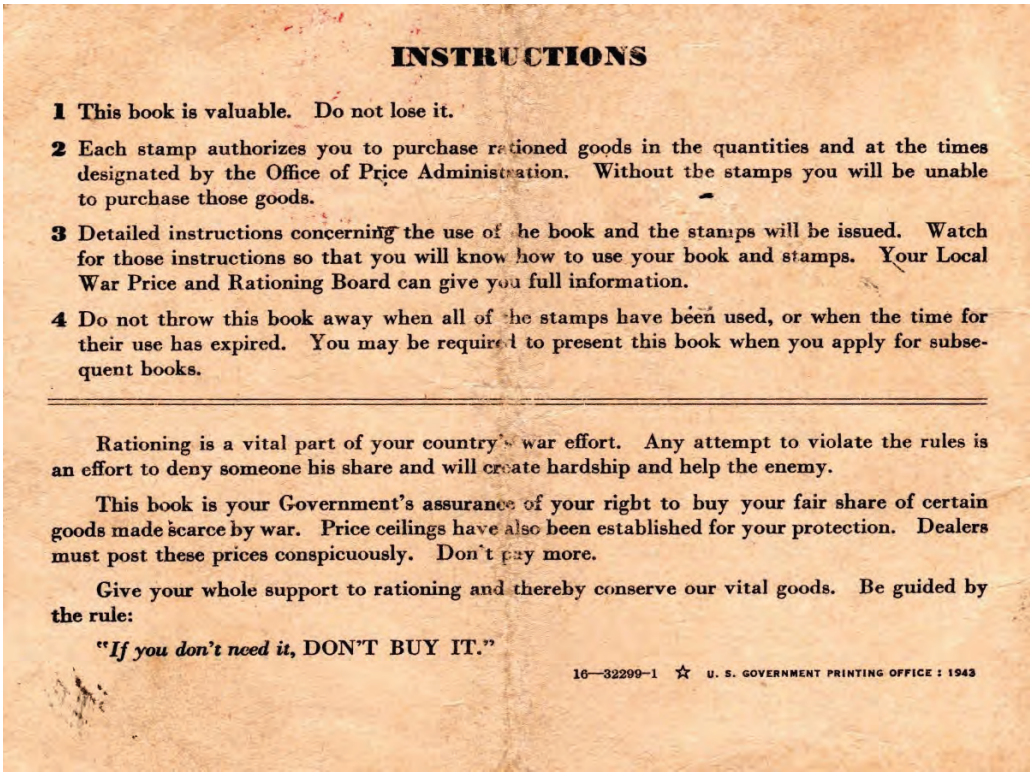
Although the family had liberal racial attitudes, I don't remember any blacks visiting the house until I began to make friends in junior high school in the early fifties. For that matter, I remember that a Catholic colleague of my father's—a good friend—once came to

[13] My brother has written about this era from the perspective of his field of ethnomusicology: Mark Slobin (2016). Improvising a musical metropolis: Detroit in the 1940s–1960s. *Ethnomusicology: 60*, 1-21. (2019) *Motor City Music: A Detroiter Looks Back.* Oxford University Press.

visit and it stood out in my mind as an unusual event to see a non-Jew sitting in the living room. Yet my grandparents' generation seemed to have a warm relationship with blacks, perhaps as they had had earlier with Ukrainian peasants. Rukhel (the sister-in-law of Shimen and Joe) used to give me a ride in the mornings to Hutchins Intermediate School in the 1950s, and I remember her instruction that I get to know black kids and feel comfortable with them; that they weren't any different from me. I'm grateful for the years I spent in inner-city secondary schools. I felt, at last, that I lived in America and had friends who were black and Latino and Arab, who went to a range of churches, and whose parents were different from my parents. At the same time, though, every Jewish family had a black maid—a *shvartse*—and housewives would compare the qualities of their *shvartses*. Ours for many years was a woman named Maggie, who was considered sort of part of the family. I remember once, when I was about eight, going with my mother to visit Maggie at home, on the East side, because she was sick. Perhaps we brought her something. It was my first direct experience of poverty, and I felt uneasy seeing black kids like me who didn't have what I had.

In each of the three Detroit neighborhoods in which we lived, realtors would engage in vicious block-busting. They would sell a home to a black family and then spread the rumor that the neighborhood was changing, that people should get out and move on to the next neighborhood—which they were developing—before it was too late. The prediction was that property values would fall, yet they were buying homes cheap and selling them dear to middle-class blacks. Each time this happened, my mother would try to mobilize her neighbors and friends to resist. She set up phone networks and had meetings to argue that we should stay put. That the people who were moving in were professional families like we were; that the new residents actually improved their homes and gardens; that we could be friends with them. And she herself did take part in inter-racial school organizations and activities. Yet it always turned out that we were among the few remaining whites—in the Twelfth Street area, and then in the Dexter-Davison area, and finally in the Seven Mile Road Area. We eventually had to move on because friends didn't come to visit us in the old neighborhood. Mom always said that her black neighbors were more friendly and helpful than the Jewish neighbors. She kept her Roosevelt Era values to the end. In the 1990s, when the newspaper workers were on strike, she canceled her subscription, because she didn't want to support scab labor even though she relied on her daily paper. She was an early supporter of Planned Parenthood. And stories of refugees anywhere, as in the break-up of Yugoslavia, and stories of Israeli collective punishment of Palestinians, always sickened her. She never lost her identification with people who lost life supports, as she had when she was a girl. Looking back, I see now that she and the refugee children of their generation carried post-traumatic stress syndromes with them, though not acknowledged. And although I was too young to hear social and political discussions between my grandparents, I feel certain that they had similar liberal values.

To bring the narrative back to the 1940s, the war and its aftermath dominated my early memories. As I said, Grandpa was an air raid warden. Some of my parents' friends were in the army (though my father's congenital arthritis kept him out). Women, such as my other grandmother and Great-Aunt Vera, trained to be nurse's aides. We gathered clothes for Russian War Relief. Army trucks would come through the streets to collect rubber bands and foil wrappers from cigarette and chewing gum packages, and whatever else could be used for the war effort. Our children's games were war games: "Bombs away over Tokyo!" while dropping stones off the edge of the porch. Everyone had a book of war ration coupons—even I did, and I felt proud to go shopping with Mom and contribute my coupons to her purchases. The instructions on the back of the booklet were patriotic, practical, serious.



INSTRUCTIONS

1 This book is valuable. Do not lose it.

2 Each stamp authorizes you to purchase rationed goods in the quantities and at the times designated by the Office of Price Administration. Without the stamps you will be unable to purchase those goods.

3 Detailed instructions concerning the use of the book and the stamps will be issued. Watch for those instructions so that you will know how to use your book and stamps. Your Local War Price and Rationing Board can give you full information.

4 Do not throw this book away when all of the stamps have been used, or when the time for their use has expired. You may be required to present this book when you apply for subsequent books.

Rationing is a vital part of your country's war effort. Any attempt to violate the rules is an effort to deny someone his share and will create hardship and help the enemy.

This book is your Government's assurance of your right to buy your fair share of certain goods made scarce by war. Price ceilings have also been established for your protection. Dealers must post these prices conspicuously. Don't pay more.

Give your whole support to rationing and thereby conserve our vital goods. Be guided by the rule:

"*If you don't need it*, DON'T BUY IT."

16—32299–1 ☆ U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE : 1943

In the days before TV the daily newspapers brought images, maps, dramatic headlines. I'm sure that Shimen and Sima paid special attention to war news from the Russian front, where their old home territory was bitterly fought over. In 1941 the Battle of Uman ended with German encirclement of the entire region. By 1942 most of the Jews of Uman had been killed, though the family in Detroit could not have known yet. Later I remember talk of "the concentration camps"—Holocaust hadn't become a word yet (actually, not until the 1960s). Little by little the horrors came into focus, even for children. Searches for surviving relatives in Ukraine were hopeless. The remaining Uman family was in Detroit, Brooklyn, and British Mandate Palestine.

Shimen and Sima's younger daughter Ann became an active participant in the immediate postwar rehabilitation, making those events part of the Detroit household and bringing pride to her parents. In 1943, restless as a Detroit kindergarten teacher, 27-year-old Ann moved to San Francisco to work for the War Manpower Board. Her life story deserves a separate account; here I can only sketch it out in relation to her parents. In 1945 she secured a position with the Joint Distribution Committee, the JDC, to go to Europe and play a role in opening the camps. She was young, single, attractive, determined—and she quickly got a position with the U.S. Army of Liberation in Bavaria. She arranged to take over the farm of Julius Streicher—Hitler's most notorious anti-Semitic propagandist—converting it to a training center for young DPs (Displaced Persons). Soon she established a Yiddish paper, discussion groups, and agricultural activities. The Detroit family was with her, step-by-step, in copious

letters, postcards, and telegrams. There were articles and pictures in Detroit's *Jewish News* and the national Yiddish *Forverts.* This 1945 article tells the basic story.

Miss Liepah Heads Hachsharah Camp Near Nuremburg

Detroit Girl to Supervise Training Farm on Land Formerly Streicher's

To a Detroit girl—Miss Ann Liepah, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Simon Liepah of 2290 Hazelwood Ave.—has been assigned the task

MISS ANN LIEPAH

of supervising the Hachsharah Camp near Nuremberg, located on the farm formerly owned by the anti-Semitic butcher Julius Streicher.

Miss Liepah left on Sept. 14 for Germany as one of the group of overseas representatives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Her mission was announced in The Jewish News on Sept. 21.

A graduate of Wayne University, Miss Liepah took post-graduate work at the University of Wisconsin. She formerly was associated with the War Manpower Commission and with the Office of War Information in San Francisco.

A former student of the United Hebrew Schools, Miss Liepah at one time was associated with Hashomer Hatzair and a number of years ago attended a Halutz camp.

In a cable she sent to her perents last week, Miss Liepah informed them of having acquired the Streicher property for a Kibbutz and urged them to secure for the Hachsharah Hebrew and Yiddish newspapers and magazines, Yiddish and English dictionaries and Yiddish books.

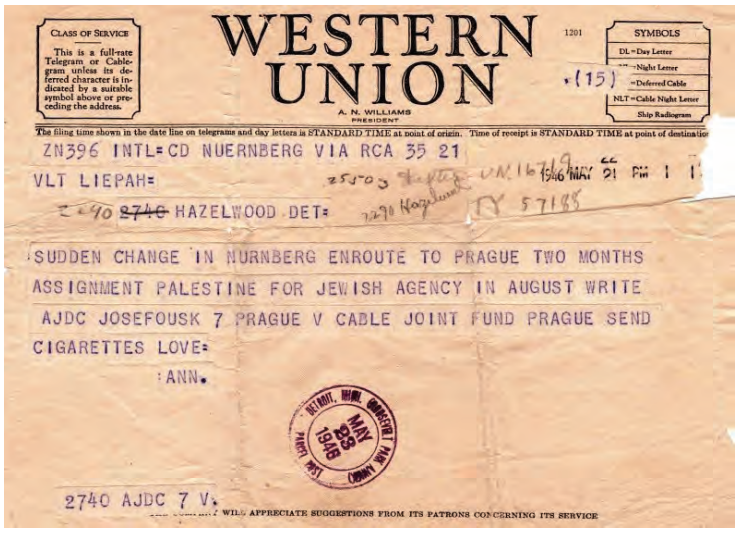
In a long series of telegrams she relied on Shimen to handle practical and financial details for her: RECEIVED NYLONS CIGARETES GRATEFUL THANKS || SEND IMMEDIATELY AIR MAIL PRAGUE THREE HUNDRED DOLLARS IN TRAVELERS CHECKS SMALL DENOMINATIONS || WELL AWARE OF RULINGS PLEASE FOLLOW PREVIOUS INSTRUCTIONS AIRMAI PACKAGE IMMEDIATELY || PLEASE SEND MY UNTERMEYER POETRY COLLECTION || SEND IMMEDIATELY TWO LONG SLEEVE BEIGE WOOL BLOUSES || PLEASE SEND ONE DOZEN STOCKINGS BEST POSSIBLE INSTEAD OF BEIGE BLOUSES SEND WHITE SILK LONG SLEEVED WELL TAILORED SHIRTS

No doubt the family felt intimately involved with unimaginable events in Europe When Ann came home for visits I saw my first pictures of emaciated living bodies and piles of corpses and had the inescapable double feeling that I was safe while kids just like me had not been.

When Poland fell into the Soviet orbit Ann was sent to the Czechoslovak-Polish border. Czechoslovakia was not yet in the East bloc and it was urgent to help the

remaining Polish Jews to flee to the West. There were numerous anti-Semitic incidents in Poland, including murders. Ann was stationed in Nachod, on the border, where each night she worked with an international team smuggling hundreds of Jews out of Poland.

She returned to the U.S. on lecture tours, but soon was in the Middle East. In 1947 Great Britain gave up its Mandate over Palestine, leaving thousands of Jewish refugees in internment camps in Cyprus. Ann went to work there and later, after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, she had a public relations position with the Weitzmann Institute of Science. She worked with Bedouin sheikhs in the Negev who wanted to benefit from Israeli citizenship. And she befriended the young conductor Leonard Bernstein in organizing a concert in Beer-Sheba. In all these ways, the outside world came to Hazelwood Avenue in Detroit.



CLASS OF SERVICE
This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable symbol above or preceding the address.

WESTERN UNION

A. N. WILLIAMS
PRESIDENT

1201

SYMBOLS
DL = Day Letter
NL = Night Letter
LT = Deferred Cable
NLT = Cable Night Letter
Ship Radiogram

The filing time shown in the date line on telegrams and day letters is STANDARD TIME at point of origin. Time of receipt is STANDARD TIME at point of destination

ZN396 INTL=CD NUERNBERG VIA RCA 35 21
VLT LIEPAH=
=40 ~~8740~~ HAZELWOOD DET=

SUDDEN CHANGE IN NURNBERG ENROUTE TO PRAGUE TWO MONTHS
ASSIGNMENT PALESTINE FOR JEWISH AGENCY IN AUGUST WRITE
AJDC JOSEFOUSK 7 PRAGUE V CABLE JOINT FUND PRAGUE SEND
CIGARETTES LOVE=
ANN.

DETROIT, MICH. GENERAL MAIL ANNEX
MAY 23 1945

2740 AJDC 7 V.

WILL APPRECIATE SUGGESTIONS FROM ITS PATRONS CONCERNING ITS SERVICE

Ann had established herself as an organizer and facilitator and pursued this open-ended profession in many ways through her long life. For a while, on her return from Israel, she became executive secretary of her mother's organization, the Pioneer Women's Organization of America. Shimen and Sima had many reasons to be proud of their daughter.

In 1950 Ann married a handsome young advertiser and writer, Fred Borden, who had spent four years in the U.S. Army of Occupation in Japan. There was a grand wedding party in Shimen and Sima's house in Detroit, and then Ann and Fred went back to New York. They settled in Manhattan, on the Upper West Side. In my mind, my parents had given me the nineteenth century, but Ann gave me the twentieth century—its music and painting and left-wing ideology. She was an attractive and romantic personality, as captured in some of these portraits by the distinguished photographer Aaron Siskind.

Ann and Fred Borden

In Michigan forever

Shimen's life did not change after the war. He continued to be a salesman for Krolik with no advance in standard of living: renting the upstairs flat from Norval and Judy and earning extra money from a tenant, no car, no time off for travel except for the brief summer week in northern Michigan. But there was a secure job and the warmth of a broad circle of family and friends of several generations. He would come home from work with something for the *boycheklekh*, as he called me and Mark—that wonderful hybrid of an immigrant word beginning with English *boy*, plus the Slavic affectionate diminutive *boychek*, and polished off with the Yiddish plural from medieval German: *boycheklekh*. If he had been shopping on Twelfth Street there would be a gleam in his eye when he unwrapped a bit of brown wax paper to reveal a delicious morsel of halvah. Or he would bring clothing samples for us from Kroliks—special socks or pajamas. When we got our first TV—a big console with a ten-inch black-and-white screen—he and Grandma would come downstairs on Saturday nights and delight in *Your Show of Shows* with Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca. I never heard him complain or get angry. He liked to laugh, to eat, to be with people—and to help people.

POSTWAR LIFE IN THE 1940S

Sima Shimen Vera Joe
SUMMER IN NORTHERN MICHIGAN
ON CRYSTAL LAKE IN BEULAH

Shimen Sima
AT HOME IN DETROIT

Detroit was a livable city in those years—the fourth largest in the country, still the world's motor capital, with a world-class art museum and symphony orchestra. Downtown had a range of shops, including elegant Hudson's, priding itself as the world's largest department store. Every fall the Big Three auto makers would reveal the new models and we'd all go to look, to study, to recognize. If you were from Detroit, you immediately spotted the differences between a 1953 and a 1954 Chevy, and you wouldn't want to be seen driving a car more than two years old. My parents' generation would socialize at symphony concerts and theaters. There were social and political and religious organizations of every sort. The public schools were good. Mark and I could safely take a 15-minute bus ride downtown where we'd wander through book and record shops.

We lived in a closely-knit social world of family, friends, and neighbors. There was always someone who could help solve a problem. Grandpa was a handyman. Isaac was a lawyer. A friend of a relative had a clothing store. There were doctors and nurses. And there was always someone who had a connection, or knew someone else with a connection. And, increasingly, there was *nakhes fun eyneklekh*—that uniquely Yiddish sentiment of prideful pleasure in the achievements of grandchildren.

I remember swelteringly hot and humid summer evenings in those days before air conditioning. The phone would ring and an ad hoc picnic quickly developed. We'd always meet by the fountain at the tip of Belle Isle, that large and gracious island

parkland laid out by Frederick Law Olmsted in the 1880s. The island was our urban refuge, with extensive canoe canals, band shell, zoo, horticultural garden, swimming beaches, and even a little forest with deer. It was too hot for a barbecue, so people brought baskets of cold picnic food, coming either by car or streetcar. Every woman had her own specialty, which no other woman dared to copy. Rukhel would bring a basket with her trademark potato knishes. Sima might bring gefilte fish; Judy might bring pickled fish. There would probably be poppy seed cookies from Vera. Bottles of Vernor's ginger ale and Faygo pop. And on and on. We would picnic at the point of the island, looking out at the industrial shores of Canada and the United States, watching the endless boats passing through what was then the busiest shipping route in the world.

There was a tightly bonded circle of *Umanyers*—family and friends with roots in Uman; and weddings and anniversaries and significant birthdays were occasions for rejoicing and feasting together in the 1940s. The network reached out to other cities. Sima had "an adopted sister," Aidka Marks, who lived in Akron, Ohio, and we would pile in cars to spend a few nights there for such an event, sleeping in guestrooms and on sofas in her ample home. Or I remember driving through a snowy night to Toronto for a wedding there. Toledo and Cincinnati were in the web and, less frequently, Chicago, Montreal, Brooklyn, Baltimore. And once in 1947 Grandma's Aunt Zahava came from Palestine with her two daughters for an extended visit to Detroit and Brooklyn. I can picture similar gatherings in the Old Country, with travels between Uman and surrounding centers of Jewish life. In Yiddish novels of the early twentieth century one reads of travels to be with family for happy (or sad) occasions, or of the joys and travails of long visits from relatives. Two pictures from about 1949 convey the joyousness and complexity of such conviviality. The first is a dinner party at the home of Joe and Vera, with family and close friends. Generally the generations of my grandparents and of my parents would socialize separately, but the major festivities—the "landmark" events—always cut across generations, with Sima and Shimen's siblings and friends, their adult children (like Judy and Norval), and their young children (me and Mark). It would take too many side-stories to identify everyone at this ample table, but I'll point to the protagonists who have entered the narrative of Shimen and Sima.

Sima *Shimen*

Moishe

Judy
Danny
Marky

Norval *Vera* *Joe*

This is the beginning of a long dinner. The candles have just been lit and everyone has a typical goblet of canned fruit salad, which somehow was considered a delicacy. There are green olives stuffed with pimentos, radishes, white dinner rolls, and piles of fruit for later—pineapples and grapes. Some sort of warm course will follow, beef or chicken with vegetables, typically followed by a salad of iceberg lettuce. Cakes, coffee and tea will finish off—quite likely in the living room, after a break during which the women clear the table and work in the kitchen while the men have a smoke or take a walk. The only beverage is water. These folks of the prohibition era by and large did not develop a taste for alcohol. The candles, the fruit salad, and the clothing all point to a grand event, though I have no idea what it was. The men wear ties and jackets; the women have jewelry and make-up and are well-coiffed. The group is in for several hours of eating and talking—like it or not, stuck in your chair for a long time. There will be politics and gossip, topics to avoid that will somehow not be avoided. People will talk over each other. It will be noisy. Hopefully it will be a happy evening for both guests and hosts. And when each couple is alone in their own bed at night, you can be sure that every detail will be dissected for praise, envy, ridicule, or scorn. You don't grow up in a Yiddish home without trying to figure out who or what made whom *beroyges*—angry, upset—and when or why it happened (which could have been just now or decades ago).

The second scene is from a wedding dinner in Akron, with many of the same people from Detroit (under the red arc) along with the Ohioans. Joe, Vera, Shimen, Sima, Judy, and Norval can be seen in the center, and the little forehead between my parents is my own. Everyone older than sixty will be talking in Yiddish or in fluent but accented English. Parties of this scale took place in large hotel spaces and could well include breakfasts or brunches before or after in people's homes. Akron is 200 miles

from Detroit, and in the days before freeways, that meant going through every town on the way, which could well have been a half-day journey.

I think Shimen and Sima were satisfied to have settled in Detroit "forever." And, alas, forever came all too quickly for Shimen. In January 1952 he collapsed with a heart attack and was dead three days later. Like so many of his generation, he had high blood pressure before it could be controlled by medication and diet, and work schedules left no time for physically healthy activities. Sima's brother Oshie had died of a heart attack at 56; my father's parents each died of heart attacks at 59. Shimen was 66 and I think he had never had a vacation longer than that precious yearly week in northern Michigan. I remember how he would begin to unwind—swimming, fishing, hiking—and then it was back to Krolik's for another 51 weeks. He left a 64-year-old widow who lived on for almost another three decades.

Sima on her own

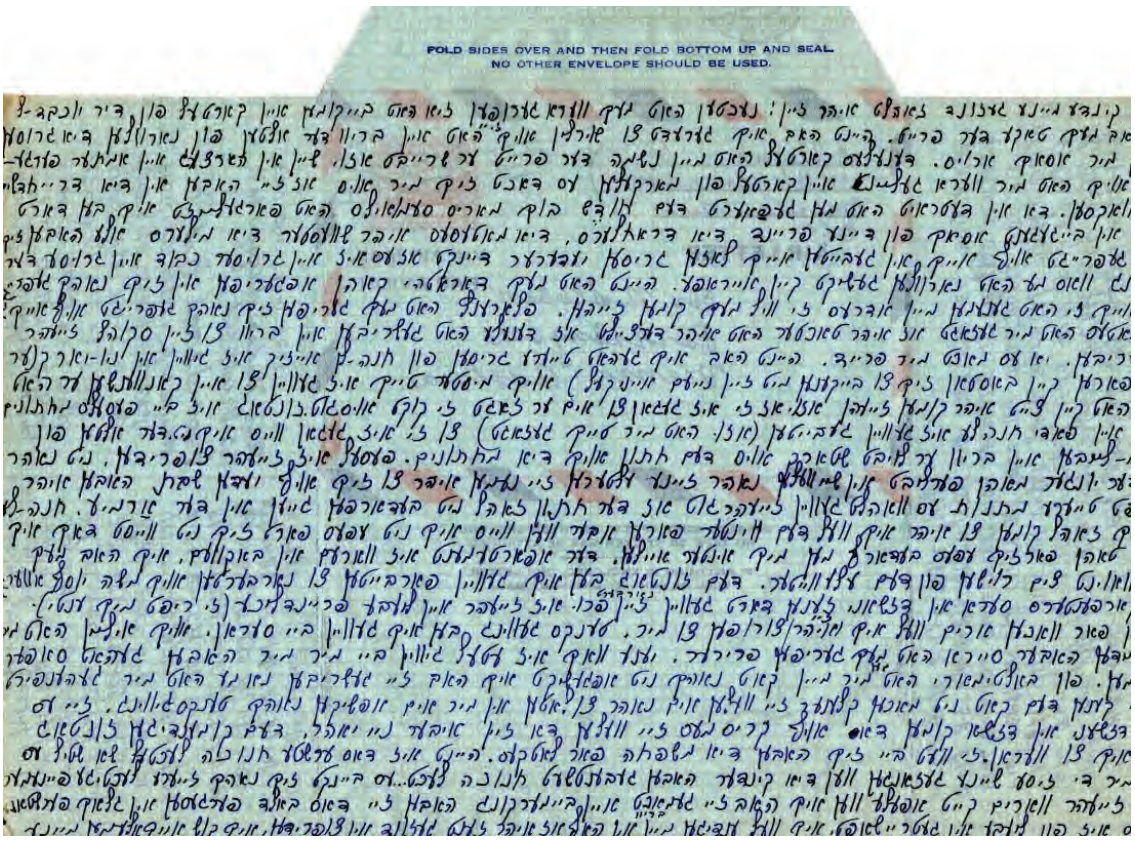
Sima carried on with characteristic quiet dignity, but Judy and Norval were eager to finally move on to a single home of their own with their two young sons, who were twelve and eight when Shimen died. In 1953 they found a home on Collingwood and Lawton in the Dexter-Davison neighborhood—the next Jewish area to the northwest. With Shimen gone and Dr. Goldflam in the "old folks home," it didn't make sense for Sima to have a whole flat to herself. So she moved to a comfortable one-bedroom apartment on the corner of Richton and Dexter in the newer neighborhood. She had no means of support beyond the small social security checks she received as Shimen's widow, so she quietly accepted Moishe's willing contribution to her support—something that was never talked about. To me, it seemed to be a balance for the childhood years in Uman when she had raised him as a surrogate mother. He was single, after an unhappy marriage, and was living in an apartment hotel. The brother and sister needed each other. Shabbos and holiday dinners continued in Sima's apartment as before, and Moishe always came early for his glass of schnaps; the same people came after dinner for tea and cakes. The only innovations were a big TV set and an air conditioner. Sima continued her activities in Pioneer Women and could do her shopping on foot in the new neighborhood. But the old world atmosphere of Twelfth Street was gone. Judy drove to a super market for the family shopping.

2974 Collingwood (1954)

3385 Richton (1966)

We have an archive of 28 letters that Sima wrote in Yiddish from 1953 to 1974 and I'll draw on these to continue much of the story in her own (translated) words. The letters are a remarkable window into her mind and the activities and values of the community. The first eight letters are from 1953-54; the rest are from 1957-74. In 1953, Norval received a Fulbright Award to spend a year as an exchange teacher in Vienna, so the four Slobins left Sima in her apartment and set off for a 14-month adventure in Europe. Sima appreciated the many detailed letters and postcards she received from all over Europe, and she sent densely-packed but amazingly neat and legible ten-cent aerograms to Vienna, written on both sides, with separate side flaps for "Danele" and "Markele." There are no paragraphs and minimal punctuation. Her Yiddish hand is neat and legible, remaining so until the last letter written at age 86. The address panel, by contrast, shows her labored writing in English, a language she did not normally use for writing, though her speech and comprehension were fluent. Here's an example from December 3, 1953. She was 65.


S. Siepak
3385 Richton apd 9
Detroit 6, Mich.
U.S.A.
AIR LETTER
AIR MAIL
10¢
VIA AIR MAIL
PAR AVION
Dr. N. Slobin
Parkring 20/3/3
Vienna I. Austria
MESSAGE MUST APPEAR ON INNER SIDE ONLY
NO TAPE OR STICKER MAY BE ATTACHED
IF ANYTHING IS ENCLOSED, THIS LETTER
WILL BE SENT BY ORDINARY MAIL
FIRST FOLD
SECOND FOLD


FOLD SIDES OVER AND THEN FOLD BOTTOM UP AND SEAL.
NO OTHER ENVELOPE SHOULD BE USED.

I've translated excerpts that show her thoughts and activities, omitting flowery openings and endings, responses to letters, detailed accounts of the activities of others, numerous reports of the good health of family members. She was in a continual network of lunch and dinner invitations and sent updates on family in Brooklyn, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. There is beautiful and rich formulaic material in her letters, which I have analyzed separately and hope to write about

November 1, 1953

... Since the apartment is small, not a very big place, there will be more time for reading—going out into the self, really resting. Big homes may be comfortable but one gets too tired and it takes too much time. So be happy [about my situation]. Time is the most valuable. When all is said and done, it's only a temporary residence.

[Her concern for Ann and Fred in New York is a recurring personal theme.] *Today I got a letter from Khone-le* [=*Ann*]. *She's satisfied with her work. She writes that Fred is very happy with his work and she hopes that his position is a good future. This is the first time I've gotten such a happy letter from her.*

Moishe, I hope, is going to Israel for Pesach. May he be healthy. This is the first time in his life that he's doing something for himself. May it be with happiness [zol zayn mit glik].

[A long account of family events in Brooklyn shows that she was closely connected with the lives of relatives there—in the days before facebook and email. And, as in the refugee times in Kishinev, she was a trusted confidante. Here she writes about two of the many adult children of her great-grandfather, Khaim Nokhum Muchnik. Pesel was a widowed younger woman with a young daughter, Sheyve-le in Yiddish, Shirley in English. Pesel, like Moishe, was an object of sympathetic concern—someone who had suffered a bad turn and deserved better. Her older brother Mordkhe-Leyb was a sage, deeply respected by the entire family. In this anecdote he plays a kind of rabbinical role.] *This past Sunday Pesel's daughter became a bride. She is very happy. The young man, as well as his parents, are dear people. Two weeks ago he gave her a ring and his parents invited Pesel to their house. So she felt she should do something for them. She went to see Mordkhe-Leyb asking him to give her advice. It was decided to make a* knas-mahl [a sort of betrothal meal]. *Pesel is very happy. She was so relieved that she phoned me that very evening to share the news with me. May it all turn out well* [zol zayn in a gute sho]. *She should have a lot of nakhes* [pleasure from accomplishments of children].

November 18, 1953

E.S. [a woman who was not a close friend] *said that she would come to visit me. She invited me for dinner but I declined. I don't want to invite her to my house so I didn't want to go to theirs.*

This week I was invited to the Shavers. The Lazaruses were visiting [Emma Shavers' parents; former owners of the house on 2254 Hazelwood where Shimen

and Sima were tenants]. *They went to their grandson's Bar Mitzvah in. St. Louis. They both look good and have a lot of nakhes from their children.*

[She writes about a wedding invitation from one of her *khaveres,* one of her comrades in the organization.] *The wedding was in Temple Beth-El and then they went to a hotel for a nice dinner with music and all the bells and whistles. At first it was hard for khavera Alpert, but you know the old saying if you can't go over you go under.. I was the only one of the khaveres that she invited to the wedding (so what do you say – such an honor). She's very friendly, I go out with her often.*

Moishe comes to me twice a week, Friday night and Wednesday. He works like a horse. I hope it's not too much for him.

December 2, 1953

Here in Detroit they've celebrated book month. Maurice Samuels did a reading. I was there and saw a lot of your friends [she lists names and send greetings].

[More about the wedding in Brooklyn, several letters later; still monitoring family relations from a distance.] *On Sunday the in-laws came to Pesel's house for a party. Khone-le was invited (so Mr. Taykh told me), I don't know if she went. I got a letter from Mordkhe-Leyb, he has great praise for the groom as well as his family. Pesel is very happy. Not only is the young man in love with Sheyve-le, but his parents have taken her to their house every shabbes, have bought expensive gifts for her. It would be very good if the groom didn't have to go into the army. Khone-le should visit her. I want to travel in the winter but I don't know when.*

The apartment is warm and comfortable. I've gotten used to the noise of the elevator

[The letters are filled with accounts of invitations and visits, and she reports inviting people back to her home. She sends Judy lists of people that she should send a card or a letter to. And she receives reports from everyone who has received mail from the family in Vienna.] *For Thanksgiving I went to Sarah and Johnny. … Next Sunday I'm going to Vera's. She's having the family over for latkes. Today is the first candle of Chanukah. It's so quiet. I miss the sweet beautiful singing when the children sang the blessings. I long for their bright faces and their warmth. Even if I made a comment they would forget it right away and understand that it was out of love and loyalty.*

On Friday I had Shirley over to visit [Norval's sister]. *She looked lovely. She was wearing a beautiful cut that suited her so well that she looked like a model.*

December 16, 1953

I have no idea if this is the truth — I heard that Leah is going back to California, but don't ask anyone about it, because I'm not sure (Vera told me that she heard about it somewhere). Florence called me this week and didn't tell me anything about it.

Mrs. Harris is making a trip to Israel in the last days of March with the Queen Mary to France. From France she'll fly. Since Mrs. Harris isn't very strong on geography (and doesn't know how far you are from France) she says she'd like to pay you to go to France [from Vienna] *and fly with her to Israel. She's afraid of the trip.* [She has a son in Israel.]

Khone-le called me on New Year's Eve [from Manhattan] *and asked me to come visit her. I'm expecting a letter from Pesel* [from Brooklyn] *about when the wedding will be and then I'll know when I'll travel. I won't travel twice since I want to be at the wedding. I told her so and I hope to receive my invitation. I'll write you when I'm going.*

March 9, 1954

You have a right to be upset with me [beroyges] *but I have the hope that you'll understand me and not do it. When I came home I thought I'd write a lot and share my impressions with you that had accumulated during the time of my visit to New York, Boston, Providence. Friends and acquaintances at the wedding, a lot of my friends I had to attend to – there simply wasn't enough time. I took in a lot, more than I had expected. I'll send more details in another letter.* [She goes on to say that Moishe had an operation and she was greatly preoccupied with his condition.]

[She writes about a difficult situation. The back story is that Pesel's daughter, Shirley, and her new husband, Jerry, have come to Detroit and are looking for a place to stay while he begins his graduate work at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Sima is putting them up in her apartment in the interim, and she knows that Ann would disapprove.] *This brings a lot of difficulties but I can't help myself. I'm sure it's difficult for them too.* [...] *I would request that you not write to Khone-le, because you know, after all, that she has a sharp little tongue* [eyn sharf tsungele] *and a sharp pen and I don't want to be like the bad bride who gives a full pail of milk and then stamps her foot and spills it all out. For you I let the cat out of the bag and you'll keep the secret. It's difficult and I ask once again not to mention this to anyone, let it remain between us. The apartment is filled with suitcases, clothing, shoes, and more and more stuff. Now I'll turn to nicer things. Shirley and her husband are dear children. Jerry is handsome, healthy, friendly, studies well, a precious young man. This is a great good fortune for Pesel – not only with her son-in-law but also with his parents. They're rich people, friendly people with soul* [nshume] *and understanding. They've taken to Pesel. Very clever and tactful, they made the wedding and didn't let Pesel feel that they had done it. Gave presents to Shirley – beyond description. They phone three times a week. They bought a car for them. They carry them on their shoulders if you can express it like that. In all, you couldn't wish for anything better. May they have long happy years. Pesel has great nakhes indeed. The wedding was beautiful, with style.*

From the wedding I went to be with Khone-le to rest for a while. It's peaceful and quiet there. Fred is very friendly. But I couldn't rest for long. I had a lot of visiting to do. I visited Mordkhe-Leyb [She goes on to list many family members in Brooklyn, going to lunches, dinners, theater; the national office of her organization.] *I've given you only a few pictures. I'll write more in another letter.*

[She describes a visit in Boston, with Manya Pelekh, the friend from Uman who had tutored Yokheved in her preparation for the entrance exam in gymnasium.] *I will long remember my visit with Manya Pelekh. When we first saw each other, someone would have thought these must be two people meeting who thought that they had been lost and met by chance like people who have come back from a war.* [She continues relating visits in Boston and Providence.] *When I came back to New York I was really filled with impressions. On Sunday Khone-le gave a cocktail party and I'm not exaggerating when I say there were at least 60 people. The whole affair was very nice.*

[A note on a side flap for Mark, who is turning eleven soon.] *Markele my dear lovely precious child! Your birthday is soon. Mazel tov. I'm happy you were born. I'm happy you're such a good, well-developing son. When you come back we'll celebrate your birthday together and I will cook and bake what you like. And maybe you can send me a menu in advance. And then I'll give you your present.*

April 1, 1954

Thank you for your letters. Your beautiful letters keep me alive. I feel that you're taking me by the hand and bring me into your house. Thank you so much, it helps me a lot.

Shirley and Jerry have already moved out [about a month since the last letter]. *They're two dear children but it was hard for me and sleeping on the couch wasn't very comfortable* [she had given them her bedroom]. *Well, anyway, it's all in the past. They still have supper with me but it will only be through Pesach.*

Yosl [Joe] *and Vera, as you can imagine, don't stay away from the doctor. Every month they consult the doctors and if the doctor says it's nothing they run to another doctor. They both look very good, but they can't and don't want to accept aging and don't know how to live (with the big salary Joe works and earns very well). If they would go away to Florida and get a good rest it would do more for them than the doctors. Oh well, I see their failures and they see my failures.*

May 3, 1954

Khone-le was here for Pesach but I didn't see much of her. [She lists all of the friends that Ann spent time with on her visit.] *But I was very satisfied with the bit of pleasure to have a child with me for the holiday.*

Yosl and Vera are fine. I ask you to please send a letter to them. Write to them instead of to me and I'll be happy with the greetings. [This is one of very many admonitions to Judy to send letters or cards to various relatives and friends.] *Shirley and Jerry come to visit me. They're dear children. She told me that she wrote you a letter and hasn't gotten an answer. I know it's hard to write, but…*

Judy Marks was here for the first seder with us [the daughter of Sima's adopted sister Aidka in Akron, Ohio]. *She came on Friday and stayed until Sunday.*

[A note on a side flap for Dan, who is turning fifteen soon.] *Precious dear Danele my life! The 7th is your birthday. Your coming to us 15 years ago gave us so much joy and hope. I was happy with your coming and take pleasure in you and hope and wish you to be happy with yourself and with your whole family. I greet you from the heart and rejoice that you have grown up to be lovely, good, and successful. We all hope to have a lot of honor* [koved] *from you. I kiss you from the heart* [hartsig] *my precious good son and grandson. Your present you'll get when you will, happily, come home. I kiss you, your bobe.*

The family together in Michigan

The four Slobins returned from Europe in August 1954 and went back to their house on Collingwood while Sima continued in her apartment on Richton. Mark went to Durfee Intermediate School and I went to Central High School, both schools a short walk from home. Unfortunately for the archivist, there are no more letters from Sima until 1957, when I went away to the University of Michigan. She was a regular part of our lives, with Friday evening dinners at her apartment and holidays and birthdays at our house.

Norval, Dan, Judy, Mark – Holland-America Line from Rotterdam to New York, August 1954

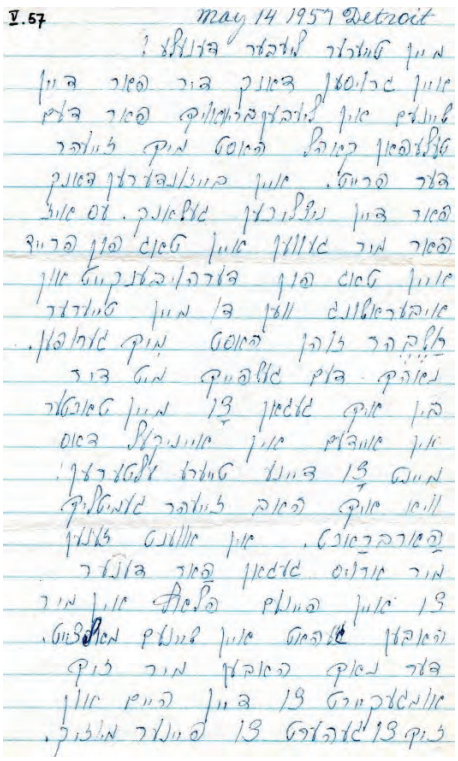
There were summer months on Crystal Lake in Northern Michigan, as before. In these old photos it almost looks as if Sima, with her Central Asian features, could have been on the shores of Lake Baikal! Clearly, she was enjoying herself.

Sometimes Ann and Fred would come from New York. In this 1955 photo we see Sima and her two daughters on the steps of our cottage—the three women who shaped my early life, each in her own way, each so different from the others. Sima remained the matriarch, with her dignified erect posture, long black hair and direct blue eyes, and unshakeable values. And all along she was monitoring everyone's relationships with everyone else, as was evident in the letters. She radiated a kind of wisdom and outward calm, while sharp and judgmental within. Through the 1950s her generation aged but went on, and she remained connected to everyone. Here she is with Rukhel in 1957. She was empathic and supportive, and remarkably progressive for a Jewish immigrant woman of her generation. She was tolerant of differences. Music and learning were of highest value to her. My parents' generation treated her with great respect.

In 1955 the Passover seder was celebrated in the living room of Sima's apartment, crowded by a folding table and couch, but still *her* yontif [holiday] with the family back around her. Here we see 14-year-old Mark next to Ann, visiting from New York. Moishe would have been there and Joe would have conducted the seder in Shimen's Ukrainian Yiddish fashion. Judy and Norval would have added modern ashkenazic and sephardic reading and singing, with Mark and me chiming in.

In later years the seder was in the large dining room of the Collingwood house, with a full table of family guests. Here we see Judy and Sima at a 1957 seder with Judy as the main hostess.

I moved to Ann Arbor in January 1957 to begin studies at the University of Michigan. It was expected that I would phone every Friday evening to wish the family a good shabbos, and that I would come home for Friday dinner at least once a month. I phoned Grandma on Mother's Day in 1957, and had sent her a gift. She responded with her first letter to me in Yiddish and we continued to correspond in Yiddish for almost two decades. In this first letter, from 68-year-old Sima to 18-year-old Dan, she thanks me for my phone call and gift, and writes: *"If you can read my letter I'll write every week."* And she did keep writing, if not exactly every week, sending letters to me in Ann Arbor, Moscow, Cambridge, Istanbul, and Berkeley. My visits were always great events for her, which she sweetened—in traditional fashion—by preparing food. In December 1957, anticipating the winter break from school, she wrote: *"You are invited to me for breakfast as soon as you come. Write me what you like and I'll prepare it for you."* She was part of Judy and Norval's social world: *"Sunday evening I was at your parents' and spent a very pleasant time."*



Sima continued to travel to be with relatives. In October 1958 she sent two long letters from New York, one to the family and one to me. It was her first plane flight and she describes the experience with delight: *"My trip was very good. When you look through the window and look down you imagine you're seeing a chest full of diamonds. The two hours passed too quickly. I looked out and was amazed by the beauty of the night and it seemed that a painter had laid it out for people."* Ann and

Fred met her in New York and took her to their new apartment on West End Avenue. *"The apartment is lovely, really too big, but I like it here much more than on 78th Street. It's quiet and nicer (as my papa would have said, it's a* miliyonerski gegent [a millionaire neighborhood])."

Shirley and Jerry lived in Ann Arbor by the time of these letters, and they had a two-year-old daughter, Linda (now Lea Shapiro). Sima had a collection of Ukrainian and Yiddish rhymes and games that she played with all little kids. From my early childhood I remember *tsip-tsop* in Yiddish and *soroka vorona* in Ukrainian, and more. The point was to get the child to laugh and then to laugh together. She writes to me from New York: *"Greet Shirley and Jerry and Linda and tell her that when I come back from New York I'll play tsip-tsop with her."* Later she would play these games with her great-grandchildren.

In March 1959 she wrote to Ann Arbor: *"You're following a path that appeals to me – learning. I hope that you'll be happy both in your studies and in your social life. I'll use the old Yiddish expression:* toyre iz di beste skhoyre [learning is the best merchandise]. *That gives a shine to your life. Of course, sometimes it's hard, sometimes the books are dry, but if you think of a future the difficulties fall away."*

Re-encountering Uman

I spent the summer of 1959 in the USSR, working as a guide at the U.S. Exhibition in Moscow (described in my 2015 memoir, *Glimpses of the USSR and Russia in Four Eras;* see pp. 178-190). Grandma sent me a letter to Moscow saying how pleased she was to read about me in *The New York Times.* After the Exhibition closed, I made a clandestine trip to Uman and brought back photos of buildings, guided by a map that my mother had made for me on the basis of her childhood memories. (Some of my photos are in Judy's memoir, reproduced above.) The pictures and my stories evoked lively interest from the Uman generation, and they gathered together to identify houses and reminisce. This was their first view of their childhood city since they had emigrated. Someone communicated with the Umanyer Geografisher Gezelshaft—the Uman Geographic Society in Chicago, and they sent for me to meet with them as well, which I did with pleasure. Uman was, for me, a sort of legendary place, and although it was the site of many bad memories for my grandparents' generation, some forty years later they were more nostalgic than anything else. In later years, Ann and Fred, and Mark went to Uman, and I went back again in 1966; but Judy did not want to go there. She said she didn't want to disturb her good memories and didn't want her bad memories re-evoked.

As far as the family knew, there were no survivors in Uman. The known descendants of Khaim Nokhum Muchnik and Refuel Abramovich lived in the United States, Canada, or Israel; Uman had been a killing field. But in 1960 a lone surviving Muchnik made contact from Uman. My mother sent me an excited letter, and wrote out—in Russian—an entire letter that had been sent to Brooklyn. Recall that Khaim Nokhum Muchnik had many children; I've already mentioned Pesel and Mordkhe-Leyb. It was their sister, Pupa, who received a letter from Yenta Aronovna Muchnik, the daughter of Aron Muchnik, yet another of Khaim Nokhum's many children. Judy remembered him from her childhood as "der Feter Aron," Uncle Aron. Here is a translation of the Russian letter from Uman that my mother copied out for me. (Her Russian remained intact through her long life.) This account seems to complete the

story of the exodus from Uman. The cast of characters is complicated and the new information was heartwarming for the family. The details are in the footnote.[14]

Greetings my dear uncles and aunts! Dear Aunt Pupa, I received your letter and shed many tears, since right now I'm the only one left in Uman from our whole big family. My dear relatives, you ask who remained alive after the Hitler nightmare? I, Perel, and Zlota, and little brother Motl. They all live in Kiev. They're all working and live well. In 1959 our beloved older sister Yokheved died at 58 after a difficult operation. That's all there is of our family. Aunt Riva lives in Kharkov, her children are well established and live very well. Three years ago Yokheved saw them. Of the Sulla family only Shmulik remains. He's working as an engineer in Kharkov. Shayka perished on the front. The only ones still alive are two sons of Aunt Sura, Avreymyl and Nesha, but I don't know where they're living now; they don't write to me. I have three children: the oldest son is 19; he's married and has a 5-year-old boy; Sema, my second son, is 15 and he's studying in the ninth grade; and the youngest is a 9-year-old girl studying in the third grade. My husband works and I'm a housewife. We live well, but the main thing is that we should all be healthy. From Aunt Golda I got a letter. That's all and I'll end with this. Greetings to all of our relatives from all of us. I kiss you all warmly and even have forgotten your faces, but you are so dear to me. Your niece Yenta.

She writes of the deaths of her parents and writes that she and her family have been moved to a house close by where her parents had lived. She gives her address as Pushkinskaya ulitsa, No. 19, Uman, Cherkass Region. No. 9 was the address that my mother remembered as having been the home of her Uncle Aron, and I had taken a picture of that house when I was in Uman in 1959, not suspecting that there could have been relatives nearby. This is one of many postwar stories of unexpected contacts with survivors. So here is the house of Feter Aron on Pushkinskaya ulitsa, No. 9.

Apparently Sima kept in contact with Yenta, who would have been her first cousin; and it seems that relatives in Israel and Brooklyn also corresponded with the surviving family members in Uman and Kiev. I went back to the USSR in 1966 (described in *Glimpses of the USSR and Russia in Four Eras*). Grandma

[14] Khaim Nokhum Muchnik had many children. In Brooklyn there were Mortkha-Leyb and his two sisters, Pesel and Pupa. The youngest, Golda (Zahava Driz), settled in Palestine in 1909 and remained in close contact with the Brooklyn and Detroit families. Sima's mother, Yokheved, had been Khaim Nokhum's first child; she died young in Uman. The remaining children of Khaim Nokhum did not leave Uman: Perel, Zlota, Dvora, Riva, Sura, Brokha, Rukhel, Aron. Rukhel's son, Philip Sulla, lived in Montreal. The writer of this letter, Yenta, was the daughter of Aron.

sent the following request to me in a 1966 letter to Berkeley before I left for Moscow: *"I'd like to ask you to send ten dollars from Moscow to the daughter of my Uncle Aron. I'll write you the address. There you'll offer money in Russian. I'd like to send more but I'm afraid it might be suspicious. Just write her that you're Sima Liepah's grandson and that's enough. If she can, I'm sure she'd fly to you."* [Strange to say, I have no recollection of whether I carried out this request.]

Reconfiguring

In 1960 Judy and Norval decided it was time to move on, northwest, to the next Jewish neighborhood. Their friends had left the Dexter area and they bought a smaller house on Mark Twain Avenue, between Curtis and Seven Mile Road, nearer to their friends. I was about to go away to Harvard for graduate school and Mark was setting off for the University of Michigan. Norval had advanced through the school system, becoming department head for social studies in various high schools; Judy began teaching at United Hebrew Schools, as she had in her youth. On Mark Twain they had a newer, more manageable house, with a big recreation room in the basement, a bedroom and study on the first floor, two bedrooms on the second floor, and a screened-in porch off of the dining room. In the backyard they planted a pear tree and a cherry tree. Sima wrote to me in February 1960, in my last semester at Michigan: *"I spent Sunday with your parents. We were in the new house. It's very beautiful. If only they can move there very soon. I can hardly wait."*

18242 Mark Twain Ave. – red brick house with red Ford

By September of that year I was beginning at Harvard graduate school and Mark was beginning as a Michigan freshman. Grandma wrote to me to Cambridge: *"I got a letter from Markele. He writes a very nice Yiddish."* Mom's early efforts to make us both literate in Yiddish were—and still are—paying off.

Her letters to me always reported that everyone was "fine," listing them one by one in descending generations and always in the same fixed order, beginning with Moishe. And her concerns for everyone's well-being never ceased. She regularly asked me to send her greetings to relatives and friends in New England and New York. In January 1961 she thanked me for having sent a present to Moishe: *"You made him very happy. You understand him and you know that he needs attention and warmth, and you gave it to him and so I thank you."*

By March of that year everything changed. Sima had a coronary insufficiency, at age 72, and ended up in the hospital. She wrote to me from there, regretting that Ann and I had been told and that Ann had come. *"I want to assure you that I feel a lot better. The doctor says that I'll be able to go home very soon. So I beg you, again, not to worry about me. I hope that by Pesach I'll feel completely healthy and will be able to celebrate with all of you."* She never did go home again. The doctor prescribed rest and Judy and Norval took her to their house. Ann and Judy decided that their mother would

be too weak to care for herself in her apartment and so they liquidated the apartment without consulting her. In Ann's opinion, when Sima felt better she should be moved to what they called "a home" in those days—that is, a nursing home. Judy and Norval preferred to care for her at home, and became Sima's caregivers until shortly before she died at age 91. They felt that her life would be more interesting in their home, where she would become part of the community of their generation. And, besides, this is what was expected when a parent aged, and it would be a public embarrassment if their old mother was not cared for by them as long as possible. Judy and Ann never saw eye-to-eye on this matter, and Sima was torn. She had always been fiercely independent, and she felt she was imposing on her children, who still had their own lives to lead. (They were in their early fifties.) Still, I think she also appreciated the security and conviviality of living with them.

She began writing to me about her conflicted feelings later that year, and every time I came home she would take me aside to tell me of her deep sadness and desire to "go to a home." But I sensed a disturbing undercurrent. Those two women, my mother and my grandmother, simply could not run a joint enterprise. Sima was covertly critical; Judy was prickly and defensive. And it was taboo to express negative feelings openly. So, for years and years, they continued to irritate each other while Norval tried to mediate without overtly taking Sima's side. Home visits were distressing and it was impossible to discuss the situation frankly. Grandma treated me as a confidante and Mom never dropped her armor.

Already in May 1961 Grandma wrote to me, to Cambridge: *"My health is improving very well but the doctor says I need a lot of rest. And so I find myself with my dear devoted children and I have the opportunity to rest. I hope I'll return to health quickly.* […] *A person feels bad when for a long time one can't help oneself at all, and on top of that can't help someone else. And suddenly to unfairly lose health and the home that I loved so much! I liked it when people came to my place. Well, let's hope that my health comes back and I can be independent again. I beg you very much, my dear exceptional son, not to worry and to believe me that I'm telling you the truth that my health is improving.* […] *The illness brought me a big profit. Your mother has gotten closer to me. It's to be hoped that, God forbid, I'm not too difficult in the house."*

Sima could not walk steps, so Judy and Norval gave up their bedroom on the first floor, equipping it with Sima and Shimen's bedroom furniture, brought from the apartment. They moved their bedroom to a large guestroom on the second floor. The intention was to make Sima feel at home and to help her feel needed by giving her some kitchen tasks. At the same time, most of Sima's own possessions had been disposed of.

Mother-daughter relations never came to a comfortable balance. Sima often complained to me that Judy had received high education—from a Russian gymnasium in Uman to an M.A. in America—but had not made use of all of that to distinguish herself professionally or in society. Grandma wrote to me: *"You know that your mama is more dear to me than my own life. I've received much pleasure and honor through her. Many of my friends are also pleased with her and I myself am pleased to have such a lovely, gifted daughter. The irritations that have piled up—for me and also for her—are maybe my fault. I've wanted to help her; she took it as criticism. So I don't go into the kitchen anymore. I don't help her. It really upsets me because I want to make myself useful, but maybe it will be better like this. So you shouldn't worry."*

Gradually her health came back and she became involved in life. All of her relatives and friends came to visit her on Mark Twain; the Friday evening dinner tradition continued. In May 1961 she wrote to me about news from Israel: *"This week I received a letter from Israel from Aunt Golda. At the moment everyone is taken up with the Eichmann trial, with our Jewish tragedy. In truth, those who perished can't be brought back to life, but*

young people should know about our great tragedy. Maybe people's consciences will be awakened and even bring them to show some empathy for the unfortunate ones who lost their nearest and dearest. I'd like to write more about this theme but I know that your time is very limited, so I'll stop here."

By Purim of the following year she sent me homentashen to my apartment in Harvard, with a note explaining that the ones filled with prunes were from her and those with poppy seeds were from my mother. These delicious Purim shipments went on and on—even to me and my family in Istanbul, to Mark and his wife, Greta, in Kabul. And after Grandma died, Mom continued sending homentashen for the rest of her life—but only with poppy seeds. When I asked her to fill some with prunes, she declined—that's what Grandma baked. Even when Sima was gone the two kitchen worlds remained separate.

Sima and Dan, early 1960s

In December 1962 I married Ellen Wyzanski in Brookline, Massachusetts, and Grandma came to the wedding—proud, dignified, beautifully dressed, and well enough to travel. In later years she was able to take trips, finally going to Israel, where she was received like visiting royalty by relatives who remembered how much she had done for them in the refugee years in Kishinev. Judy and Norval were able to travel as well, leaving Sima at home for weeks at a time.

The trio in the Mark Twain house, 1966

Norval Joe Vera Sima Mark Judy
1965

Sima's generation remained generally healthy through the 1960s. In 1965 Joe and Vera celebrated a significant wedding anniversary in grand style.

The Passover seder was celebrated in the Mark Twain house, with Grandma contributing her traditional dishes. Joe sat at the head of the table with Vera and conducted the service in the old style.

In 1964, having completed my Harvard PhD, Ellen and I moved to Berkeley and I began as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, where I spent my entire career. In 1966 Mark and Greta were married in Detroit and went on to earn PhDs and eventually become professors. Sima was filled with *nakhes* from these family events.

Grandma wrote to me and Ellen in 1966, when we were setting off for a conference in Moscow and travel in the USSR. *"I'm sure you'll enjoy yourselves visiting the big world, bringing knowledge to them and from them to us. The two of you with your good heads will observe a lot. I hope your trip will be a happy one. Be careful when necessary. Danele, my holy soul* [heylige nshume mayne]*, don't be upset, I'm not trying to teach you but that's the way I am, thinking things over."*

In 1967 Ellen and I bought the house on 2323 Rose Street in Berkeley where I have lived until now. Grandma came to visit in the winter and was delighted with everything—the house, the campus, San Francisco and the ocean, friends and family.

Sima in the living room on Rose Street, 1968

At the time I was a member of a Yiddish club and the members were eager to converse with a native speaker. Grandma agreed to come to a meeting, which we made into an evening gathering with tea and cakes on Rose Street. After chatting in Yiddish for a while, someone asked Grandma to read something out loud to us, offering a book by Isaac Bashevis Singer. She blushed and laughed nervously that she couldn't read that kind of literature to us and asked for something else. She went on to read from one of the classics—probably Sholem Aleichem—to everyone's pleasure. When she returned to Detroit she wrote to me and Ellen: *"It was good to be with you!* […] *Danele, my beautiful noble soul, you took me by the hand and took me to places where I felt good and really enjoyed myself. Your office, the room where you have your meetings, all the buildings of the university—I have the greatest respect for all those places. I enjoyed myself and was proud of you for taking part in the Yiddish group. I know how busy you are and still you find time for everything.* […] *I had dreamed of visiting you, but I held myself back, I doubted a bit, didn't believe that my health would be good enough. I feel fine and the trip showed me that my health isn't so weak. So you don't have to worry about me."*

In 1968 Ellen and I divorced and I married Kathy. We came to Detroit with her two-year-old daughter, Heida. Sima immediately took her in—her first great-grandchild. And she played the same Yiddish and Ukrainian games with Heida as she had done with me and Mark. Judy made Heida her kitchen helper; Norval entertained her. The family accepted the change graciously (it was the sixties, after all) and everyone came to Mark Twain to meet the new child and her mother.

Ann Heida Norval Moishe
in Mark Twain house, 1968

That summer Judy and Norval went to Israel for the first time (Sima had not been there yet), and she wrote to me about all of the attention she was receiving during their absence: visits from family, her friends, and Judy and Norval's friends. Her letter to me in July 1968 had some pensive aspects: *"As always, your letters warm me and make me happy. In you I see my beautiful holy past! And my beautiful present and hope for a happy future.* […] *For myself, I can't complain. I feel fine but you can't turn back the clock. I have something to show for my long years, so I don't have the right to complain. Don't worry about me. I'm one of those lucky ones whom people like, and I like people."*

In December 1969, when she was 81, she wrote to me to Istanbul reminding me to count on her support: *"Share with me. I love you and understand you, and if you think I can help you with anything—I mean with some advice—just ask."*
In 1970 she and her dear brother, Moishe, were photographed together in formal splendor at a family wedding. She had come to terms—as best she could—with her semi-dependent life, taking part in a busy schedule of social and cultural events while being well cared-for by Judy and Norval.

Maurice Baker and Sima Liepah

Kathy, Heida, and I were spending 1969-70 in Turkey; Sima also went to Israel during that period. She wrote to us in March 1970: *"I'm counting the months to your return. Heida will be a big girl. I'm sure she won't forget her own language, so we'll*

be able to talk with her. Since I wasn't in the country at the time of Heida's birthday I'm sending a present now (it's an old custom to send shalekh mones [gifts] *at Purim time), let Kathy buy a dress for her and tell her that I sent it."*

She lived to rejoice in two more great-grandchildren: Mark and Greta had a daughter, Maya, in 1970; Kathy and I a son, Shem, in 1971. And Great-Grandma lived long enough for the three children to get to know her.

The two newcomers in Detroit, 1972
Maya Shem

Heida, 1972

Greta Mark Maya
1971

Heida Shem
1972

Together in Detroit, 1972

Kathy Shem Sima Heida Maya Mark

Shem Sima Judy Dan

When these pictures were taken, Kathy and I were enroute to Istanbul for a second year of research and exploration, this time with two children. Mark and Greta had already spent an adventurous research year in Afghanistan before Maya was born. Grandma sent a letter to Istanbul in April 1972: *"My precious dear Danele, Kathy, Heida, Shem! My warm greetings to all of you for the Pesach holiday, a holiday of joy in freedom and achievement and hope. You, my dear ones, together with me, have achieved a lot this year! You've become parents of a son, and I've become an old grandma of a beautiful, dear great-grandson. He has brought me joy and hope.* […] *It makes me happy that Heida loves him so much, because children are very often jealous of the younger child and sometimes that makes things difficult. The little one needs more attention.* […] *I'm in telephone contact with Mark and Greta. Maya is a dear little girl. May the children grow in health and bring* nakhes *to their parents and to all of us."*

In a letter of December 1972, the time of Shem's first birthday, she reminds me that Shem's birth was a transformative experience for her. She was in intensive care in the hospital after Shem was born, but before she had seen him. She was certain that keeping a picture of baby Shem in front of her restored her life at that time. *"Your son helped me to regain my health. I had such a strong will to see him and to hold him. That was the greatest joy in my life. May he bring joy and honor to you both. I hope that he will grow to be a good person for society. You, his father, have brought me honor and consolation (I've already told you once about this) – I hope that you remember.* […] *You should know that it's too difficult for me to write out my feelings to you, my dear one, but I'm sure that you read my unwritten letters although, in fact, I haven't written to you in a long time.* […] *Great thanks to you for sending us movies of Shem and Heida."*

Sima's letters ended in June 1973, when we left Istanbul. In the last letter she reports that everyone in her generation is still in good health, but that Vera was recovering from a stroke. Over the next decade all of them would fade away. For the next six years, as her vision was failing and her hand became unsteady, we relied on telephone conversations and visits. And Mark tape-recorded a number of conversations in 1973, 1974, and 1977, discussing musical practices, tastes, values, traditional activities in the Old Country. These have all been digitized but not yet transcribed.

Kathy and I and the children stopped in Detroit on the way back from Turkey in the summer of 1973. Sima was physically frail but emotionally and intellectually alert.

Shem Dan Sima Heida

1973

The last thing she wrote to me was a birthday card in May 1974. *"I can't be with you to celebrate but with my heart and thoughts I'm with you and send you my heartfelt blessings for a beautiful life* [mayne hartsig brokhes far eyn sheynem leybn]."

Sima Kathy

Envoi

Judy and Norval cared for Sima tenderly in the last years. She was grateful for their help and felt guilty that she was imposing on them. It became physically more and more difficult for them. Glaucoma had taken most of her vision and she was physically weak. In the end, she got her wish to be in "a home," but she didn't last very long there. I saw her for the last time in January 1979. She was 91; I was 40. This is what I wrote in my journal at the time.

> A feeling of love and closeness with Mom and Dad, a joy in the continuity and safety and familiarity of family. Together with the sadness of Grandma's slow and resolute dying. Now she is in a nursing home, where she wants to be for her own dignity, but where she waits for death in her loneliness and isolation from all that she loved and valued. Strangely, she seems to be keeping herself strong and alive in order to wait for the last adventure—the Welcome Guest. She sat proudly in her chair, erect. She said she wants to go "back." I asked, back to where. "Eternity." She expects nothing after death—no consciousness, no feeling, no God—but she longs for it as the last good thing that can happen to her. She complained that all of her joys have been taken from her: reading, listening to music, doing things for people. But she said: "Если жизнь тебя обманет, не печалься, не сердись" (If life deceives you, don't get sad, don't get angry)—adding that it was sometimes hard to follow this admonition. "Sometimes I'm a soldier and sometimes I'm a weak little girl."
>
> I spoonfed her, thinking of how she must have done that for me years and years ago. Life is hard.
>
> She had asked me to bring a book of Russian poetry. She wanted me to read Nekrasov's poem about the horrors of war. As I read it, she recited it with me, from memory, deeply moved. She declaimed the final lines with a determined, sorrowful voice.

Внимая ужасам войны,	*Considering the horrors of war,*
При каждой новой жертве боя	*With every new victim of battle*
Мне жаль не друга, не жены,	*I pity not the friend, not the wife,*
Мне жаль не самого героя. . .	*I pity not the hero himself . . .*
Увы! утешится жена,	*Alas! The wife will find consolation,*
И друга лучший друг забудет;	*And a friend is forgotten by the best friend;*
Но где-то есть душа одна -	*But somewhere there is a single soul –*
Она до гроба помнить будет!	*She will remember to her grave!*
Средь лицемерных наших дел	*Amidst the hypocrisy of our deeds*
И всякой пошлости и прозы	*And all our pettiness and banality*
Одни я в мир подсмотрел	*Only once in this world have I seen*
Святые, искренние слезы -	*Holy, sincere tears –*
То слезы бедных матерей!	*The tears of poor mothers!*
Им не забыть своих детей,	*They cannot forget their children,*
Погибших на кровавой ниве,	*Fallen on the bloody field,*
Как не поднять плакучей иве	*Just as the weeping willow*
Своих поникнувших ветвей.	*Cannot raise her drooping branches.*

I returned for her funeral. This is what I wrote in my journal, after she was buried, on February 16, 1979, along with a poem that I wrote the night before and read at the funeral.

> The visit, once again, to the silent tombstone: LIEPAH**.** The end of the living name. Запаздалый лист упал. Липа без листа стоит. (The last lingering leaf has fallen. The linden tree [*lipa*] stands without a leaf.) Winter's tree—but she will have no spring. My world turns toward spring. At home I prune my fruit trees while the acacias blossom. In the cold soil of Detroit, under showers of snow, there will soon be planted a seed that cannot blossom. I am a fruit of the blossoming of the tree of that seed—of that Linden bud. My pen moves now because life moved within her—began to move in 1888; was passed on in 1908; again in 1938 (and again in 1971).
>
> The great chain of being gathers around her coffin to dance. I had a vision last night, on falling asleep: people dressed in white—men and women and children—made a circle around Grandma's open coffin and all joined hands, dancing a joyous dance of life, rejoicing that we were all alive. That there was still life. I smiled and laughed. Grandma would have liked that: the joy of life. To all hold hands: to affirm that we all have life. To celebrate it in the face of death is fitting. Death makes life precious—even reminds us how the motionless one once cherished movement.
>
> Strange that сема – Sema in one spelling of her name – means 'heaven' and липа – Liepah – 'tree': tree of heaven. And Baker in between. Food between sky and earth.
>
> What did she mean to me? Origins. Always the figure of the past that was no longer there. She did not exist in my present world. She was the past incarnate—the bearer of stories, the informant, the documenter. Evidence that we had come from an alien world and had only been transplanted to American soil, our seeds having been blown across the planet by winds of disaster—winds of war and persecution and revolution and pogroms. She had lived through things she couldn't speak of. She said the book that she could write would be one that people wouldn't want to read, couldn't bear to read.
>
> But she was never present values, present life. She provided food—the food of the Old Country. Her ideas were "quaint." I did things to make her happy and was always surprised by the depth of her response, her gratitude. It puzzled me, and often embarrassed me, to have such a strong effect, an effect so much beyond what I felt I had done.
>
> She was also wisdom and dignity and grace and nobility. A mysterious and poetic depth, born of suffering and youthful beauty, shaped by deaths and miraculous escapes from death. A sure faith in the values of love and mutual help. An unshakeable pride in being Jewish—and in being part of our family. The bearer of a great national and a great genealogical history. An American patriot. A believer in democracy, hurt by having to acknowledge the flaws of America. And it was obvious that she was a Zionist—a natural commitment born, unquestioning, of Jewish pride and Jewish suffering. A Liepah who was a planter of trees. (She raised money through her membership in Pioneer Women to plant trees in Israel.)
>
> Unworldly in my American world. She didn't drive or smoke or drink alcohol or follow the soap operas or dance or play cards or long for movies or trips to Florida. She loved to read and listen to music and have quiet evenings with friends—with Vernor's and tea and strudel and cakes. She was proud of her

continence, proud of the inner secrets and potential confessions which she vowed she would take to the grave with her. A private person in a public world. A person whose sense of divinity lay in the inner joy of giving. An unbeliever among orthodox Jews—but a quiet unbeliever, tied yet to all of the habitual and treasured acts of tradition—for the sake of her father's memory—the man who anchored and defined and gave meaning to her life. The memory that tied her to me as the child who bore his name, and thence something of his spirit.

Neat, careful, proper—to the point of compulsiveness. Yet tolerant of the ways of others. Watching their lives from the outside with a kind of quiet understanding.

Again and again she told me her maxim: "If you do something for someone, forget it immediately; if someone does something for you, remember it forever." She tried to live by that maxim. But she was human. I rather think she warmed herself in the inner knowledge of what she had done for others—but without expecting repayment. For she had a peculiar mixture of humility and pride.

Last Words for Grandma

(Read at the funeral of Sima Liepah,
Detroit, February 19, 1979)

Blown from Russia by winds of disaster,
holding her family in her arms,
bearing within: the memory of her father—
        his books, his love, his death—
she set up a tent against the storms
and in it nourished her loved ones and friends—
not just with chicken soup
but with wisdom
and with the work and comforting of her hands
        the hands that shaped dough
        and caressed children's heads
        and turned pages
        and held the thousand tools of woman's work
and with the work and comforting of her words
        her words of the Old Country and the New—
        of Yiddish and Hebrew
        and Russian and Ukrainian
        and English—
with these words she taught us
        the joy of giving
        and the inevitability of suffering
        and the value of loving
        and the poetry of being
And watching her move
was to know dignity and grace

Reflecting on her life
is to know of the permanent possibility of

strength through suffering
and insight through seeing
and understanding through loving

Reflecting on her life
is to remember
to be quick to help
and slow to judge
and always
to
hope

We buried her on a cold, dull, snowy day. As I walked away from her grave, thinking of her lying under the freezing ground, I heard her voice in my head: גיי גיי מיין קינד, זאָרג זיך נישט פאר מיר *gey gey mayn kind, zorg zikh nisht far mir* ("Go, go my child – don't worry about me.") I know that is how she would have wanted it.

1912

1940

1956

1970

Postscript

After Sima's death, Judy and Norval moved on, further northwest to a gated community in Southfield, Michigan, one mile past the northern border of Detroit. They rented a spacious two-bedroom ground-floor apartment and had a number of good years together there. They traveled often to the two coasts, going west to visit my family in Berkeley and cousins in San Diego; going east to be with Mark and Greta and Maya in New England, Ann and Fred in Manhattan. There were many reunions and holidays in Southfield. In 1982 Mark and I organized a large and joyous celebration of our parents' fiftieth wedding anniversary. And here are the three generations in March 1991, celebrating Norval's eightieth birthday.

Maya Greta Mark Norval Heida Judy Dan Shem

Judy even lived on to meet Hazel, her first great-grandchild. Heida, Shem, and I brought two-year-old Hazel to Southfield for Thanksgiving in 2002.

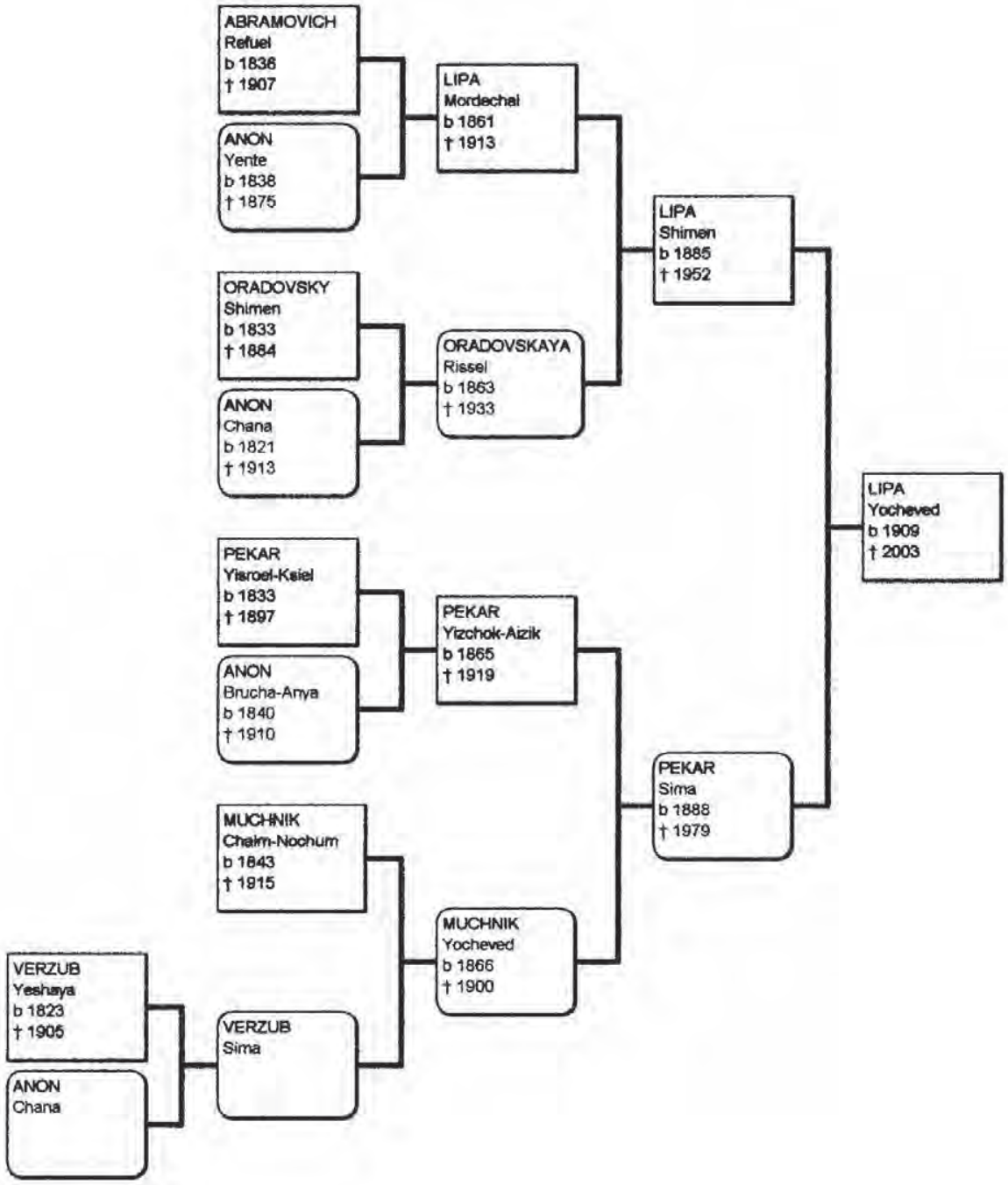
And 93-year-old Judy played the same games with Hazel that Sima had once played with all of us.

Shimen and Sima's generation all died in the twentieth century. Judy and Ann were the last Umanyers of our line. Ann died in 1995, in Berkeley, at 80. She lost her vision to macular degeneration, and her joy of living to strokes. My father died two years later, at 86, after several years of dementia caused by strokes. Judy cared for him at home to the end. Only Judy and Fred lived on into the twenty-first century. She too lost her vision to macular degeneration and her hearing was fading. Still, she survived for seven years on her own until the last months, dying in an assisted living home in 2003, at 94. Fred was the last, living on until 2005, also ending in a nursing home. He died in Berkeley at age 96.

This is the record of the westward trek of the Liepahs from the Old Country to the New. I have no more written records, no one left to ask about their journey. I am grateful that they shared so much of it with me, and that I have been able to gather what I know for those who come after.

Dan Isaac Slobin
Berkeley, California
February 14, 2016

Appendix 1
Family tree of Yokheved Lipa (Judith Liepah Slobin)



Appendix 2
from the Preface to Yitzkhok Aizik Pekar's Commentary on Song of Songs
(first edition, Odessa, 1897; second edition, Berditchev, 1900)
written in Hebrew, translated by Norval L. Slobin

מקרא קודש
עשרים וארבעה
כתובים
שיר השירים
בכתבי המקרא, בתר ויתיר, בקרי וכתיב, על פי דברי המסורה
והנקוד וכללי הדקדוק
עם פירוש רש"י ז"ל אבי וראש של המפרשים והמבארים
הראשונים והאחרונים
ומקף עוד כפר
מלמד להועיל
ביאור על שיר השירים
בכולל ישמח, על"י תולדות הקודש ישרון, חוקת הקדש האשכנזי ישרי האשכנזי והספרדי ישוב
ארץ ישראל, ביאת משיח צדקנו, תשובה נאולה התעוררה, בנין בהמ"ק ציון וירושלים.
אשר חבר וגם חקרי בקורות ה' מלמד להועיל
יצחק אייזיק בהרה"ח ישראל יקותיאל נ"י הכתבות בשם המשפחה איש פעקאר.
מכל מלמדי השכלתי
כי עדותיך שיחה לי (תהלים קיט)
כה אמר ה' ראשית קדש ישראל
אני ה' אלהיך מלמדך להועיל
מדריכך בדרך תלך. (ישעיה מח)
מהדורא שנית מתוקנת ומשוכללת
ברדיטשוב
בדפוס של חיים יעקב שעמיל
נדפס בשנת אמה לן כתרך לי סגר תציגו רגי פלם תהבננו פלח לשן

"I am a teacher of Bible, Talmud, and Hebrew and grammar to Jewish young people—a service to God. … I know very well that I am not worthy of calling myself an author. I am a teacher. I almost decided not to publish, but I realized it was my duty. If God reveals something sacred to a man, and the man is able to write, and doesn't, that man is robbing Him who revealed it to him, for it was revealed for no other purpose. … Please, dear reader, I beg of you, please go on reading what I have put together. Perhaps you will find something new in my explanation. I know very well how unworthy I am, for the fingernail of those who came before us was greater than the belly of those who came after them. They were as great as a hall, and we are as small as the eye of a needle. Nevertheless, we are like a dwarf who rides on the back of a giant. The dwarf sees much more than the giant he rides on. Also do not scorn the worm; there may be silk inside that worm. …

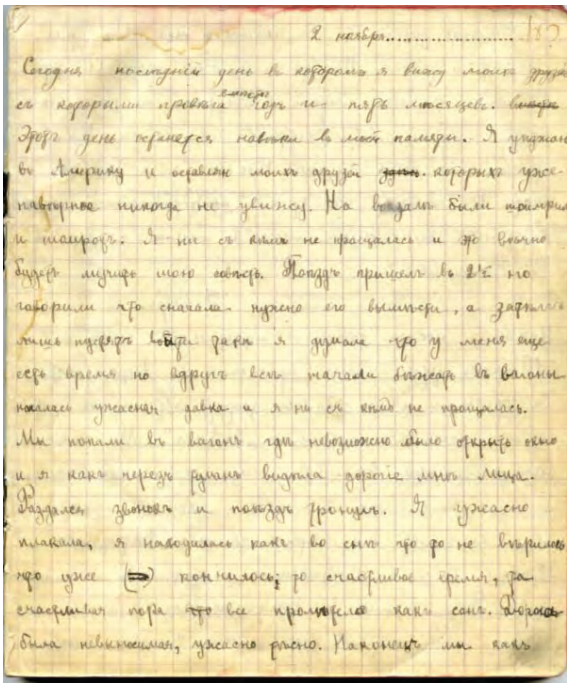
"I finished this in Uman. These are the words of the least in the house of Israel, Yitzkhok Ayzik Pekar, son of Yisroel Yekusiel Pekar, born in the small town of Okhrimov, written as Sarne, in the region of Levetz, province of Kiev.

"Warning: It is forbidden to print books without the knowledge and consent of their authors. Violators will be punished by the laws of Heaven, as well as by the law of men."

Appendix 3
Diary of Yokheved Lipa, age 12, November 2-18, 1922

written during her journey from Kishinev, Romania, on the way to the United States

(translated from Russian, with added notes of clarification, by Mark Slobin)



The first page of the diary

November 2

Today is the last day on which I will see my friends, with whom I have spent one year and five months together. This day will remain forever in my memory. I am going to America and will leave my friends, whom I will probably not see again. There were shomrim and shomrot [boy scouts and girl scouts] *at the train station. I didn't say goodbye to them, and that will always trouble my conscience. The train came at 2:30, but they said first they had to sweep it and then let us get on. I thought I still had time, but suddenly everyone started to run into the carriages. There was terrible crowding and I wasn't able to say goodbye. We went into the carriages, where it was impossible to open the window, and I saw familiar faces as in a fog. The bell sounded and the train moved. I cried terribly, I felt as if I were in a dream—you can't believe that those happy times have ended, that happy period passed like a dream.*

The road was unbearable, terribly cramped. Finally, we got ourselves arranged somehow, and I stayed by the window. The night was fresh and warm. The train went very fast. From tear-dimmed eyes I looked at the fields and forests, ponds, and rivers that we went past. It was very noisy at the stations. I couldn't sleep all night. The whole time various scenes of the past that my friends and I lived through in Kishinev stayed in my memory.

November 3

Finally, after a long and difficult night, at 10 am we arrived in Bucharest. With difficulty, we found a car to take us to the Hotel Patria. We rented a large room. Having put away my things, I washed, changed clothes, and went with Papa to a store to buy a few things like tea, sugar, and cups. Having returned, I went for tea. Having washed and drunk, we cleaned up. Papa went into town on business, and Mama and Khanusya [six-year-old sister Ann] *and I went to sleep. I couldn't sleep because I sat by the window and looked out at the street. I thought I saw Lissansky, and wanted to go out on the street in case he came by again, but since Mama was sleeping, I couldn't leave the room. I looked at the street again and I thought he came by again. Just then Mama woke up and I was able to go out. I got dressed and went outside. The rain was dripping. I stood quietly for a while and got cold, so I went in and went to sleep. I woke up late at night, undressed, and went back to sleep.*

November 4

Waking up in the morning, at first I couldn't figure out where I was. But then I remembered, and felt sad and heavy. Quickly dressing, washing, and eating, drinking, we went to the bathhouse. There was a big line there, so we had to wait two hours. Then I went with Papa to HIAS [Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society]. *There I saw my friend Freiman. He told me that tomorrow at ten am I could see our shomrim* [scouts]. *We went back to the bathhouse. Having bathed, we went out to eat, and then to see the city a little. It's a big city— beautiful, rich, but very noisy and dirty. The sidewalks are narrow. There's a terrible noise and commotion, day and night. Carriages are going on all sides, coachmen, cars, electric trams, and a horsecar* [streetcar pulled by horses]. *On the way we bought boots and gloves. Then we went home—that is, to the hotel—changed, and went to the office to be registered. After that Papa had to go to the insurance company on Skita Michurin Street. We didn't know the way home ourselves so we had to go with Papa. We had to wait a couple of hours and went home with a horsecar. On the way there was a very beautiful post office. We ate and went to sleep.*

November 5

Having gotten up and done everything necessary at home, I went to HIAS to see my friends. I didn't know the way myself, but Papa described how to go. Arriving there, I first saw Farber and Ostrovsky, and then Borokhovsky. With Farber and Ostrovsky I went to Futoryansky. And then together we got on a horsecar and went to the museum. On the way, Futoransky got off, since he had to go to a lesson, and we went farther. Arriving at the museum, we began to look at it and that took a couple of hours. We walked a long time, since the way was very far, the museum being at the edge of the city. On the way, we chatted about many things; among others, Farber told me that Golub wrote him in one letter "remember me, and the daisy," and "kiss for not forgetting." I couldn't ask him for the meaning of this because of Ostrovsky. Near the hotel, I parted from them, since I was afraid they'd be worried about me at home. After parting, Farber told me that if I want to see him again, I can find him tomorrow at HIAS from 12 to 2. I promised him.

Then I went home. We ate right away. A terrible rain fell. We reached the restaurant drenched and soaked. There I saw G. Zarkhy. During dinner it cleared up. After the terribly black rain clouds, the warm sun came out, caressing and drying everything. Little by little the rain clouds turned into a few light clouds. Khanusya, I, and M. Borokhovsky walked to the Exposition, where we saw many interesting things, for example little beasts, etc.

From there we went to the office so the doctor could inspect us. There I found my parents. After examination, the doctor declared everything was fine. They told us that

Tuesday morning we would travel, and we went home. We had dinner, sat around, and after chatting awhile (and I wrote a postcard) we went to sleep.

November 6

Getting up in the morning, I have to go to HIAS and write a letter home. I dressed, washed, and ate quickly. Then I wrote letters to everyone and went with Papa to the post office to mail them. A terrible rain began to pour and we quickly ran home. I understood that my dream to go to HIAS wouldn't happen. We went out to eat. From there Khanusya and I went home, and Papa and Mama went to buy outfits. When they came, they had bought Papa an old suit. We began to pack our things and then Borokhovsky, who had bought me a diary as a present then, went out to eat. Having handed over our baggage, we went on the streetcar. The whole time he [Borokhovsky] *gave me such piercing looks that I had to laugh; he asked me why I was laughing. I couldn't explain, so he thought I was laughing at him. Then he asked me if I loved boys. I asked him why he needed to know. He didn't want to say why, and so it stayed that way with him.*

Having come home, I went to bed right away, since we have to get up at 4 because the train leaves the station at 7; it's very crowded and you have to get places early.

November 7

At 4 am, Borokhovsky woke us up, bringing a car [probably the first car she had ever ridden in]*. The car only wanted to wait 20 minutes. So we quickly dressed, washed, and left. When we got to the train station it was early, only 4:30. We went to the teahouse for tea. Having drunk, we waited some more. Finally, at 6;30, the train to Constantsa arrived. We rushed to get seats. At 7:05 the train began to move. The way was beautiful. It was very free. We strolled from one carriage to another. At 3:15 we arrived in Constantsa. The first thing we saw was the sea, and on it a mass of boats. Having put our things on carts, we, that is, everyone who was on the same boat as me,* [?…] *we found our room— small, with one bed, but cozy. We put away our things right away and washed. I went for tea and we drank and ate. Then I wrote my correspondence: one card to Ita* [?] *and one card to friends in Kishinev. After that we went to bed. The city of Constantsa made a very good impression on me. It reminded me of my hometown Uman.*

November 8

*Today we boarded the boat. Getting up in the morning and gathering our things, we rented a coachman and went to the pier. There was our ship, white, beautiful and big, as I had imagined, I who had never seen a boat in my life. On it, in big black letters, was written "**Braga**." They gathered all the passengers and inspected our things, and then went up on the gangplank. It was 11. They took us to the cafeteria and vaccinated us. From there they took us to the cabins. While I was waiting to be vaccinated I managed to write a card to Kishinev.*

Practically all day I sit on deck. Since I never read about the sea, I never imagined what it might be like. At 4:25 the boat moved, and at 4:30 we ate. Towards evening the sea was enchanting. The setting sun cast its last golden rays on the sea. There were light golden clouds in the sky, predicting a good day for tomorrow, and everything reflected in the water. In the evening the sea was pretty but dark; everything was black. The sea was barely aroused. Nothing was visible except the sea, the sky, and us. I got very sad and heavy, and I went to sleep.

November 9

At 7, our boat went by the island of Bosphorus. I always thought an island is a massive piece of land in the middle of the sea. But the Bosphorus island goes completely against my expectations. It is like a hilly place on which there are three- or four-storied houses. At 11, we arrived in Constantinople. The city is situated on a hilly place. Having eaten, we got into longboats and they took us to quarantine.[15] *I was very seasick on the way. Arriving there, we waited a long time. Then they took us to a room to do a small quarantine, and then we went back on the longboats. The city was lit up. We felt wonderful. Myriads of stars illuminated the sky, reflecting in the sea. The Turks wear red hats. The lady Turks were dressed like nuns, with covered faces. Coming home and having eaten, we went to sleep, since we were very tired from traveling.*

November 10

Today a mass of passengers arrived with a lot of baggage. The whole day they were loading various supplies. Around our ship there was a mass of little boats with provisions, like a real bazaar. There was nothing to do all day. I watch the loading. I eat and drink. It lasted until evening, when it was time to go to sleep, with the thought of getting up early so as not to miss the Dardanelles.

November 11

Early morning, when it was barely light, we passed through the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmora; I slept through everything. Now we're going through the Ionian Sea. At 10, it started to rock terribly. Everyone started getting seasick and we all started to throw up. I threw up in the cabin, and then they told me that it's better on deck. I went there. There I sat until evening until we came to Smyrna [Izmir, Turkey]. *Smyrna was a beautiful city, but now the city is almost completely destroyed; there's not a whole house standing. It seems to be after a war or a pogrom.*[16] *Everything reminds one of Ukraine. At noon we went past the Greek hills and peaks. The hills are very high; it's as if the clouds rest on them. The hills are covered with green and in some places there are even settlements. The sea is blue in some places and green elsewhere.*

November 12

They loaded figs on the whole day. I stand on the deck the whole day and gather figs. I wrote in my diary a little during the day. It lasted until evening. I went to sleep, but I couldn't sleep because the loading was terribly noisy. I lay and thought about my friends. I got very sad and heavy, and with such heavy thoughts and memories I fell asleep. To kill the Turks today with a piece of iron. [That's what it seems to say…–MS]

November 13

---

[15] The British occupied Constantinople from 1918 to 1923. Travelers in transit were taken to the Selimiye Barracks—the former Ottoman barracks in Scutari (Üsküdar) on the Asian side of the Bosphorus.

[16] The Turks had taken the city back from the Greeks just a month earlier. Large portions of Izmir burned September 13-22, 1922.

Again today they're loading and I watch. Like that till evening. There was an interesting story in the evening. Slavnaya came to me and said there's a group that wants to organize theater. I asked what kind of group. She said it was all of our girls and another two boys. Donya and I agreed, and we already started discussing the play and the decor. Slavnaya went to get the boys so we could get to know them. When they came and greeted us they behaved terribly, making bad jokes and the first impression was they were badly brought up boys. One was called Boris and the other Bernard. They told us that Sonya Royt said a lot of dumb things about us. We decided to prove everything tomorrow [=set them straight about what Sonya said?] *and went to bed.*

November 14

Today at 12:45 we left Smyrna. Strong rocking. The weather was foul. In the evening, we sat with the boys and chatted, joked. Only now did I see that "the devil is not so black as he's painted." The boys are very well brought up, especially Boris. Bernard likes to play the fool a little. The whole evening he stuck to Donya and Fanya, and declared his love to them. We sat around like this until 10. The rocking was terrible at night, practically throwing me out of bed. Then we entered the Mediterranean.

November 15

Beautiful weather today. No rocking at all. At noon we went past the island of Sicily. The island is very large. We were far from it and I couldn't see it clearly. The whole day I wander from the deck to the cafeteria and from the cafeteria to the cabin. In the evening Mama washed my hair and then I went to bed.

November 16

The weather was good again. But as soon as it started rocking, I felt bad. Until 11 I lay down. Then Boris came to bring me a book and got me out on deck. I stayed there until evening, not eating or drinking anything. In the evening at 6 we passed the island of Alaga [Isle de la Galite?].

November 17

Today we were supposed to be in Algiers either at 11 or at 2. But neither happened, and we arrived at 4. The general view of the city appearing before my eyes was enchanting. The city lies on a hilly site. It is interesting to see the sea below and above, on the hill, the streetcar going by, etc. We decided to go into town. We collected a group of ten people, among whom were me, Papa, Donya and her father. We got into a boat and set off. It was lovely in the boat. It glided quietly on the warm waters of the Mediterranean. When we arrived, we began to walk around various places until we arrived at the city. And there a wonderful picture appeared before us. All the ladies appeared to be the same shape, almost all the same height. There are Bedouins there and they walk around dressed very funny. The men are dressed in white from head to foot. The women are also dressed like that, but they still wear veils up to their eyes. Having bought everything we need, we returned home at 10. In the evening, the sea was very beautiful. It was kind of illuminated by the mass of boats standing at the docks; their light reflected onto the ship and it looked like it was lit up. We were all excited/taken by the city. Algiers is no more than a French colony practically in wild Africa. But even so, people who have seen all of Russia, half of America, China, Japan, Manchuria, the Caucasus, etc., say that they never saw such beauty.

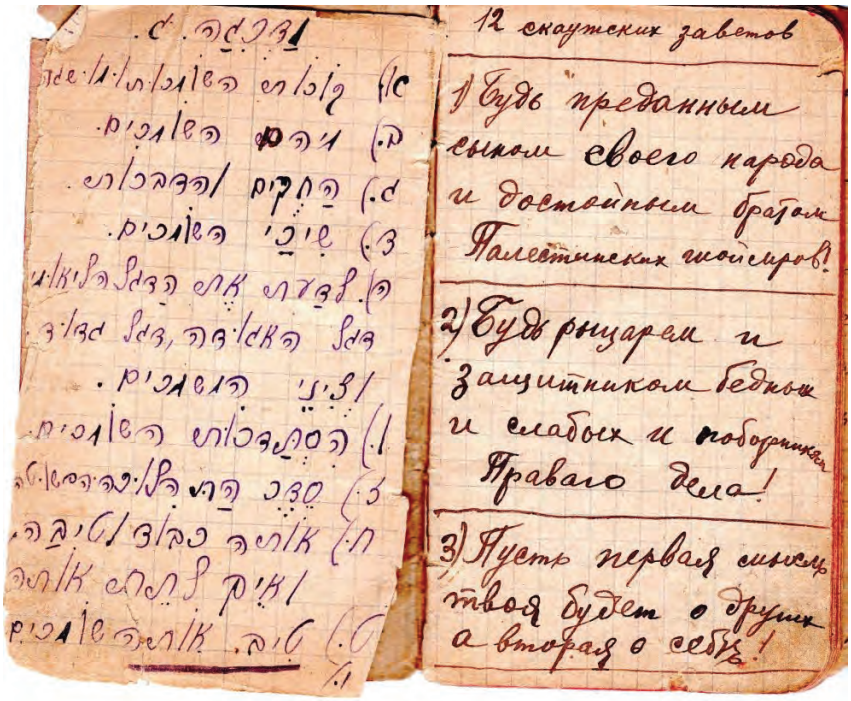
November 18

At 4 in the morning we left this wonderful city. During the day we passed Spain, then the Straits of Gibraltar, and we entered the Atlantic Ocean.

[Apparently from here on she was too seasick to write further. The rest of the notebook is blank (except for school lessons and poems in Hebrew, beginning at the opposite end of the notebook).–MS]

Appendix 4
Scouting notebook of Yokheved Lipa, Kishinev, 1921

My mother kept a little black notebook, about the size of a 3x5 card, with writing in Yiddish, Hebrew, and Russian. There were poems and lessons and words for songs, addresses—and the twelve Baden-Powell scouting rules, adapted for this unusual group. Here are the first three, in Russian.



1) Be a devoted son of your country and worthy of your brothers in the Palestinian shomer!

2) Be a knight and a protector of the poor and the weak and an image of justice.

3) May your first thought be of others and the second of yourself!

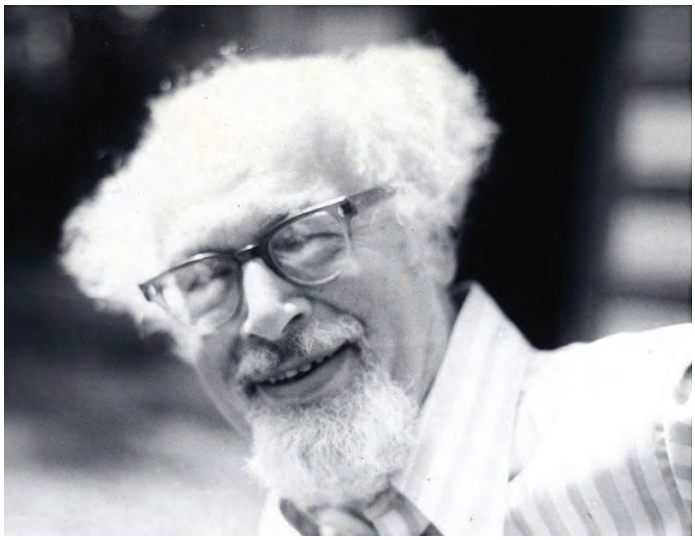
On another page she has penciled in her grades. These children were learning a remarkable range of languages, no doubt because it wasn't clear where they might end up living.

Yiddish	17
Russian	18
French	22
Mathematics	19
German	
Jewish history	25
Romanian	28
History, geography of Romania	

PART TWO – FATHER'S SIDE

Part Two presents the two halves of my father's family, and thus two quarters of my own family history. The record begins in 1790 with one of my great-great-great-great-grandfathers in Russian Lithuania, and I continue the tale until the death of my father, Norval L. Slobin, in a suburb of Detroit, Michigan, in 1997. Much of his story from his marriage onward is recounted in Part One.

the one-year-old with his father, 1940



Dr. Slobin - retired teacher, polyglot, and polymath, 1971

From the Baltics and Ukraine to Southeastern Michigan

The lives of Samuel K. Slobin (1881–1941) and Miriam Greenberg Slobin (1890-1950)

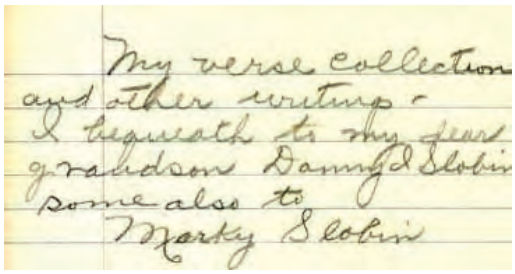
My father, Norval Slobin, was the oldest son of Samuel K. Slobin and Miriam Greenberg Slobin. I never knew my grandfather; he died just before my second birthday. Here I elaborate his story from what my father told me and from various other bits of family lore and records. I did know my grandmother, but only as a young boy; she died when I was ten. She left me with more extensive archival materials. I begin with her and attempt to interweave the stories of the lives of my paternal grandparents.

Miriam's legacy



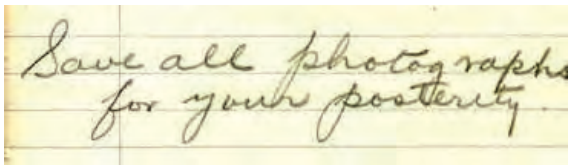


In 1949, when I was ten years old, my grandmother entrusted her writings to me and my seven-year-old brother. I didn't know this until the time of writing, at age 76, when I came across a draft of her last testament in a notebook apparently intended for her four children. She was only 59 when she wrote this, but six months letter she was dead, felled by a sudden heart attack in uncanny parallel to the death of her husband in similar fashion at the same age a decade earlier.


My verse collection
and other writings
I bequeath to my dear
grandson Dannyd Slobin
some also to
Marky Slobin

I remember listening to her read her verses to me, telling me that someday I would read them back to her. That never happened and I never got to know her as an adult. Her life is more richly documented than her husband's, but for both of them I can only try to weave a story from this distant perspective, well over a half-century later.

She concluded her book of instructions with the following:



It turns out, in 2016, that I am the oldest surviving member of that posterity, and her writings and photographs have ended up in my home in Berkeley and in the home of her granddaughter, my first cousin Joy Wasserman, in San Diego. It seems fated that I should attempt to tell the story of her life, as well as that of my grandfather. Their two stories make a composite of Jewish life in southeastern Michigan in the first half of the twentieth century, bringing together a young immigrant peddler from Ukraine and an American-born girl whose parents had come from the Russian Baltics a generation earlier. The arc of my grandparent's life went from a romance and economic rise to a falling out and economic decline, leaving a young widow who had suffered many losses. I have tried to give substance to their lives and personalities, using whatever materials are still to be found. There is no one left from whom I could learn more.

The Baltic origins

We have the benefit of Miriam's own sketch of her mother's family, the Kimmels. Sometime around 1947 she responded to a series of questions from her first cousin, Mary Jacoby Leopold, who—like me—wanted more information about family origins. Miriam's mother (Ida Kimmel Greenberg) and Mary's mother (Ella Kimmel Jacoby) were sisters.[1] The questions came from Mary, and Miriam replied in a one-page typewritten document.

Just what city and state in Europe did our parents come from?
Yanishok, Latvia [now Joniškis, in Lithuania, just south of the border with Latvia]. My father [Samuel Elijah Greenberg] was born on an estate, in Kurland, part of Prussia, conquered by Russia.

What ages did our grandparents marry?
Our grandparents married very young [Miriam Kimmel and Yshaya Simon Kimmel]. She was 13 years old, he was 12. They married so young because Czar Nicholas did not accept married men for military training. They had ten children. Our grandparents were first cousins and therefore raised in the same house. Grandfather was a wealthy balabos [head of household] with a large home and family.

To what age did our ancestors live?
Mother said her grandmother lived to be very old, almost to second childhood. Don't know their exact ages but grandfather lived to be very old too.

Exactly what business were they in?
Grandmother's and grandfather's people were jobbers and wholesalers of flax and wheat. They were successful and beloved business men. Once when

[1] Their common grandparents were Yshaya Simon Kimmel and Miriam Kimmel, who were first cousins. The Kimmel family tree is on page 6.

grandfather's house burned down, the non-Jewish neighbors brought enough lumber to build three new houses.

In what year did our mothers arrive in New York [Ida Kimmel Greenberg and Ella Kimmel Jacoby]? About 1886. Our grandmother [Miriam Kimmel] died a year and a half later, in the blizzard of 1888, and is buried in a Jewish cemetery on Long Island. She didn't like it here—considered it *treyf* [not kosher]. Before she left Europe she sold her silver so that a poor girl could have a dowry.

I***da & Ella Kimmel – sisters***

In just what year did the folks come to Bay City? [Miriam's parents moved from New York to Michigan; Mary's family ended up in Philadelphia.] About 1894. My mother was then about 27.

What can you glean from our ancestors' vocations, family, health?
My mother tells me there were no nervous breakdowns, or ailments of similar nature in the family on the other side. They seem to have been a very strong and sturdy family. Our grandmother and all of her five sisters died as the result of strokes, probably high blood pressure. Grandfather's father died at the age of 66. Our grandparents both suffered from rheumatism. Mother claims they were cured by a liquid they acquired from cooking an herb called decock [apparently dock root]. They came from balabatische [middle-class], respected families who lived the patriarchal life with children and grandchildren around them.

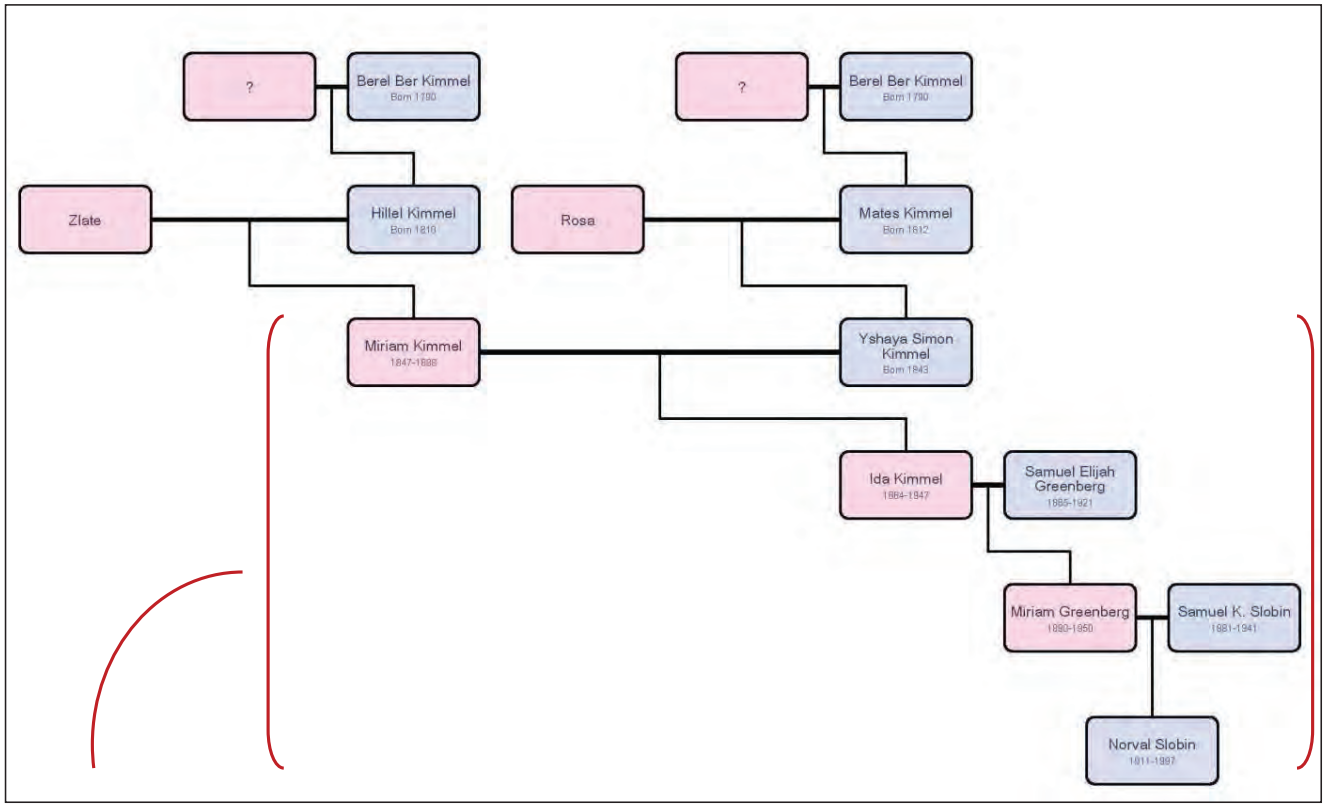
Yanishok (Joniškis)—the Kimmel hometown—was small, but not a *shtetl*. In 1897 Jews made up 48% of the population (2,272 out of 4,774). "Apparently, Jews settled in Joniškis at the beginning of the 18th century. They made their livelihood by trading crops, flax, horses, cattle, eggs, ducks, and other things, and generally speaking, their economic situation was good. … At the beginning of the second half of the 19th century, Joniškis became famous for its horse bazaars, which attracted merchants even from Russia. [Yshaya Simon Kimmel apparently was a horse salesman.] In 1864, when the main road and the railway line to Riga were constructed, Joniškis became a transit station and the city's importance as a commercial center for tobacco, flax and horses declined somewhat."[2] Perhaps this decline motivated Miriam's family to emigrate.

The town had two substantial synagogues—still standing: "the white synagogue" and "the red synagogue," the latter with a brickwork *magen David*.

[2] Josef Rosin, Joniškis. *Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Lithuania.* http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Pinkas_lita/lit_00339.html

Here are 1935 views of the synagogues and marketplace, probably little changed from what the Kimmels would have remembered.

The only surviving family portrait from the Old Country is a small undated picture of a man whom my father could only identify as "a grandfather of Miriam Greenberg Slobin." The Russian writing, Шавли, indicates that photograph was taken in Shavli, which is now Šiauliai, a large city in northern Lithuania (the Kovno Province of the old Russian Empire). Yanishok is in the Shavli municipality, and presumably this man would have gone to the nearest large city—60 km to the south—to have a portrait taken. He is likely a great-grandfather of Miriam—one of the brothers Hillel and Mattes. They were the fathers of Miriam's grandparents, who were first cousins. We know that Miriam Greenberg's grandmother, Miriam Kimmel, emigrated to New York around 1886, along with her daughters Ida and Ella, and probably also her husband, Yshaya Simon Kimmel. I imagine that Miriam and Yshaya took along this picture of a man who would have been the father of one of them and the uncle of the other. (Cousin marriages are complicated!) Here is the Kimmel side of my father's family tree.



DIED IN USA

Kimmel Family Tree

From the Baltics to Michigan

We don't know why Miriam's family left the Kovno and Kurland regions in the 1880s. This was a time of massive emigration to the United States and one can assume that they were seeking physical and financial security. Miriam's parents—Samuel Elijah (Shmuel Eliyohu) Greenberg and Ida Kimmel—were married in Yanishok in 1880. In 1886 they emigrated together as a young couple in their twenties (he born in 1865, she in 1864), along with Ida Kimmel's mother and perhaps her father as well. Kurland is directly north of Kovno, and one can assume that Jewish matchmakers traveled between these adjacent regions, finding eligible young people and negotiating marriage agreements. There is no record of where the Greenbergs lived in Kurland or what they did there. All we know about Samuel Elijah Greenberg is that his parents were named Hershel and Sarah, that Sarah's father was Berel, and that they all died in the Old Country.

Samuel and Ida, like most Jewish immigrants, ended up on the teeming Lower East Side of Manhattan. A picture has been preserved of a certain Jacob Greenberg who had a clothing store on Baxter Street, continuing one of the few occupations open to Jews in the Pale of Settlement—an occupation followed by many of my ancestors on both sides of the family. Perhaps Jacob was a brother or a cousin. Perhaps he had come first and provided a link to the new immigrants. But we'll never know. We do know that crowded living conditions and frequent tenement fires motivated the family to move west, to Michigan, apparently in 1895.

Mulberry Street, Lower East Side, around 1900

On August 5, 1890, shortly after the young Greenberg couple had settled in New York, their first child was born—my grandmother Miriam. In 1891 a son was born, Harry; and a daughter, Sarah, expanded the family in 1895. At that point the five Greenbergs moved to Michigan, where three more sons were born: Hyman (1897), Matthew (1898), and Bert (1905). Here is the family shortly after settling in Bay City. This hand-colored studio portrait, in a bowed glass frame, is from 1896 or 1897. Miriam is about six years old here.

Miriam Greenberg, New York, 1891

Harry Ida Sarah Samuel Miriam

My great-grandfather Samuel Elijah Greenberg appears as a determined paterfamilias in his early thirties. If the hand-coloring is accurate, he had reddish hair and blue eyes. A standing portrait was taken on the same occasion, and with the same sort of expression—surly? challenging? strong but uncertain? In any event, a determined young man in his early thirties with responsibilities and knowledge that he has left his native land and culture and has to find a way in a different world—in fact, the second, already having left New York. There are no other pictures of Samuel in the archive. The only clue to his personality is in a letter he wrote to his new son-in-law, my grandfather Samuel Slobin—but that comes later in the story.

Mama is evidently proud of her little brood.

And Miriam, my grand-mother, seems to be a serious, well-groomed child. (Of course, they all had to hold their poses for the photographer.)

We'll pick up the family in Bay City after a brief retrospective glance from the perspective of my own fragmentary memories of the Kimmel ancestors.

We have one iconic Russian artifact that traveled with the family—a samovar, which was essential equipment in every household, keeping water hot for tea. I grew up with this samovar in my parents' homes in Detroit, where it was described as something that great-grandmother Ida Kimmel brought from the Old Country. It had gone from Lithuania to New York to Bay City, Michigan. Later it resided in Connecticut, in the home of my brother and his wife, Mark and Greta Slobin. And now it is in my home in Berkeley, California. My brother and I are holding it in his dining room in Middletown, Connecticut, in 2008.

I overlapped briefly with my great-grandmother. Some 44 years after that first Bay City picture she visited Detroit. This snapshot from August 1941 shows four generations on the Kimmel-Greenberg-Slobin line, down to two-year-old Danny. It's the oldest image we have of her, at age 77. She lived on to the age of 83, dying in Bay City in 1946.

Norval and Dan Slobin *Miriam Greenberg Slobin* *Ida Kimmel Greenberg*
FATHER *GRANDMOTHER* *GREAT-GRANDMOTHER*

I remember being taken to visit her towards the end, when I was six. She lived in the old clapboard house on Sheridan Street that my father had visited in his childhood. There was a pump on the front lawn and Ida used to keep chickens in the backyard. My father remembered that when he was a boy he would go with her to take a chicken to be slaughtered by the kosher butcher. By the time I met her she was old and weak, living with her three unmarried sons. I was impressed with how gently they seated her at the kitchen table and fed her. She held my hands and looked into my eyes, saying something in Yiddish that I didn't understand, but it seemed to convey a sort of sadness and longing.

The Greenbergs in Bay City

Let's return to 1895 and the beginning of life in Michigan, which remained the home base for several generations. We don't know what led Samuel Elijah Greenberg to Bay City. Jewish peddlers had been active in Michigan since the early nineteenth century, following the expansion of mining, lumbering, and farming.[3] Bay City was a gateway, close to farmland, forests, and water transportation. Already in the 1880s there were several synagogues, cemeteries, and fraternal organizations. Only Detroit had a larger Jewish population at the turn of the century.

BAY CITY

DETROIT

The Bay City Directory for 1896 lists Samuel Greenberg as a "peddler" residing at 512 South Sheridan Street. The same information appears in the directories for 1899, 1902, and 1907. Beginning in 1908, is still a "peddler" but at a new address. The Greenberg residence is listed as 211 South Sheridan Street, where it remained through the death of the last son, Hyman, in 1974. We don't know what my great-grandfather "peddled," but he must have been itinerant, perhaps traveling in the countryside in a one-horse cart like the one in the picture postcard. There is an article about "The Peddlers of Bay City"[4] that offers one possibility: "…frequently Bay City peddlers, first by pack and later by horse and wagon, brought household materials to the rural Michigan areas in exchange for scrap 'junk', which was sold in Bay City salvage yards." Whatever his business, in about ten years he had accumulated enough money to buy a family home and support a wife and six children. And by the 1913 directory he is no longer a peddler but a "laborer," apparently working in a dry goods store owned by Hirschhorn. We don't know anything else about his life. He died in 1921 at age 56 and his widow lived on for another 26 years.

---

[3] Jewish immigrant men often began as itinerant peddlers. Their careers have been insightfully explored by Hasia Diner, *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way* (Yale University Press, 2015). The life story of my grandfather, Samuel K. Slobin—whom we are about to meet—closely follows the pattern described in Diner's book.

[4] Lillian R. Greenstein, The peddlers of Bay City, *Michigan Jewish History,* 1985, *25:1-2*, 10-17.

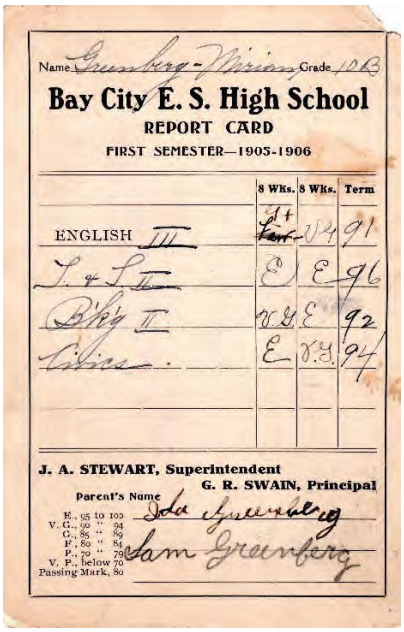
The house that Samuel Greenberg bought in 1907 or 1908 was relatively new, built in 1890. The previous house, on the same street, was smaller and older—a three-bedroom house built in 1810. The new house had four bedrooms and a finished attic. Both houses are still standing and occupied. When I visited in 2011 I found a pleasant, leafy neighborhood with well-maintained homes. In the 1940s and 1950s I went there often with my family, stopping to see my father's uncles on the way to our regular summer holiday in Northern Michigan. In those days there were three remaining children of Samuel and Ida, Miriam's brothers Bert, Matt and Hy. Bert, the youngest, died in 1948, a year after Ida's death. Matt and Hy continued living in the house. They had a lumber business which they ran from an office in the living room. And, unlike my mother's urban side of the family, the Greenberg brothers were hunters, with strong dogs and rifles in the house.

2011

1956

211 South Sheridan St., Bay City, Michigan

When the family moved into the new house Miriam was already 17. The only record we have of her childhood are ninth and tenth grade report cards, showing high grades (and the only extant signatures of Ida and Sam Greenberg). Miriam had fine penmanship throughout her life, as can be seen in her bequest to "Danny" on page 2. She had high grades in bookkeeping, typewriting, and shorthand, along with algebra, German, domestic science, and chorus. Apparently she went to work immediately after graduating from high school. The city directory for 1908 lists her as "bookkeeper, Affleck Electric Co.," living at 211 S. Sheridan. She was 18. In the following year, 1909, her brother Harry, then 18, is listed as "laborer," with no indication of employer; Miriam continues working at Affleck. Their father is still a "peddler." Clearly the two oldest children were contributing to household expenses, helping to support their younger siblings, ranging in age from two to twelve.



Name Greenberg - Miriam Grade 10B

Bay City E. S. High School

REPORT CARD

FIRST SEMESTER—1905-1906

	8 Wks.	8 Wks.	Term
ENGLISH III	1+ Fair	94	91
L. & L. II	E	E	96
Bkg II	VG	E	92
Latin	E	VG	94

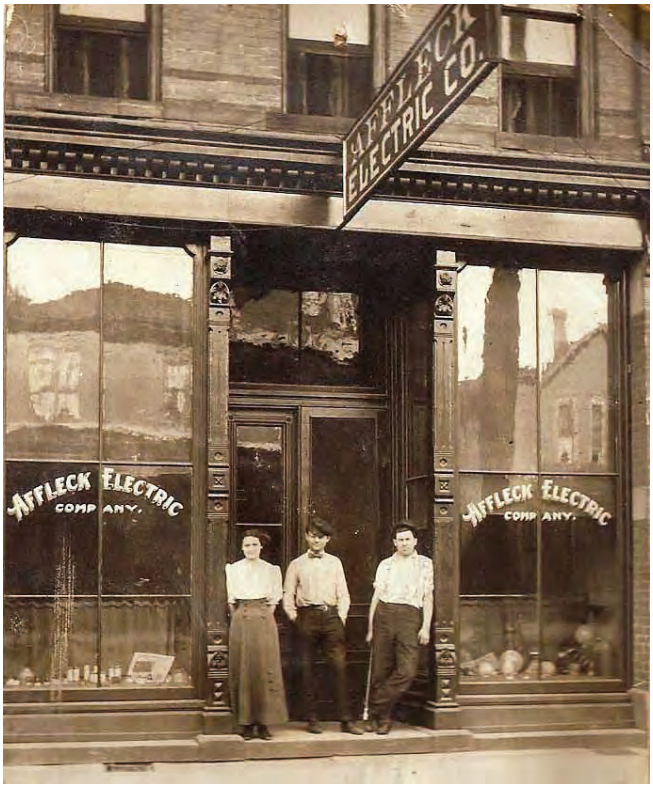
J. A. STEWART, Superintendent

G. R. SWAIN, Principal

Parent's Name Ida Greenberg

Sam Greenberg

E., 95 to 100
V. G., 90 " 94
G., 85 " 89
F., 80 " 84
P., 70 " 79
V. P., below 70
Passing Mark, 80



the young bookkeeper at Affleck Electric Company

Ida Kimmel Greenberg

Ida Kimmel and boys - undated

It is 1909. Time for nineteen-year-old Miriam to get married. And time, in this narrative, to bring my future grandfather, Samuel K. Slobin, into the picture. So we will backtrack to 1881 in Ukraine, far to the south of where the Greenbergs and Kimmels came from. My father, Norval (Nokhum), was his oldest son, born in 1911—just two years after his mother, Miriam, was working as a bookkeeper in Bay City. There will be a rapid change in the family narrative in 1910. I never knew my grandfather; he died just before my second birthday. Here I elaborate his story from what my father told me and from various other bits of family lore and records.

The Zlobinskys in Ukraine

Shneur Zalmen Zlobinsky (later Samuel K. Slobin) was born on September 20, 1881, in a town called Lokhvitsa (Лохвица), some 80 miles northwest of Poltava, in what was then Russian Ukraine. The Poltava Region is in Eastern Ukraine, as shown on a schematic Wikipedia map. Lokhvitsa was not a shtetl; it was recorded as a town as far back as the Middle Ages, and it was an administrative center. The Jewish population in 1900 was about 2,500. There are no Slobin family pictures from Russia. Lokhvitsa was the scene of heavy fighting in World War II and there are probably no remaining traces of 19th century Jewish life there. I drove through Ukraine in 1966, stopping in Poltava. Street scenes like this would probably have been familiar at the beginning of the twentieth century. The countryside around Poltava is fertile, gently rolling, and heavily agricultural. (Now the region is a center for extracting natural gas.)

Nothing is known of Shneur Zalman's early childhood and education. He must have gone to *kheyder* (primary school) like all Jewish boys; it is evident from his surviving letters and postcards that he was fluently literate in Yiddish and Russian. After leaving Russia he quickly became fluent in English, which he spoke with a Yiddish accent and traces of British English, since he first learned English in England.

The life story is empty until 1902, when he was drafted into the army at the age of 21. His father, who was religious, had counseled him to find some *gute yidn* (good Jews), and that with God's help—*got vet helfn* (God will help)—he would avoid the draft. But he *was* drafted and, as he told my father years later, from then on was skeptical of the efficacy of *a guter yid* (a good Jew). Before leaving for the army, he worried about the necessity of eating *treyf* (non-kosher food). In my father's words, this was the advice that the young recruit received from his father—perhaps the only direct quote from Abraham Isaac Zlobinsky, my great-grandfather: "Eating is allowed, but don't suck on the bones."

Here is a picture of a Russian soldier from that period. Perhaps the young Zlobinsky wore a similar uniform. Once in the army. Zalmen was stationed in Smolensk, in western Russia, where he managed to avoid the rigors of military training by somehow arranging to be put in the regimental band—though he had no knowledge of music. This is the first evidence of the man whom my father later characterized as a *shakher-makher* (wheeler-dealer). He was given a French horn and when it was evident that he didn't know how to play it, some friendly person (*a guter yid* perhaps?) took pity and, in my father's words: "he was given strict orders never to toot into it at all—only to appear that he had been playing." However, when the Russo-Japanese War broke out in 1904, his unit was mobilized to be sent to the front. In the family lore that I heard as a child, he said to himself: "Why should a Jewish boy go shoot Japs for the Czar?" So he devised a way to get out, arranging with someone at home to send him a telegram calling him back urgently to Lokhvitsa because his father was dying. He got a leave to go home on personal business and, again in my father's words: "Once he got home for personal business, he kept right on going." When he managed to cross the border out of Russia (we don't know where or how), he sent home a prearranged, unsigned one-word telegram: *blagopoluchno* "successful."

Somehow he made his way to London where it is reported that he stayed with relatives. (There is no record of relatives in London.) He tried his luck in London for a year, but the economic situation was apparently not favorable for a young, unskilled immigrant, with dreams of bringing his family out of Russia, so he set off for America in 1905, sailing in steerage from Liverpool to Quebec, with the stated destination of Bay City, Michigan and an "uncle H. Koffman." He went first to New York and found a city packed with poor immigrants and few prospects for success. He was advised, in timeless American fashion, to "go West," and so he proceeded, apparently as planned, to Southeastern Michigan and to Hyman Koffman (Chaim Mordechai Kaufman)—apparently his mother's first cousin—in Bay City (where he was already listed in the 1892 city directory). Koffman ran a general store in Kawkalin, a small town near Bay City, and the young immigrant worked as a peddler, making a circuit of farmhouses, selling things to housewives—thimbles and thread, buttons, needles, scissors, funnels, and the like (thus carrying on the timeless role of the wandering Jewish peddler, like his future father-in-law). At some point along the way he changed his name to Samuel K. Slobin, taking a middle initial from his mother's maiden name, Kostoff. (His letterhead from 1910 gives just "Samuel Slobin"; the 1925 letterhead gives "S. K. Slobin.")

He didn't stay a backpacking peddler for long. He managed to save up enough money to buy a horse and cart and to move on, setting up a clothing store in the village of Rosebush in the countryside west of Bay City, and somehow accumulating enough money to bring his mother and father from the Old Country. He and Samuel Elijah Greenberg may both have profited from the scrap metal trade.

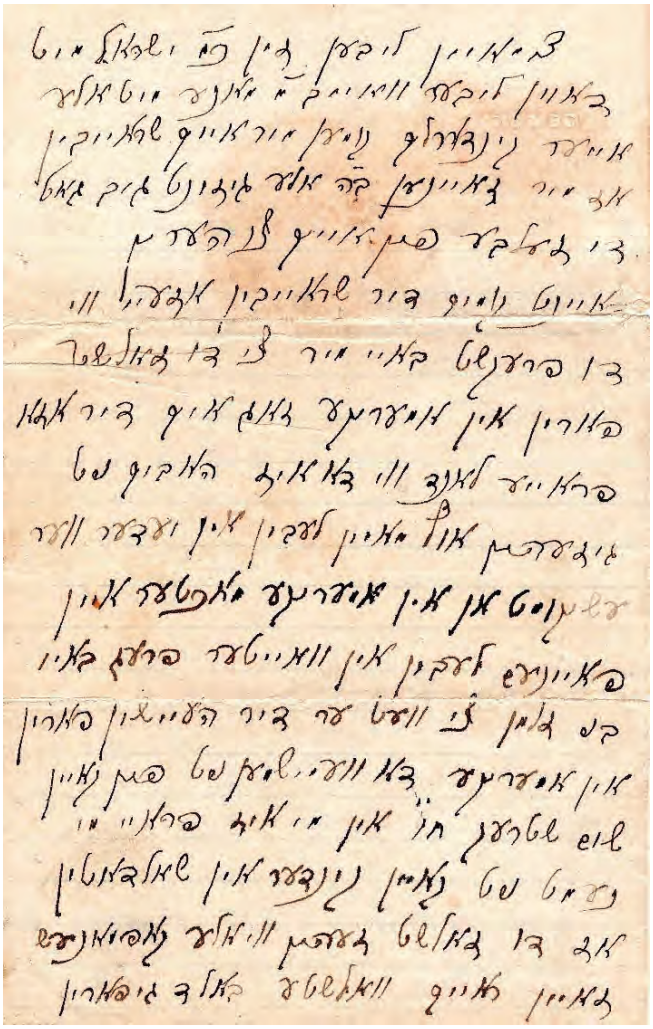
It's not clear in what year his parents arrived; S. K. Slobin settled in Michigan in 1905 and his father died in Michigan in 1914. Sam was one of six siblings who grew to adulthood (seven others didn't make it). When his parents came to America, they left their five other children behind (but only for a while: Sam soon brought them all to Michigan). In my father's memory: "To his dying day he was so proud that his parents preferred him above all the others, and left the others to come to him." He considered

himself the favorite son. His parents lived with him for the rest of their lives and are buried in Machpelah Cemetery in Detroit.

The Parents of Samuel K. Slobin

At this point it's useful to take a detour to summarize what little is known about these parents, my great-grandparents. Abraham Isaac (Avrom Yitskhok) Slobin lived for only a few years in America, dying at age 81. He was born in 1833, presumably in Lokhvitsa. Given his advanced age as an immigrant, he probably was supported by his son. There is only one portrait of him, taken in Michigan. And there is only one letter from him, written in a fine Yiddish hand, and sent back to Russia to one of his sons, Yisroel, urging him to come to America. This must have been written sometime around 1908 or so. It's a gem of description of *a goldene medinah*, a Golden Land blessed with freedom and prosperity. It was apparently important enough

Abraham Isaac Slobin (1833-1914)



to have been kept by the family. Yisroel must have brought it with him from from Lokhvitsa to America and somehow, through the years, it ended up in the few remaining papers that were passed on to me, going through my grandmother Miriam, her daughter Esther, and my father in Detroit. Here it is in Norval Slobin's translation from the Yiddish:

To my dear son Yisroel and your dear wife Manye and all your dear children. We are writing to tell you that we are, thank God, all in good health. God grant us to hear the same about you. Now I'm writing to tell you, since you asked me if you should come to America, that such a free country as there is here—I have never seen in my life, and everybody that comes to America makes a fine living.

You can also ask Zalmen if he would tell you to come to America. Here nobody has to think of any kind of fear, God forbid! And people are free. Children are not taken to be soldiers. If you could see how all the Koffmans are rich, you would come immediately.

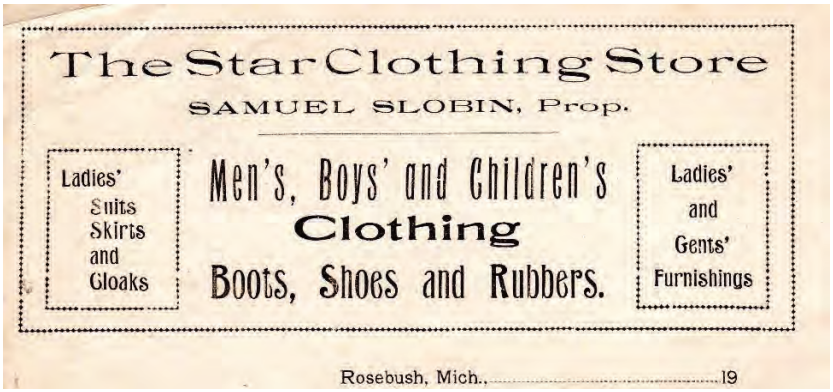
Sosia Kostoff Slobin (1849-1924)

Abraham Isaac Slobin's wife, my great-grandmother, was born Sosia Koshchikovskaya (the family name was apparently changed to Kostoff in America). She lived with Zalmen and his family, surviving her husband by ten years and dying in Detroit in 1924 at age 75. My father, who was born in 1911, remembered her well. She spoke only Yiddish and was his main caretaker until he was old enough to go out on the street. So his first language was Yiddish. He remembered taking her to silent movies—which she loved—translating the captions into Yiddish for her. And when her vision failed, she asked her twelve-year-old grandson Nokhum (Norval) to read Yiddish romance novels to her—but not to listen to the risqué parts! Here is the only portrait of her; she reappears later in a family photo, and here are two snapshots later in life, in Detroit. My father remembered her as *di bobeh Sosye*. She had been married at sixteen and had thirteen children, of whom six grew to adulthood. She told him that she remembered the freeing of the serfs in Russia in 1861.

S. K. Slobin's genealogy goes back only one generation farther, to his grand-parents, who had died in Russia. Sosia's parents were Kalman Koschikovsky and Henye Koffman (thus the Koffman cousin who started S. K Slobin off in Kawkalin). Abraham Isaac Zlobinsky's father was Nokhum Zlobinsky; there is no record of his wife.

Starting off in Rosebush, Michigan

Rosebush was a village, lying about 50 miles inland from Bay City, in the center of the state. Sam Slobin established a clothing store there, filling a familiar niche for Jewish merchants. The small villages of central Michigan, surrounded by flat agricultural land, must have been reminiscent of the Ukrainian countryside. Roads were unpaved, transportation was by horse cart and train. He prospered there and brought over his two sisters—Ida and Celia, a niece—Isabelle Lezin, and a nephew—Martin Lezin. When his sisters came he looked for someone to teach them English. He was active in philanthropic work to aid Jewish immigrants, and so a young woman was found to tutor his sisters. She was an American-born girl, Miriam Greenberg. Sam had a business, he had brought his parents and some other relatives; it was time to settle down with a wife and start a family. A courtship began in 1908, embellished with romantic cards that my grandmother kept all her life. Here is a card to "Maria" from "Saam" from 1908. It's a home-made card, with drawing and "Samuel" all in sparkles attached to outlines in glue.



Miriam Greenberg, about 1908

We know what Rosebush was like from two postcards from that era. Sam sent this one to his sister Celia. We see an unpaved "Main Street" with some wooden storefronts and people posing on the sidewalk. The man in shirtsleeves and black vest, standing under the awning, appears to be Sam. On the back is a message written in his hand, in English, to Miriam's sister Sarah, who has apparently gotten to know Celia. The message on the back of the postcard is in a sure hand but with less sure English:

Hello Sister!
I really did not know I have a other sister but I am glad I know now, well dear how is everything I suppose you and Celia having a good time. I wrote to Celia she can stay as long as she wants to stay I know this will favor you to, I am sending you a card with picture's of some strange men but you will find one man that is no strange to you! Yours as ever a friend, Sam Slobin.

Samuel Slobin
1909
age 28

The second postcard shows the other side of the street. The awning above the head of the automobile driver says CLOTHING and on the fringe it says SAMUEL SLOBIN. There are two men standing erect under the adjacent awning. One of them is an anomaly in this street of Michigan villagers, who stand apart from him. He has a black suit and hat and a long, trimmed white beard. Could this be the new immigrant Abraham Slobin, standing next to his son, the proprietor of the clothing store? An enlargement seems to leave no doubt. (I went to Rosebush a century later, in 2011. The village seemed little changed and this corner brick building was immediately recognizable. But there were some surprises: see the Epilogue to this memoir.)

The coming together of Slobins and Greenbergs

The courtship continued through 1909, while Miriam was living in Bay City and working at Affleck Electric Co. We don't know how Sam traveled between Rosebush and Bay City, and though there were telephones, written communication was more common. The romance continued through letters and postcards, but we only have the ones from Sam that Miriam kept. The postcard with Sam and his father standing by the shop has this message, in halting English:

Hello kide, how are you? according your postal you must enjoying yourself very good, i am glad of it wish i could bee in B.C. and cam to see your girls pleasant hour, would,nt you be glad to ses me? i suppose yes. well Dear i dont know any news to wright you from Rosebush but i suppose there is some news in Bay City if you know any lat me know good by Dear

yours as ever a friend
S. Slobin

This card, by contrast, is in a fine Russian hand, using *ty*, the familiar pronoun of address.

In my translation:

Dear Maria!
I inform you that I arrived successfully in Rosebush,
I'm very sorry that it will be hard for you when someone reads this card for you. I imagine you would like to write in Russian, and it was the same with me when I received a German letter from you, this would be bread for bread,
dosvidaniya,
Zalmon Zlobinsky


To My
Best Girl


"Kisses in billiard games are more than few,
It's part of the game of Heart-Diabolo too!

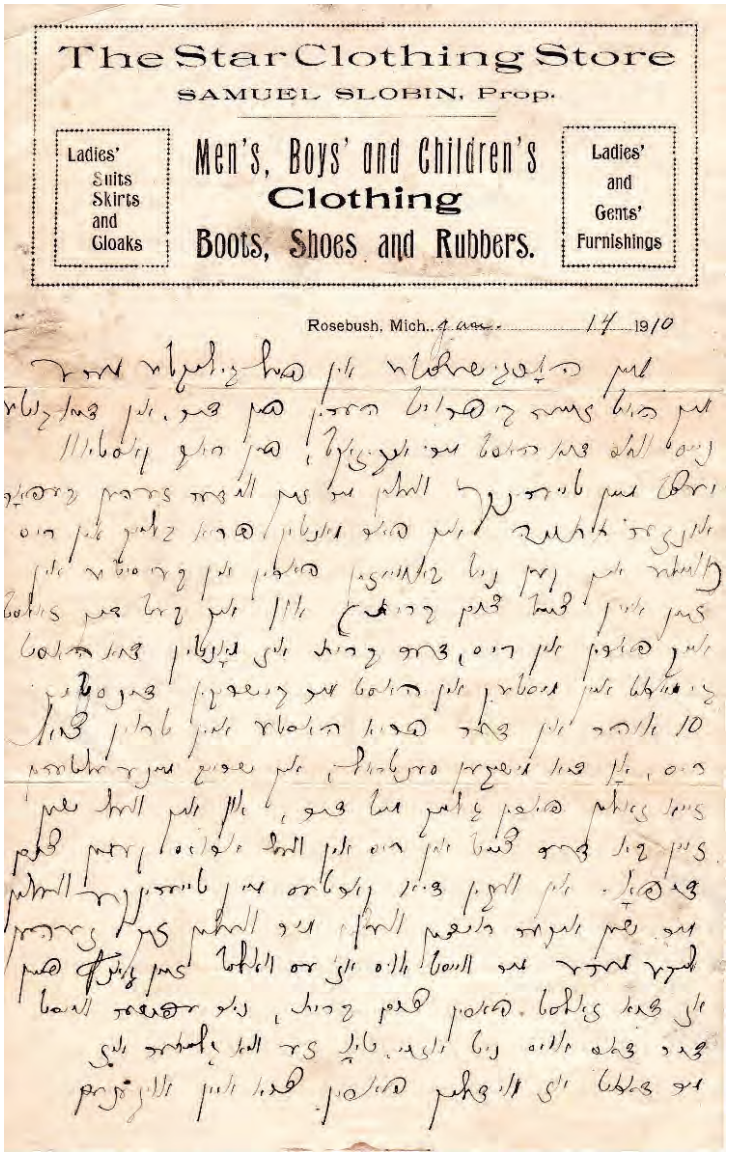

YOU KNOW YOU'RE NOT FORGOTTEN


Post card — Postkarte — Carte postale
Correspondenzkarte — Levelezö-Lap — Dopisnice — Dopisnica — Carta postala
Karta korespondencyjna — Cartolina postale — Briefkaart — Brefkort — Tarjeta postal
Korespondenční listek — Дописна карта — Открытое письмо.
HELD FOR POSTAGE
MICH
Hello, Maria
Every thing
is all right
and I am
well I will
be home
soon
Miss Maria
Greenberg
S. Sheridan
Bay City
No. 5049.

Miriam was apparently literate in Yiddish, growing up with immigrant parents. (When I met my great-grandmother Ida in Bay City she spoke only Yiddish to me.) Sam wrote long letters to her in Yiddish, in a fluent cursive. One can imagine that the serious part of the courtship went on in Yiddish. At some point in 1909 they became engaged, as is evident in this two-page Yiddish letter he sent from Rosebush on January 14, 1910.

In my father's translation:

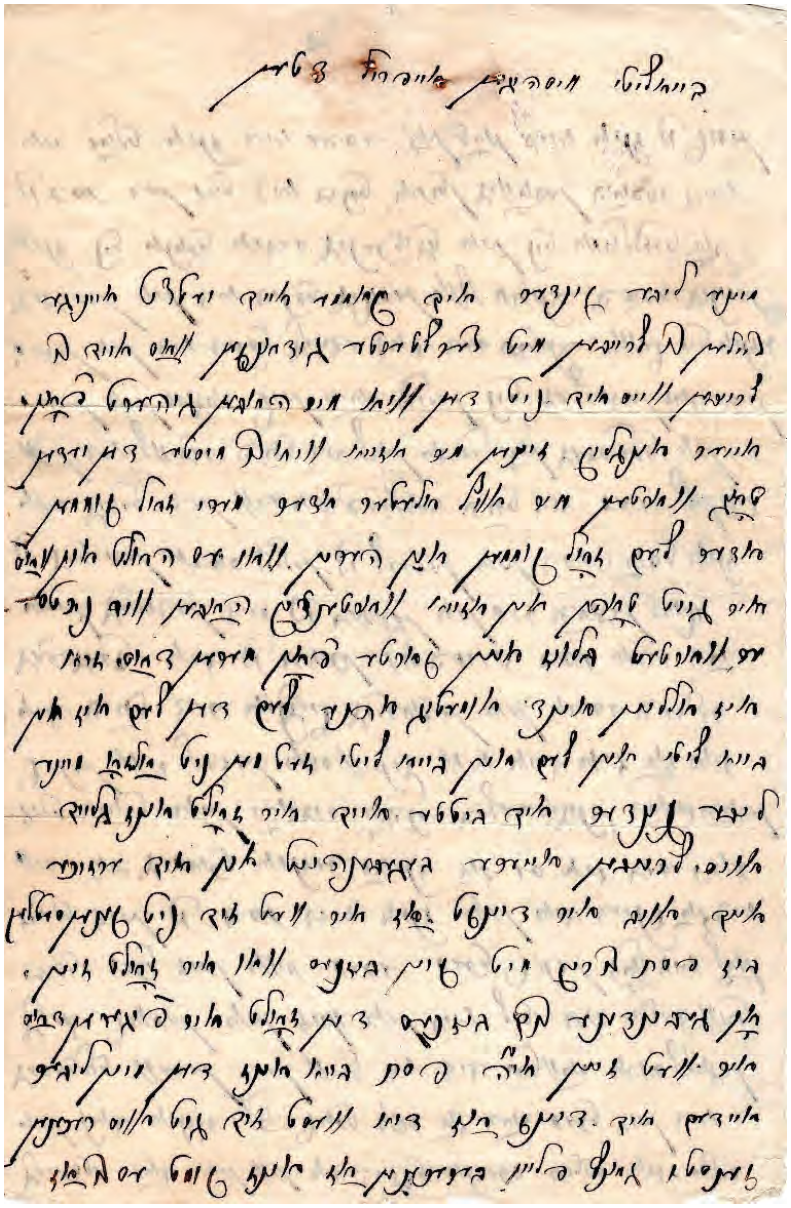
My highly treasured and much beloved Mary: I was very happy to hear from you, and the good news you told me about Khaim Kostoff. Now, my darling, we will get to see each other again before our wedding. I'll go directly to Reese [a nearby village] *on Monday morning because it's not possible for me to go to Bay City and still be on time for the bris* [circumcision ceremony]. *I would like you to go to Reese too. The bris is on Monday. You made a mistake and wrote me it was Tuesday. There is a train you can take at 10 AM to Reese, at the Michigan Central. I'm writing my parents to go at the same time with you, and by that time I'll already be in Reese, and will come over to the depot. As to the tickets, my darling, we can talk it over when we see each other. Dear Mary, it seems to me that it would be a good idea for you to go to the bris. But if it doesn't look that way to you, consider what is more appropriate. It seems to me that unmarried women do go to a bris, but I could be mistaken. If you don't go, call me up on the phone. There's nothing more for me to write you about just now. Keep well, from me, your Sam*



Sam and Miriam were married on February 20,1910. He was 29 and she was 19. This may have been a wedding portrait. And we have their remarkable winter honeymoon picture taken in front of frozen Niagara Falls—the required honeymoon goal, regardless of the season—a cold and serious pair of newlyweds, heavily bundled up and looking beyond their years by standards of the twenty-first century. In two years she would be the mother of two little boys.

For one reason or another, the business in Rosebush didn't succeed and the young couple soon moved to Detroit—actually, to Hamtramck, a small town within the borders of Detroit which was beginning to take off in the rise of the automobile industry.

We get a glimpse of the first months of the marriage from the only surviving letter of Miriam's father, Samuel Elijah Greenberg. Here we see Jewish family relations as they have played out for generations, from letters to phone calls to email and beyond. The three-page letter was written on April 3, 1910, to Sam and Miriam (called Mary), but essentially guilt-tripping the new son-in-law to pay more attention to his in-laws. It is signed in the name of both of the Greenberg parents, Sam and Ida, but is in the husband's hand and is clearly his voice directed to the younger Sam. The handwriting is elegant and the Yiddish has German influences, reflecting the Greenberg family origins in a part of East Prussia taken over by Russia. Here is my father's translation:



My dear children: I'm now writing you a few lines with my tenderest thoughts. I don't really know what to say, because as soon as we heard about your misfortune [the loss of the Rosebush store] *we got terribly upset. Every day, we keep waiting for a letter. Either Mary should come* [to Bay City] *or Sam should come, so we could hear what's going on and what you're going to do. We wait but nothing happens. We expected, at least, a card from Mary, that she is alone and lonesome without Sam, that Sam is in Bay City. But Sam has not showed up in Bay City. So, my dear children, I beg of you to write to us immediately about your situation, and I plead with you, if you think you can't get settled again with any business before Passover, in a way that make you tied up with the business, then please plan on spending Passover with us, God willing. My dear son-in-law, if you think about it carefully, you can figure out quite simply that you owe us the honor of coming to our house for Passover. Ever since you got married, you have not slept over at our place, not even for one night, and haven't had a single meal with us. You came to the wedding, you took our Mary, and right after the wedding you went away with her, and you haven't even written us a few lines since then. When your mother-in-law scolded you a little, and gave you a talking-to, then, as I understand it, Mary was barely able to drive you to write a few lines, and you invited us to visit you. We actually did plan to visit you during Khol-ha-Moyd* [the middle four days of Passover] *but then the misfortune hit you, right into your hearts. We can read how things are with you without having it*

spelled out for us since you are left without lights in Rosebush. That's why we made up our minds that it would be better if you spent Passover with us, and I think the best thing will be for Mary to come to our place right away, if she can, and stay in Bay City until everything gets settled down. In this way, she'll come out of it a little and to our way of thinking, this will turn out to be the most reasonable way, and if you think otherwise, please write us all the details, and, for the love of God, don't hold back on answering, because we are quite upset. Your mother-in-law wanted to come to you last Friday, but she kept herself back. We thought we would certainly hear from you. I am working at Hirschhold's again, and can't get away. There's nothing else new to tell you. Stay well, this is the wish for you from your ever-loving parents,
Sam and Ida Greenberg

The children all send regards [Mary's sister and brothers]*, also regards from all of us to Celia, Morris, and Ida* [Celia and Ida were Sam Slobin's sisters; Morris (Israel) was Ida's husband].

We can only speculate about why this is the only letter to survive from my great-grandfather, Samuel Elijah Greenberg. Apparently Sam Slobin kept it; it remained in his widow's papers and eventually found its way into the twenty-first century. There is no way of knowing how and if it was replied to. The two letters reproduced here—from Abraham Zlobinsky and Samuel Greenberg—are all the personal writing that is left of the generation of my great-grandparents.

The failure of the first business venture was only the first of many misfortunes that we will encounter through three generations of the Slobin-Greenberg story. But first there were years of growth and prosperity in Detroit.

Family life in Detroit

Sam and Miriam moved to the big city, where business was booming in the pre-war rise of the automotive industry. The Dodge Brothers opened a plant in Hamtramck in 1910, and that enclave of Detroit was flooded with immigrants, especially Polish. What began as a factory making parts for Ford expanded to make Dodge cars in 1914, seeking to fill a niche with a more expensive car than Ford's Model T. Sam quickly took advantage of opportunities for business. He apparently understood that the rising population would be buying food more regularly than clothing, and he opened a grocery store on the main thoroughfare of Hamtramck, Joseph Campau Avenue.

Dodge Brothers plant, 7900 Joseph Campau Ave.

Thirteen months after the wedding, on March 20, 1911, my father was born in the family residence behind the store on 1998 Joseph Campau. His grandparents, Abraham and Sosie Slobin, also lived there. And exactly one year later, on March 20, 1912, his brother Sidney was born. The two grew up almost as twins. Here we see the first family portrait, showing off the proud parents and the two boys in 1912. Miriam was 22, already with two little children, in-laws, and an entrepreneurial husband in his early thirties setting off on a new business in what must have felt like a sort of frontier town. Miriam is looking directly at the photographer, apparently pleased with her boys. Sam seems to be looking beyond, with a determined gaze into his own future. And what did he look like beyond this formal pose? His 1918 draft registration gives him as "medium height, stout build, gray eyes, black hair."

Sam Norval Sidney Miriam

Sam ran the grocery story with his brother-in-law, Morris Israel, the husband of Sam's sister Ida. (Names recur on both sides of the family; Miriam's parents were also Sam and Ida.) But my grandfather soon discerned greener fields in real estate, which became his major business for the rest of his life. He began buying up property on Joseph Campau and apparently had a good eye for the possibilities. That business went on for some time, as can be seen in this letterhead from a 1925 letter. The office of S. K. Slobin "For Joseph Campau Frontage" was located in the Penobscot Building, a major downtown building in the Financial District (the forerunner of the 1928 skyscraper).

He earned enough money to turn the grocery store over to Morris and to bring his brother Mendel from Europe, and later his sister Esther. Apparently Jews were allowed to emigrate from Russia in the last years of the Romanov Empire, and the American restrictive immigration laws of the 1920s were not yet in place. Mendel crossed over on the SS Concordia from Liverpool to America immediately before the outbreak of World War I cut off travel. He arrived in August 1914, just in time for his father's funeral. (Mendel eventually became the founder and president of congregation B'nai David in Detroit.)

Welcoming new immigrants (1909)

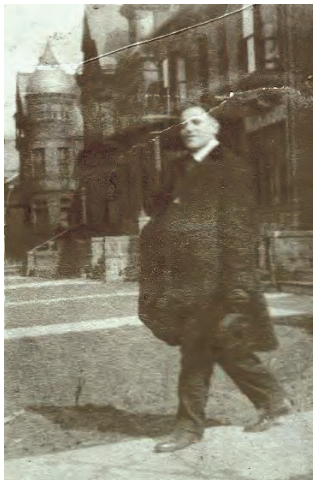
Abraham Isaac Slobin died at age 81, in Hamtramck, on July 30, 1914. His wife Sosie lived on for another ten years, dying in 1924 at age 75. She played a central role in raising the young boys, and since she and Abraham Isaac spoke only Yiddish, my father began with Yiddish as a first language. Abraham and Sosie are buried in Machpelah Cemetery, in Ferndale, Michigan, on the northern border of Detroit. Sam arranged for striking, matching tombstones, which stand out among the others in that section of the cemetery. And later he bought six plots next to them, intended for himself and Miriam and their children.

Joseph Campau Avenue was just beginning to develop when S. K. Slobin turned his attention to real estate there. His role was recognized in his 1941 obituary, where he is described as "a prominent merchant and real estate man" who was "one of the men who developed the business frontage on Joseph Campau in Hamtramck." He was also remembered for his role in "synagogue circles," having been "an organizer of the Hamtramck congregation, which he served as president." Here is a view of the street from 1913, and another from 1941, the year he died.

Business successes allowed the family to move to the expensive neighborhood of East Ferry Avenue, which was just opening up to Jews. My father described it as "a classy neighborhood," remembering it as "pretty far north" for those days. This was the grandest period of the family's residences. They remained there from 1914 to 1918, with Sam Slobin's mother, Sosie, and what the census listed as a "servant." Here are Sam and Miriam in 1914, with sons Norval and Sidney.

Sam was well-dressed as he went off to work—always with a good car. It looks like the two boys enjoyed playing around the car.

186 East Ferry St., Detroit



The Detroit Jewish community kept moving northward and westward, and the Slobins followed the trajectory. What remains of Ferry Avenue is now the East Ferry Historic District in Detroit's cultural center, next to Wayne State University, the Detroit Institute of Art, and the main library. A contemporary picture provides the red brick color and elegance missing in the old black-and-white snapshots. (The Slobin house at 186 Ferry Avenue is no longer there.)

The first daughter, Esther, was born in 1917. This professional photo in the Ferry Avenue home shows a prosperous family and proud pater familias.

Sidney Miriam Sam Esther Norval Sosie

The almost-twin brothers

Norval and Sidney grew up as buddies. When Norval's thirteenth birthday approached, he deferred his Bar Mitzvah for a year so that he and Sidney could celebrate a joint coming-of-age ceremony. They went to the same schools and were both active in the Philomathic Debating Club, where Norval won several medals.

Sidney Norval c1916

Sidney Norval c1917

JOINT BAR MITZVAH 1925
Norval Sidney

Miriam was involved in social and philanthropic organizations throughout her life. And she wrote verses constantly, distributing them to friends and family, sending them to public figures, and publishing them from time to time. Later in life she was chairman of the Detroit Writers League and Poet Laureate of the Purity Chapter of the Order of Eastern Star (a Freemason Society open to men and women). Already in 1918 Miriam was concerned with the treatment of returning veterans of World War I. She was 27 then and may well have known some soldiers. She wrote the following poem, which was published in the *Bay City Tribune* on February 22, 1918. Sadly, it was appropriate to publish it again after World War II, this time in the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* of December 21, 1945. And, alas, it is still relevant in the aftermath of twenty-first century wars. Here it is, as it was published the first time. She left a scrapbook full of clippings, programs of meetings, and many verses. Newspaper clippings of "The Soldier's New Task" from 1918 and 1945 are pasted together on the same page.

The Soldier's New Task

The brave lads return and many are here
From those war-torn areas, from tasks so severe;
The boys who went forth with staunch courage to fight
For country and liberty and democracy's right.

We sent them with promise and high hope inspired
To grant them necessities and small things desired;
And now, since they're home, crippled, torn and abused
They roam most despondent, employment refused.

This son cannot work at his calling of yore,
His eye, limb or body some bullet has tore.
His confidence shattered, his resources gone,
Yet undaunted and hopeful, this brave lad trods on.

The one that we see, who is yet well preserved,
Gets not enough credit, nor great praise deserved;
He sees not the man who will lend him a hand,
Nor open the threshold on which he can stand.

So, citizens true, while your duty you're doing,
Don't fail at this one, when our soldier is suing
For naught but his chance to resume life again,
With a livelihood needed by a good honest man.

We will encounter more of Miriam's poetry later in her life, but first back to the family chronicle. The fourth and last child, Shirley, was born in 1922. The six Slobins moved on, north-westward, to newer neighborhoods, with addresses on Burlingame and on Josephine. Sam's business prospered. As my father remembered: "He was an excellent businessman. He had a creative imagination—he created deals, promotions—he saw the possibilities of various properties and so on. Long after he died, people told me they admired his business sense." But in 1924, tempted by a land boom in Florida, he drove down there with a cousin, Martin Lezin. He had brought Martin and his family over from Russia, and the two became business partners. But their luck didn't hold in

Florida. As I heard it in my childhood, he invested in property that turned out to be swamp land. My father described the failure more charitably: "The bubble burst." Martin moved to California and Sam returned to Detroit, doing well in 1925 and 1926. The full family beamed in this portrait from about 1925.

Sidney Sam Norval Miriam
Esther Shirley

Problems begin

In the 1925 family portrait it is evident that Esther's right arm is swollen. She had fallen off her bike and broken the arm at the elbow when she was five, with complications for the rest of her life. Sometime after this picture was taken, Miriam took eight-year-old Esther to Iowa City for special treatment at the University Hospital, leaving Sam to care for the boys and three-year-old Shirley. He sent a caring letter to Miriam, in Yiddish, here in my father's translation. It is written on his letterhead "For Joseph Campau Frontage," written legibly on both sides of the page. This is one of only two remaining letters from my grandfather. It shows him as a responsible and dedicated father and family man in a network of a large and supportive family. In a few years, the picture will be quite different.

My very beloved, wise, beautiful, dear, good, clever, educated Merele – live in happiness. I'll give you a report about your dear ones that I am looking after. Your little birdie Shirley is, thank God, frisky and cheerful, and is very popular. Everybody wants to have her stay with them. Celia [the wife of Sam's nephew Martin] *asked me to let our birdie stay with her. I said I would have to ask Sarah* [Miriam's sister]*, and Sarah promptly said she wouldn't give her up. But Shirley is at Celia's now and she's taking very good care of her, and she'll take her to school every day. The boys feel fine, and are having a good time. I bought them fine suits and hats. We'll be praying at the Taylor Street synagogue. They have a good cantor this year, and a good rabbi. All the relatives want to have us over for the Holy Days* [Rosh Hashonah]. *So we will make them all happy. Tonight we'll have supper at Mendel's house* [Sam's brother]. *Tomorrow dinner at Minnie Goodman's* [a cousin]. *Tomorrow supper at Esther's* [Sam's sister], *and then at Itze's at Celia Brown's. I'm surprised that you did not get my letter with the check for $200. I sent it before Esther's letter. If you've already gotten it you can hold it until you need money again. As to my business affairs, I have nothing to write. As of now I have not made any money yet. The times are very bad here, but I hope things will get better. God will have to come up with something because we have many needs.*

I have spoken with the relatives about California, and they all say I should go there first and then they will follow. They're all urging me to do this. I'm sending you New Year cards. You can send them to our friends in Iowa. I don't have their addresses. I have sent cards in Detroit to relatives and friends. Your present, which I sent you, for whisking bread crumb – I hope it will always work for us, so that we always have enough bread for it to whisk. I must end because we have to go to the synagogue right away. The boys are dressed up in their new clothes and the cleaner has just brought my suit. Goodbye for now, my dear wife, and a good and happy year. Your Sam.
Regards to my dear beloved little daughter Esther. I sent her a silk bag as a present for the Holy Days because she is just like silk herself.

Esther's treatments were not successful, and she remained with a withered right arm. Nevertheless, I remember her as a vibrant young woman, always driving a flashy Buick convertible and successfully carrying on the business of the Slobin Realty Company. Back in Detroit, as my father put it, "The auto industry wasn't doing too well by 1926," so Sam decided to try his luck in California.

A Western interval

At the end of 1926 Sam and Miriam set off with the three younger children, leaving Norval in Detroit to finish high school in January 1927. In those days before ubiquitous telephones, rapid and efficient long-distance communication was carried out via Western Union telegrams. Miriam later pasted three of these into her scrapbook. And they were, indeed, written in "telegraphic English," since every word was charged. Detroit Mich Jan 26 1927 8:00 AM to Mrs S K Slobin: GRADUATED THIS MORNING RECEIVED HIGHEST HONOR IN SCHOOL WITH LOVE NORVAL. / Los Angeles Calif Jan 26 1927 11:57 AM to Norval Slobin: LOVING CONGRATULATIONS SON WERE PROUD OF YOU SUCCESS AND JOY MOTHER AND ALL. Norval joined them later in Los Angeles (leaving his sweetheart Judith Liepah—my future mother—behind): Beaumont Calif Feb 19 1927 3:40 PM to Mrs Slobin: TRAIN VERY LATE WILL PHONE ON ARRIVAL TO GET ME NORVAL.

Sam's financial ventures, however, didn't prosper. There's no record of what he did or why he failed, but my father said it was not real estate. So in the summer of 1927 the family trekked back to Michigan (and the romance between Norval and Judith proceeded to marriage in 1932 and my birth in 1939). My father remembers the return to Detroit as a great cross-country adventure in a Buick sedan that could cruise at 65 mph. By then there were paved roads and gas stations across the continent, and they explored such places as the Redwoods, Mt. Rainier, and the Great Salt Lake on the way back. Here they all are in that grand old product of General Motors—a family of well-dressed travelers.

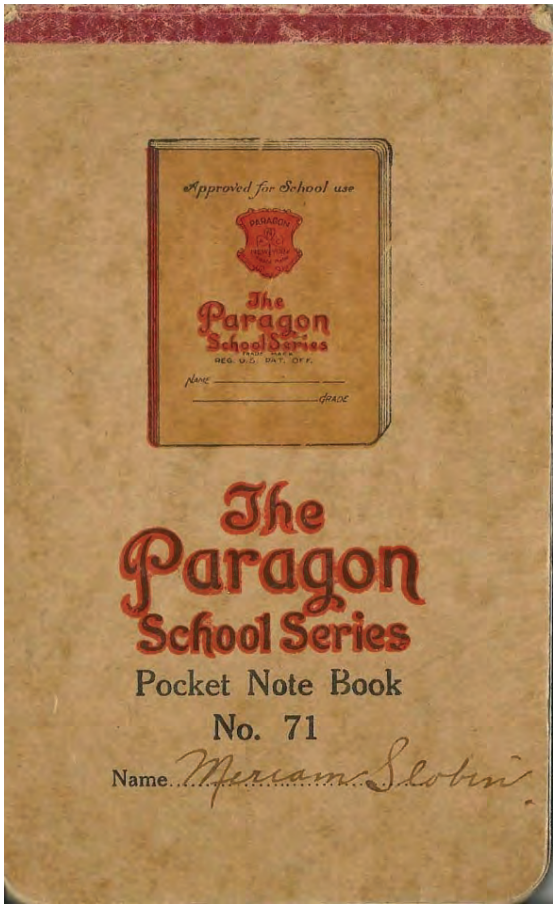
Miriam Esther Shirley Sidney Norval Sam

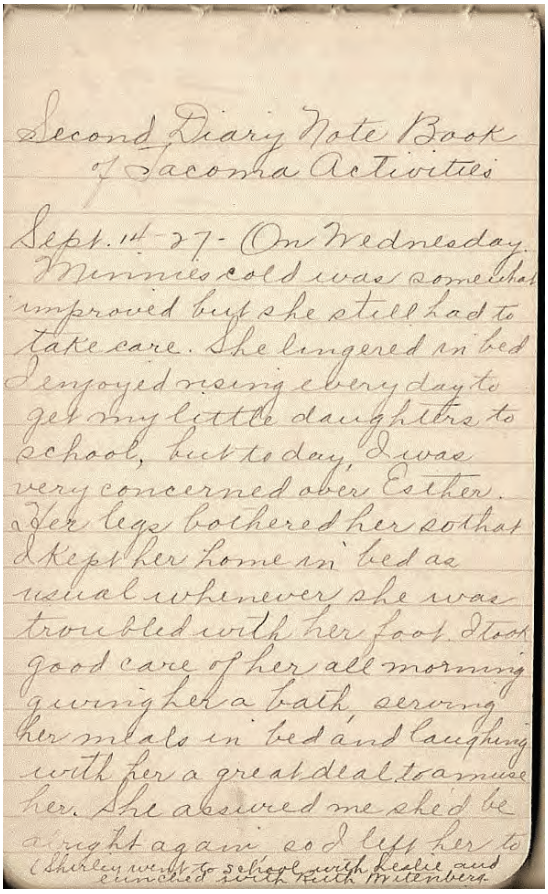
They divided up on the way home. Miriam and the two girls went to Tacoma, Washington, to spend the summer and the High Holidays with friends there. (She always made it a point to be away from Detroit during the hay fever season and Tacoma was one of her retreats, along with Northern Michigan.) Her whereabouts were reported by the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle,* preserved in clippings in Miriam's scrapbook. She regularly posted accounts of family events—a forerunner of Facebook a hundred years ago.

S. K. Slobin and family have motored from Los Angeles, Calif., to Tacoma, Wash., where Mrs. Slobin and daughters are now the guests of Mr. and Mrs. J. Sussman, formerly of Detroit. Mr. Slobin and sons motored back to Detroit after six months in Los Angeles. Among the many interesting places they visited were Sequoia National Park, Yosemite Valley, Mt. Tacoma and Yellowstone National Park.

Mrs. Samuel K. Slobin and daughters, Esther and Shirley, have returned to their home on Clairmount avenue after having spent the past six months in the west. Mrs. Slobin and her family spent the summer in Los Angeles, but visited also in Washington and Iowa.

We are fortunate to have part of a record that Miriam kept of the three months that she spent in Tacoma, "Second Diary Note Book of Tacoma Activities," running from September 14 to October 12, 1927. This detailed record gives us a rare glimpse into Miriam's thoughts and the social world of those times. She was an American woman in her late thirties, with two teen-age sons who had gone off with their father, remaining with two young girls, ten-year-old Esther and five-year-old Shirley. They were staying with friends, a Jewish family originally from Bay City, who also had four children. Here I'll present fragments of the diary, with interspersed commentary. The entire document will be placed in a digital archive.




Second Diary Note Book
of Tacoma Activities

Sept. 14th 27 - On Wednesday Minnie's cold was somewhat improved but she still had to take care. She lingered in bed I enjoyed rising every day to get my little daughters to school, but today, I was very concerned over Esther. Her legs bothered her so that I kept her home in bed as usual whenever she was troubled with her foot. I took good care of her all morning giving her a bath, serving her meals in bed and laughing with her a great deal to amuse her. She assured me she'd be alright again so I left her to Shirley went to school with Leslie and lunched with Ruth Millenbers.

The major protagonist in the diary is Minnie Sussman, the woman of the house, born in 1890, like Miriam; moved from Bay City to Tacoma in 1913. Here she is in 1938. She and Miriam are buddies—getting the giggles together, supervising and coordinating the children's activities, planning dinners and parties, visiting or entertaining friends. Miriam is concerned about how she'll be perceived in Tacoma—her appearance, her behavior, and her self-described role as a writer and a literary person. In the course of these weeks some of the children get sick. It's also the time of the high holidays. The writing, though only to the self, often has the formal prose of a nineteenth-century novel, but peppered with American expressions of that era. Miriam writes of "my girlies," "kiddies," "hubbies." They put on their "duds" to get "dolled up." This is also the inner world of a Jewish American woman, and so there are occasional Yiddish and Hebrew words, one expression even written in the Hebrew alphabet. Consider this observation, which sounds to me like a line from an early twentieth-century Jewish Jane Austen: *"I tried to call Mrs. Witenberg when I returned to acknowledge the glad news from her of her sister's engagement—the librarian Miss Endelman to Mr Malikoff of Seattle. The phone was out of order, so I was disappointed. Minnie finally got ready to trot out with me in the sunshine and while walking nicely I suggested seeing Mrs. W. Minnie agreed, eyeing me but went cheerfully, and Mrs. W was surely thrilled with our response."*

In some ways the life of almost a hundred years ago is familiar: people make local phone calls, go to movies, go out for ice cream, go places by car, read newspapers. But they wait impatiently for letters, walk to visit friends or go shopping, and are enmeshed in daily worlds of intense social interaction. They smoke cigarettes and play cards. And when they prepare to go back to Detroit, they pack their trunks and anticipate being taken to the train depot. However, all we have here is a precious view of one lived month. I don't know how or when Miriam, Esther, and Shirley got to Tacoma nor when they left. Miriam writes of "going home," and so it seems that a home had been maintained in Detroit during the Los Angeles interim. Here are some of the repeated themes, with Miriam's words quoted in Italics.

Planning a party, self-presentation.

Miriam was very active in synagogue and charitable organizations, and she and Minnie were both members of the Order of the Eastern Star. The major event of the month is planning a large luncheon at the Tacoma Hotel, which was the place for important occasions. *"Responses were coming over the phone and by mail and Minnie was in up to the neck, every minute." (9/14) "Minnie surely thrilled me wrapping the prizes all so originally. Our colors were all shades of autumn and the boxes showed it all tied with novel ribbons in autumn shades. We had to arrange cards, etc. and I got a good kick out of those preparations that night." (9/18) "We arose thinking of our approaching festal*

affair… We left this afternoon open for a manicure, hair clip etc. I was glad I had taken my massage on the Saturday previous, so I could feel relaxed for the party. … The evening was quiet and yet full of anticipation for the next day. … Minn stayed up later still planning how to seat her guests congenially for the morrow. I enjoyed watching her handle the little cardboard pieces with names. They were as real as the people themselves." (9/19) "This was our gala day. … Minn asked me to pick some flowers at a neighbor's for our tables. … The newspaper phoned for us to come and pose for a photo. … We reached the hotel at 11:30 with many packages, all accessories to the party, place cards, flowers etc. even an extra dress and shoes. We were well pleased with the tables and all set to work. I was very calm and self-possessed. … At 12:30 the guests began to arrive. … I felt quite confident in my clothes and felt much at home with the ladies all." (She lists the guests—all women—at the head table, which seated twelve, and writes that the other tables were set for eight and nine. The food was "delicious," after lunch the ladies "cheerfully" played cards. She is unsure of herself as someone from out-of-town, and is grateful that Minnie has involved her and that she was accepted.) *"I was thrilled with the way I was received and heard whispered compliments and so many out loud." (9/20)*

Missing home, concern for her ailing sister, intimations of an uneasy marriage. *"We attended a card party at the Temple in the evening. … It was a very nice affair and I enjoyed it tho it brot a longing in my heart to be home.* (She had been away from Detroit for about nine months.) *Sarah's card saddened me again and my every thot was for her health. I was brave and endured and conquered better than before by 9 being thankful for all things good." (9/14)* (Miriam's sister Sarah suffered from a debilitating disease; more of that later.) *"I arose feeling so very dilapidated, I wondered which "safety first" method to adopt. I thought of the hot bath, and tried to write my necessary letters to divert that homesick spasm that was downing me. … We had intended to attend the Temple service that evening, but I was unable to get into the mood. … That night tho, I just felt that I must have the diversion of a movie. I was so disturbed about Sam's mail going astray and poor Sara's condition always depressing thots began to gather so I wanted diversion to get control – and that I finally <u>got</u>. Minnie went with me in spite of feeling tired from her shopping. It was not a picture to enjoy, "Simple Six," but I was delighted with the Vitaphone for the first time, and went to bed more relaxed." (9/16)* (Vitaphone was a new sound system for movies, in which the soundtrack was issued separately on phonograph records that were played in synch with the movie.) *"I took to the Crystal Baths for my needed massage. I surely was benefited, especially when I reached home and found a letter from Sam. The letter was apologetic and explanatory. He begged us to excuse his not sending us birthday gifts." (9/17) "I wrote my diary and thot about what I'd write Sam in the morning." (9/18) "In the evening at the table, a few tears fell when Mr. Sussman asked where my men where for Yontoff."* (Rosh Hashonah was the following day.) *(9/26). "I was hoping I could soon plan the day for departure. After such a cordial long stay, I wanted to relieve the dear family of Sussmans and see the dear family of Slobins in Detroit. I had been quite homesick over the holidays too." (9/30) "I was thrilled and excited over the arrival of my hubbie's letter with big check for fare home and enough*

to settle for other check. The explanations for its occurrence were clear and I excused Sam entirely."

Amateur writers.
"We reached home a bit more tired from talking than from walking but cheerful enough to hurry away to the meeting at the Fromans Social Club where Minnie had to serve on the refreshment committee. Mrs Ray, a writer was particularly anxious to meet me, from what Minnie had told her of me. We chatted of our hobby of writing, and she asked for an appointment with me to see my work and show me some of hers and also asked us at her table for the Drama Legean Style Show." (9/29) (Miriam and Minnie went out to call on various in what was clearly an intimate Jewish neighborhood.) *"We played bridge and enjoyed another Yontoff* [holiday] *feast. Minnie read a bit from her Tacoma play Mrs. White's Pink Tea, while the guests wrote autographs for me." (9/28) "Thots led to Yom Kippur preparations but Minnie had plans also for a style show by the drama league at the Winthrop Hotel. … We were in time for Kol Nidre" (10/5) "Didn't sleep well that night and rose at three to scribble verses to Minnie." (10/6)*

A bit of religion.
Rosh Hashonah: *"I enjoyed the service as much as it is possible to enjoy reading my little bit of Hebrew, while kind folks assisted me in keeping the place." (9/27) "We used the car to get to shool* [synagogue]*, prayed again, whispered laughed and hoped." (9/28)*
Yom Kippur: *"Lounged a bit in the morning, reaching shool after 12:00. Enjoyed greeting friends and joining services. Reviewed my knowledge of Hebrew. Esther called for us late in afternoon and all joined Mrs. Olswang home where we had a fine feast. Later others dropped in to play bridge. … tho the ladies were tired and anxious to reach home we waited for the men to rise from their game." (10/6)*

Life in an era of childhood illnesses.
"Minnie and I decided not to allow the children at any movies because of the Infantile Epidemic [polio] *in Tacoma, so I wanted to spend the afternoon with the children pleasantly. I took them downtown to shop for their own pleasure." (9/17)* (Minnie's son Leslie got the mumps and Miriam stayed home to care for him, trying to keep her girls away. On another day Esther was home with a cold.) *"I took good care of her all morning, giving her a bath, serving her meals in bed and laughing with her a great deal to amuse her." (9/14)* By October 8 their trunks had been sent off to the train depot with the baggage men and they had train tickets to set off on October 9. But an obstacle arose. *"I was soon thinking of the satisfaction of closing up grips and starting away tomorrow when I spied a most alarmed look on our Esther's face. She looked awe stricken grabbed her cheek and blurted out Mother – Mumps. Well, that was some fine predicament to be in. The children were to have a farewell party at Mrs. H. Friedmans and we were to call on Mrs. Kleiner, and here was a case of stay in Tacoma longer. … Minnie called to speak to the doctor who surprised her with a hurried visit, saying it was a case for a month, proper. On hearing that my first thot was protection to Minnie's children dear Beaty and Rhoda Jane. I at once announced my plans to depart* (from the Sussman's home). … *Minn and I traveled to town and saw the doctor and found suitable quarters for nurse and patient at the Bonneville Hotel. (Wrote hurried letter home to Sam about our delayed trip.) I insisted on moving in that night. I was a bit unnerved but steeled self for everything. Minnie was gracious with every kind assistance serving Esther that day as I had occasionally served Leslie with a meal. She urged me to sup, which I meant to omit, but partook and felt better. Mrs. Sussman was jolly and helpful and laughingly we trudged out of our three months abode." (9/8) "The comfort and peace*

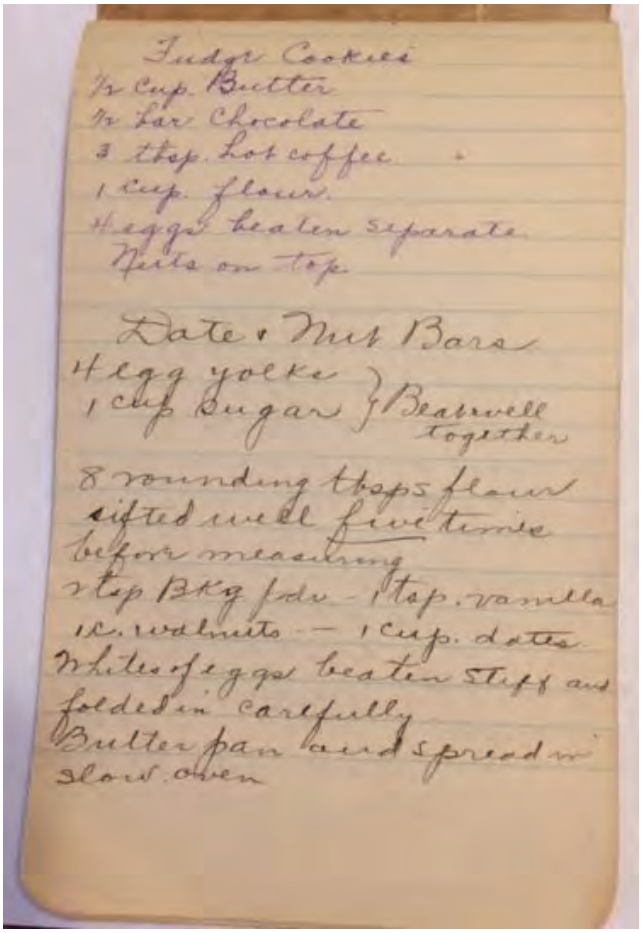
of the hotel did not at once compensate for our disappointment to start for home. … I began to enjoy nursing my dear girlies and getting some much needed sleep." (9/9)

She has bought presents for everyone and concludes: *"I endeavored all thru my stay to do the right thing by each and everyone, hoping my purchases could in some way express my appreciation for what I thot was unstrained hospitality." (10/3)*

The diary ends on October 12 with a copy of a verse that Miriam sent on a card to Minnie's husband:

"In your home I found Gladness and Comfort and Cheer
In your home I found friendliness too
And my happiest visit in many a year
Was the time that I spent there with <u>you</u>."

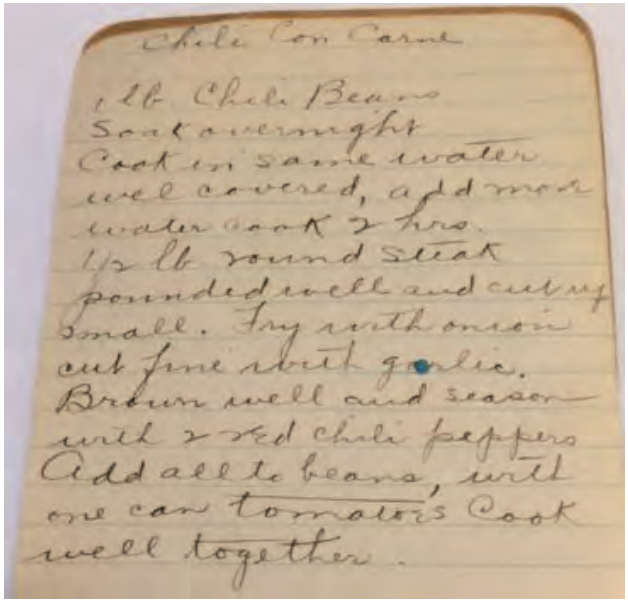
On the last pages there are three recipes. Here they are, should any reader wish to revive the rich tastes of 1927.



Fudge Cookies
½ Cup. Butter
½ Jar Chocolate
3 tbsp. hot coffee
1 Cup. flour.
4 eggs beaten separate
Nuts on top

Date + Nut Bars
4 egg yolks
1 Cup Sugar } Beatwell together

8 rounding tbsps flour sifted well five times before measuring
2 tsp Bkg pdr - 1 tsp. vanilla
1 C. walnuts - 1 Cup. dates
Whites of eggs beaten stiff and folded in carefully
Butter pan and spread in
slow oven



Chile Con Carne

1 lb. Chile Beans
Soak overnight
Cook in same water
well covered, add more
water cook 2 hrs.
½ lb round steak
pounded well and cut up
small. Fry with onion
cut fine with garlic.
Brown well and season
with 2 red chile peppers
Add all to beans, with
one can tomatoes Cook
well together.

A closer look at S. K. Slobin

Sam didn't leave a diary and there are only a few early letters. What can we discern of his personality from photographs? He was remembered as "a dapper dresser." In almost all pictures he has a shirt and tie, as did his sons. (And in almost all pictures he has a cigarette or cigar in his hand.) Here is a photo of father and son—my grandfather and father—in California in 1927. Miriam has added commentary on the photo, suggesting that there was a longstanding playful competition between the two men. Her caption says, in verse: "Father and Son / Neither Outdone." The bottom line gives her judgment for this occasion: "Norval had a lead on Dad here." In a snapshot in the Redwoods Sam looks more sporty, with no vest and with a casual jacket; but he still has a dress shirt and tie (with the tie tucked in) and one of his trademark hats. A snapshot from a picnic later in life shows that this was apparently the standard for relaxed occasions.

Norval clearly followed suit, as shown in this snapshot from his mother's scrapbook. He was not a snappy dresser in the many years that I knew him, but his father apparently provided a model and a sartorial challenge. Here is Norval, probably in 1927.

Sam *Norval* *Sidney*

Of course, Sam could relax too. This photo is from the Great Salt Lake, visited on the way back to Detroit from California in 1927. My father was fond of this picture and the memory of his father floating on his back with his newspaper and cigar, held up by the water. He reminisced about it when we swam in the Great Salt Lake in 1956 and in the Dead Sea in 1985.

Sam enjoyed rough-and-tumble play with kids.

These well-worn headshots, probably from a photo machine somewhere, show a man who enjoyed playing with his appearance.

Perhaps his personality shows most clearly in this magnificent snapshot from the twenties: Sam with his cigar and elegant clothing, in a shiny open touring car, looking down proudly at the unknown photographer. The passengers are unidentified.

The unraveling

By the end of 1927 the six Slobins were together again in Detroit. Norval went back to courting Judith Liepah and the two of them began to study at the College of the City of Detroit (now Wayne State University). Miriam returned to activities in charitable and social organizations: the Purity Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star (Miriam G. Slobin, Poet Laureate), the Zedakah Club (Miriam G. Slobin, Warder). and B'nai B'rith Women's Auxiliary. These activities continued through the 1930s and 1940s and are documented in detail in her scrapbook, "Clippings of Printed Achievements for Detroit Writers League." We will return to these clippings and verses later. Here I will only note, in passing, a letter of June 29, 1928 from the Tuberculosis and Health Society of Detroit and Wayne County. It is addressed to Mrs. Miriam Slobin, 2900 Clairmount Ave. (so the family had moved on again): "I am enclosing your poem for which I thank you. It will appear in our Cheer-O-Gram for August and I shall be pleased to send you several copies as soon as it comes from the press." Here are Miriam and Sam in that era, probably in their Clairmount Avenue home, looking prosperous, going out together as an elegant couple.

And then, on Black Tuesday—October 29, 1929—the stock market crashed. The Great Depression of 1929 was a blow that S. K. Slobin never recovered from. He had some valuable property that he had been holding onto for his retirement—including some centrally-located Detroit property, next to General Motors Headquarters and the Fisher Building, but the Depression did away with all of that. As my father summarized those hard days: "The Depression didn't actually end until around '39. And don't forget, in the early years of the Depression there was only limited aid but he was too proud to take it. And there was no social security and there was no unemployment insurance, and if you were out of luck you were just plain out of luck. So he would try to do some real estate, buy and sell—a *shakher makher* [wheeler-dealer] but it was rough. And actually when there wasn't enough money coming in from that source, my mother had to tap her brothers in Bay City, particularly Matt. Matt had no earning power, but he had something from before. He was pretty good financially. He was in the lumber business and he had a good business sense." Later, during World War II, Matt's business prospered, as he was able to supply West-Coast Douglas-fir timbers to the building industry at a time when war allocations made it difficult to find commercial lumber.

But Sam was not so lucky. Sometime around 1930 Sam set up a candy store. My father was in college at the time. He often told me of his father's advice to him in those days: "Don't go into business. Get a profession where you have the knowledge and skills in yourself." Norval, majoring in history, was preparing to become a teacher, although his father was pushing him to become a lawyer. My father recalled the economic hardships of that era: "In '31, I graduated from Wayne and got a B.A. and went right from the graduation to the store—he had a candy store on John R—and swept out the store and worked behind the counter. And he eventually got closed out of the store because he couldn't pay the rent. I went to substitute teaching and when I finally got a sub call—I started substituting in September and a call didn't come until December—and I wanted to work out lesson plans for the next day, and the lights were out because he couldn't pay the electricity. It was a rough time."

Miriam and her brother Matthew Greenberg around 1930 (note the resemblance between Matt and Norval)

Sarah Greenberg Lebeson (1895-1931)

During these difficult times, Miriam suffered a terrible blow. We've already encountered, in her 1927 diary, her concern for the health of her sister, Sarah, five years her junior. Sarah had an incurable and painfully debilitating illness, tic douloureux, that affects the facial nerve, causing intermittent, unbearable pain. It was only made worse by operations, leaving her with facial paralysis and continuing pain. The excruciating details are described in a biography of her son-in-law, Henry Kaplan, a distinguished Stanford radiologist.[5] In 1931, depressed and desperate, she hanged herself, leaving a husband and two young girls. She was only 36. Miriam was crushed. She wrote a poem, "In Memoriam":

[5] Charlotte DeCores Jacobs, *Henry Kaplan and the Story of Hodgkin's Disease* (Stanford University Press, 2010). (Kaplan was famous for innovative treatment of Hodgkin's, but that was not Sarah's ailment.)

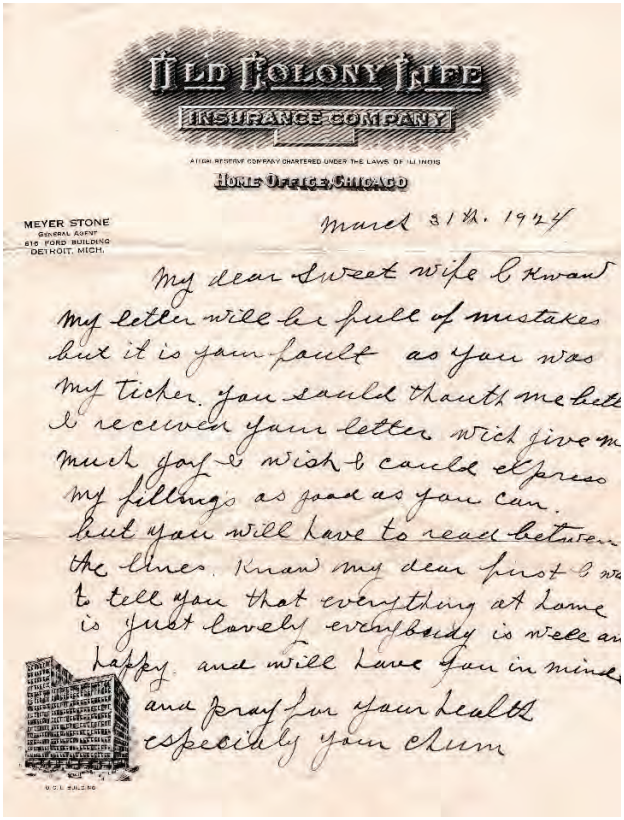
The tears of those who lost you, here inscribe you
Since oh so many here and elsewhere knew your worth.
The angels could no longer see you suffer
And gently gave you rest beneath the earth.
From Heaven above you brought all love and sunshine
Which most mortals seek and never find.
The lives you have touched with every human kindness
Shall ever mourn and leave that truth behind.
Then Heaven found she must recall her Angel,
Who served and suffered patiently on earth.
The host above felt lonely, uninspired,
They needed her; she came to lend her worth.

There was considerable family strain through the thirties—never discussed or described later—leading Sam and Miriam eventually to separate, with some acrimony. Sam's pride was clearly shattered by his economic losses. I remember comments that he had been "a lady's man" and great raconteur, but stories weren't told in my youth, and now all possible witnesses are gone. My father, throughout his long life, avoided emotional discussion, saying that expression of negative feelings could only lead to "the war of all against all." This, he said, he had learned in his childhood home, but he would not say more. The remaining documentation allows us to explore and speculate about my grandparents' relationship. This photo, from sometime in the thirties, shows an unhappy couple, rather different from the pre-Depression pictures.

In 1924, when times were good and the children were young, there is a loving record in a letter from Sam to Miriam, sent on the letterhead of the Detroit office of Old Colony Life Insurance Company, with which Sam must have had some dealings. It is written to Miriam who has gone away for her health—probably one of her annual pilgrimages to Northern Michigan or to Tacoma to escape the terrible Detroit hay fever season.

My dear sweet wife
I know my letter will be full of mistakes but it is your fault as you was my ticher. You sould thauth me better. I received your letter wich give me much joy. I wish I could express my fillings as good as you can, but you will have to read between the lines.

Know my dear first I want to tell you that everything at home is just lovely everybody is well and happy, and will have you in mind and pray for your health especially your chum



Here it is in Sam's handwriting. One can't help noting the difference between his command of the language and his wife's elegant and fluent use of English. This was, in some respects, an intercultural marriage, beyond differences in personalities.

It seems that the marriage was still good in 1926, when we have letters of anniversary congratulation from Norval and from Esther. The letters were sent from the Hotel Wolverine in Detroit, suggesting that Sam and Miriam had gone off on a holiday trip in February of that year. I'll quote both letters here, because they reflect at least the appearance of a happy family, and also because they show the level of formality between parents and children that was apparently expected in those days. The first is from my 15-year-old father in a firm and mature hand:

Dear Parents,
I heartily congratulate you on this happy day of yours, and I hope to see you celebrating your golden and diamond anniversaries with the same peace and joy as this, your sixteenth anniversary. I was glad to be with you today, and I hope you were as glad as I was. May this remain with us as a happy and joyful reminder to us in later years when we are celebrating our own anniversaries, and may our children be blessed with the same kind of parents as we have.
Your devoted son,
Norval

The letter from 8-year-old Esther is in a childish hand, reflecting a family of happy children, all still at home:

Dear Mother and Father
I hope you both have had a very enjoyable time on Sat. Feb. 20 and remember in a very loving memory and think that sixteen years ago of the day when you had a grand wedding. Now you have very loving children one of age 15 one of age 14 one of age 8 one of age 4. All are very happy to think that you have been married sixteen years and have been very happy.
Your loving Esther

But by 1931, the year that Norval graduated from college, the family had fallen apart. Since 1928 Norval had been in love with Judy Liepah, later my mother. To escape from the tensions and chaos of his own family, he spent much of his time at the Liepah home. Sam and Miriam were living apart and Norval had the responsibilities of

the oldest son. His uncle Matt, in Bay City, leaned on him to help provide financial support to the family, but Norval had only occasional work. Sam remained in Detroit and Miriam and the children were living in Hazel Park, just north of Detroit. We have a long letter dated August 25, 1931, from 20-year-old Norval to his mother, who had gone away for "respite from worries and hay fever." (Sarah had committed suicide two months earlier, but there is no record of how the rest of the family dealt with this tragedy.) Norval and his sisters were staying with a certain Swacker family, and there was a Mrs. Swartz who was supposed to help out with the girls, who then were ages 14 and 9. (It's not clear whom Sidney was living with, though there is a hint he might have been with his father.) The letter presents a very grim picture and a plea for a change. He talks about Esther's ear infection, but goes on:

But perhaps worse than her physical condition is her moral danger. Dad and Sidney have been investigating the Swackers on the sly. They claim to have Mrs. Swacker's confession to her own adultery, and the confessions of some of the fellows frequenting the S. house to the effect that they engage in sexual intercourse with girls they pick up there, leading in one case, to pregnancy and abortion. If those things are true, we must move far away from such a corrupting environment before lack of proper companionship elsewhere forces Esther back to this sort. Esther says she has sworn off having anything to do with them, but it seems most advisable to me to have our residence far from here, even though financial considerations still necessitate keeping the store. Esther should be in Jewish, decent company, among her equals. Shirley, too, should be kept from harmful influences. Besides, I think, school opportunities would be better in Detroit. There are rumors that the Hazel Park schools may not open in the fall for lack of funds. Even if they operate, they will probably be inferior to the Detroit schools. …

If we move into Detroit, Dad will be obliged to sleep in the store, so giving you less contact with him, and more opportunity to care for the girls. He says he does not want your help in the store.

For these reasons, then, I think it best for us to move, and to do it before school opens: better social environment, better educational opportunities, and less contact between you and Dad. I have convinced Dad, or at least he lets me believe that I have, that this is the most desirable course. He has offered to do so, with your help. This is where the sad part comes in—you would have to be here to find a suitable place and plan the moving. I hate to put myself in the light of one who has joined the ranks of the enemy, but if you see any better way out of the difficulty, let me know of it.

It may be, of course, that Dad only spoke of being willing to move in order to get me to believe that you would be home, or to get you to come. Still, in view of the danger of the environment to Esther, I can hardly see how he would decide not to move if you did come back.

Saturday, August 29, will be my last payday on the city job. After that date, I shall be more able to discharge the duties you enjoined upon me when leaving. I shall, however, become absorbed into the store again, and shall probably be unable to take the place of a mother to the extent you could, especially if you did not work in the store.

We don't know what happened after that, and have no further documentation of the family situation. My father's oral narrative to me ends in 1931. He was always reluctant to speak of the years of family crisis. My parents were married a year later, in August 1932, and Sam refused to go to their wedding. He was apparently resentful of the time Norval was spending at Judy's home. And he felt that his son should not "marry down" by taking an immigrant from a lower middle class family; rather, he should "marry up," as Sam had done, by taking a native-born American. I know that my parents pleaded with him to attend the ceremony, to no avail. Here we get an impression of a stubborn man and an immigrant who seems to feel a social stigma of not being native-born. My father left the family scene and moved in with his in-laws after the wedding, not able to afford separate housing until 1939 (described in more detail in *Part One*).

Judy and Norval Slobin 1932

This is what Sam looked like in the 1930s—still with a shirt and tie, still; proud of his car. Miriam is in the car.

By 1934 things looked bad, financially and interpersonally, judging by a surviving letter from September, sent special delivery to Sam from Miriam, to an address at 211 W. Mitchell Street, Detroit. She is writing from Petoskey, in Northern Michigan, where she has gone to escape hay fever. It's the time of the High Holidays and they'll be apart. She addresses him affectionately, but sternly, listing many financial woes. The letter has three pages in English followed by five in Yiddish. It is full of hopes for economic success and family reunion, ending with "dayn getroye vaybele"—your faithful little wife. She admonishes him to find ways to earn money, trying to build up his courage and shaking a finger at him at the same time. It seems he has become listless and she has been searching for income possibilities for him. Her criticisms give some window into the man's character, albeit from her own perspective, as well as showing how she talked to him. The Yiddish pages are full of specific detail, suggesting that Yiddish may have been their language of daily interaction. The letter is a mixture of concern, admonitions, and caring, along with her feeling of being cut off from home. There is an undercurrent of desperation. Here are excerpts, first in English:

My dear, friend husband,

I am now answering your English letter of Aug 31… First I'll talk courage to you and then money. …

Now Mr. S. K. I will add that "God helps them that help themselves." … So it is with business. I know there are some things you are not to blame for. Still there are ways that a good salesman like you can still earn a dollar and even more than a dollar. Here I will suggest to you Ben Jacobs business. I found out he has been selling a line of glassware for bar trade and other lines. … I feel that you can sell real estate any time there is really a demand for it. The trick now is, to try to sell the line which there is a demand for.

Now my dear husband, I hope you can find the courage and strength and wisdom to find that line in the right way. Just to tell you to have hope and courage and give a nice line of words is not enough. The idea is to actually get out and make a real search for the right line to sell. I still have hope that we will all make a great grand comeback with health, money and love too. …

Here, in Jewish I will answer your second letter, with the splendid news that God did lend man a hand to help himself.

The following five pages in Yiddish are filled with financial details. She seems to be micromanaging from a distance. Apparently seventeen-year-old Esther is living separately, with some financial aid from her parents. Twelve-year-old Shirley is in the family home in Detroit, where some people named Thompson are supposed to be paying rent. Sidney is somewhere in Canada seeking treatment for his arthritis. There is no mention of Norval, who has been married to Judy for the past two years. Here is my translation of parts of the long letter.

My dear Sam,

Now I can give you a real mazel tov for your real estate deal. May they multiply and bring back happiness. … I still say that real estate will open up. … [Again, she lays out possible avenues to explore.] …

And as I wrote you in English, I'll say it again here – you can see how I've had to conduct everything with so little money. … I know that the rent has to be paid and I only hoped that your Thompsons would pay me. Now I see from what you write that they don't have any money, but if they could look after Shirley properly and give her at least something decent to eat then they could even go without paying until I come back home. If they want to live together with us let's relieve them of the money that they would pay for a room. I'd like to see them there when I come home and it's better for me if they would look after the house a bit so Shirley wouldn't be alone in case they would go away. Or Esther could come home and look after Shirley. … I wrote to Esther telling her to pay less for board. … I'll send Esther a dollar and take it off of my room and board allocation. … I'm looking for someone to move in with me and share my room here so it would cost me only half of $4.50. … You asked me about fixing the furnace and plastering the kitchen and the bedroom. You promised to pay Crowley $93.00. Call Mr. Barker. If you don't have it I don't have it either. I'll have a lot to tell you and I'm not going to waste my time with nonsense. … I think that if God will help us again you'll soon get the $85.00 and make more deals. …

Now yonteff is coming, my dear husband, and with a hay fever wife a lot of men are celebrating alone – the holiday is very early this year. I think you have to be in Shaarey Zedek shul, even without money, and you can eat with Jews. The girls can be together and you can see them. …

I thank God that I got a happy letter from Sidney. He's not having troubles in Canada and is trying every kind of healing, and he's happy that I'm here. He doesn't mention Hot Springs – we'll discuss it further when I'm back. He sends greetings to all of you. …

I beg all of you to be patient until I come back. I can't do better. … I'm happy that I can recover a bit from the hay fever sickness and then you'll be back with a healthier wife. …

It's nice that Mrs. Jacobs is here. She's very good and devoted to me, but I don't ask for anything from anybody anymore. God will take care of everything in the right way. It turns out that I'll go to shul here too and I'll pray for all of you, and all of you there pray for me here. …

Don't forget to go and get your winter coat from the cleaner because it won't be God's fault if you can't find it.

I'm sending my letter by special delivery in case you'd like to answer a few important questions before yonteff.

I hope that you will be back with our daughters, with God's help, until I come back. I can't come sooner, but maybe healthier. May all of you be happy and healthy and have good hopes and write me good news. You write often enough, my dear husband – may your letters be full of good cheer and money. Try to finish things up quickly so that you can come to me. I want to see you here.
Your faithful little wife.

We have no information of their lives after this letter. Clearly they are under both financial and personal stress. Reading this bilingual missive as a psycholinguist, I am struck by how different Miriam's tone is in English and Yiddish. The two languages draw upon different sorts of rhetoric, and I can picture Sam as being disadvantaged when the language was English (and I know he didn't speak Yiddish with his children). Miriam's eloquent command of English could well have kept him off balance. Perhaps this was another reason why he disapproved of my father's marriage to an immigrant, thinking of communication difficulties between the two cultures. However much they were all Jews, Miriam and Norval were Americans while Sam was not. This cultural dimension of immigrant life deserves attention. But I will move on with the narrative.


Harry Greenberg 1891-1938

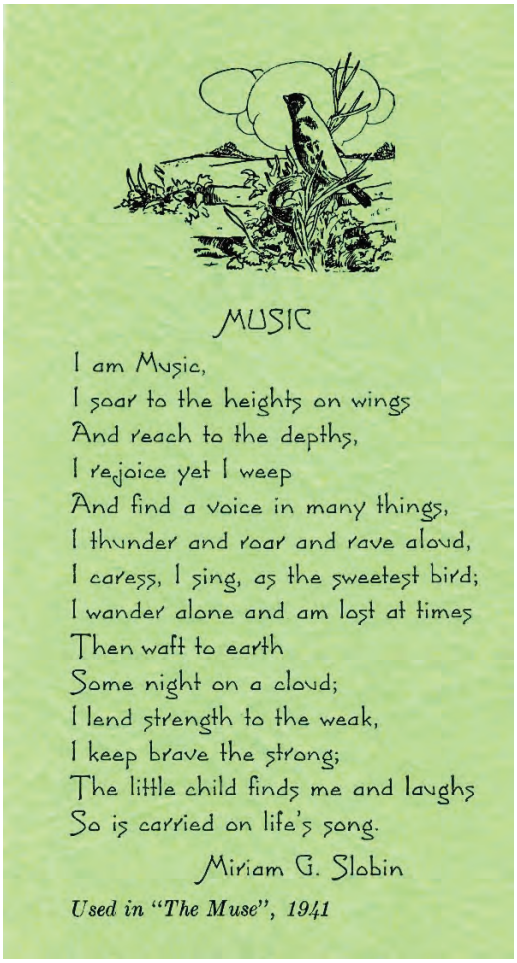
In 1938 Miriam suffered another blow. Her brother Harry committed suicide, leaving a wife and three children behind. His son Edward emailed the following account to me in 2010: "He committed suicide, and was found with his gun in his hand, shot in the head and lying on the grave of his sister, Sarah Greenberg Lebeson, who also had committed suicide. My father loved her very much, and along with other reasons, that was a big contributor to his action for he missed her terribly." He wrote calm and loving farewell letters to his wife and children, in a neat and clear handwriting, sending loving wishes as if he were going away on a trip for a while. He urged the children to care for their mother, to study well, to enjoy life. And a three-page letter to "my darling wifey": "I ask your forgiveness for this last act of mine – I figured it the best thing to do – I am sane and know what I am doing. I want you to know that I love you – always did. … I will be looking on – watching over you over you and them – I will let nothing harm you …
Try to cheer my mother – have the children cheer her – my poor dear mother – I hope she bears up and does not take it too hard – I fear for her – but I just can't help it – I am too weak and sick to go on living as I did … May God Bless you and love you as I do – Good Bye My Dearest, your lover." We don't know if his poor mother, Ida Kimmel Greenberg, or his sister Miriam and her brothers, ever knew of these letters, which only came to light recently. And there is no record of how all of them—and Sam and their children—reacted to this second tragic death in the family. One can only speculate on the motivations for Harry's suicide. The place and manner give rise to many dark possibilities. I visited the Bay City Jewish Cemetery with my father in 1982 and we looked at the graves of Harry and Sarah. But when I asked my father about the rumor that Harry had shot himself on his sister's grave, my father professed to know nothing

about it. We have nothing that Miriam wrote about Harry's death, but he is included in a "Prayer to My Dear Departed" that she wrote after Sam died.

How Miriam spent her time

In the 1930s and 1940s Miriam wrote and distributed many verses and was active in several Jewish social and charitable organizations. As the materials in her scrapbook attest, the two activities were interrelated for her. She saw to it that her poetry was published in Jewish and local newspapers, and she read verse aloud at gatherings. On one page of the scrapbook she lists accomplishments in the period Dec. 1940 – Jan 1941, including the three major city newspapers—*Detroit News, Detroit Times, Detroit Free Press,* as well as the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle*, along with presentations to various venues: Altman's Jewish Hour, Weinberg's Hour, Lipson's Market, General Motors Good Housekeeping Shop, Michigan Lady's House, Boesky's Delicatessen, Hotel Strathmore. She had some of her poems printed out on colored cards (3.25"x6") which she distributed to family, friends, and associates. Others were commissioned as advertising, as this one for a beauty salon.

She was proud to be a member of the Detroit Writers League.

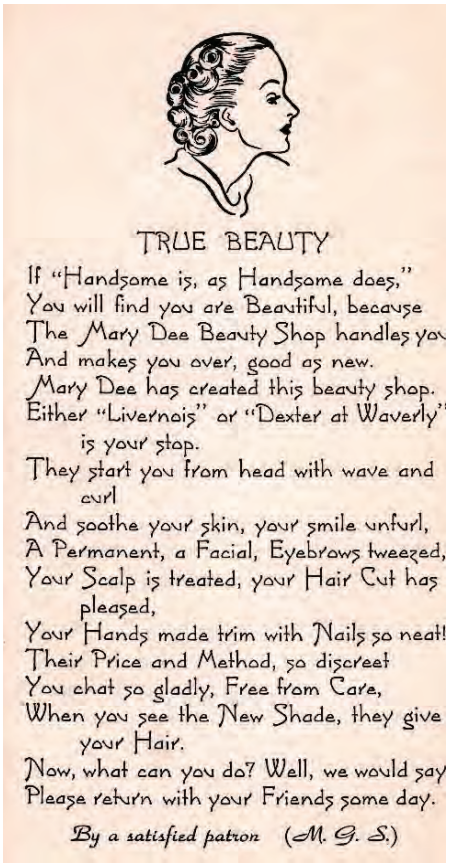


MUSIC

I am Music,
I soar to the heights on wings
And reach to the depths,
I rejoice yet I weep
And find a voice in many things,
I thunder and roar and rave aloud,
I caress, I sing, as the sweetest bird;
I wander alone and am lost at times
Then waft to earth
Some night on a cloud;
I lend strength to the weak,
I keep brave the strong;
The little child finds me and laughs
So is carried on life's song.

Miriam G. Slobin

Used in "The Muse", 1941

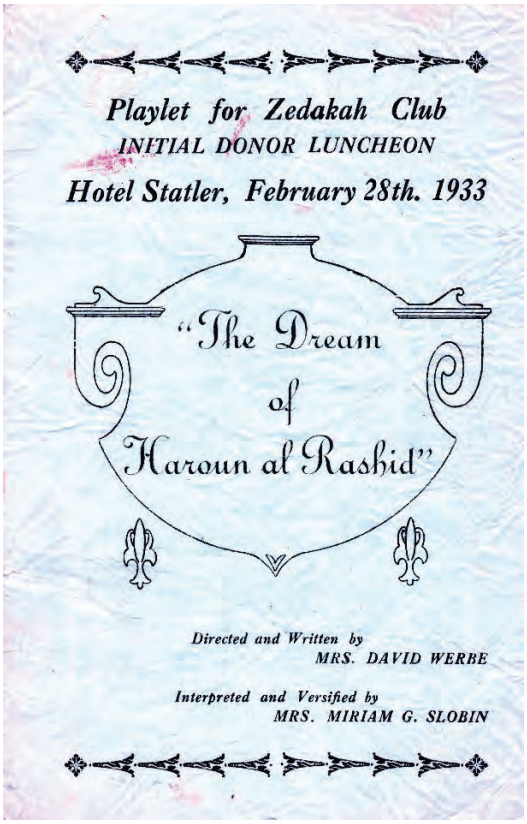


TRUE BEAUTY

If "Handsome is, as Handsome does,"
You will find you are Beautiful, because
The Mary Dee Beauty Shop handles you
And makes you over, good as new.
Mary Dee has created this beauty shop.
Either "Livernois" or "Dexter at Waverly"
is your stop.
They start you from head with wave and curl
And soothe your skin, your smile unfurl,
A Permanent, a Facial, Eyebrows tweezed,
Your Scalp is treated, your Hair Cut has pleased,
Your Hands made trim with Nails so neat!
Their Price and Method, so discreet
You chat so gladly, Free from Care,
When you see the New Shade, they give your Hair.
Now, what can you do? Well, we would say
Please return with your Friends some day.

By a satisfied patron (M. G. S.)

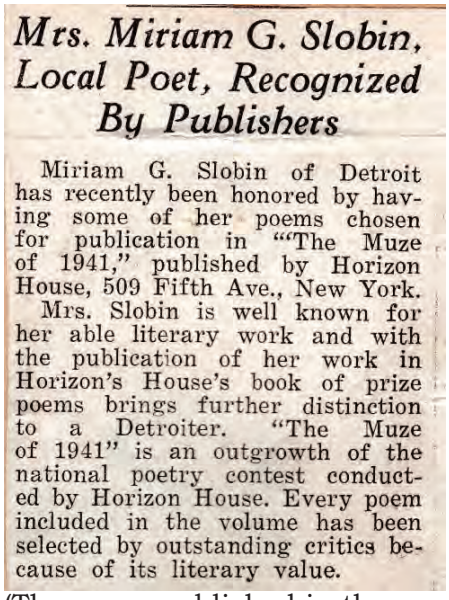
From 1933 there is a booklet containing an entire playlet, "The Dream of Haroun al Rashid," prepared for a donor luncheon of the Zedakah [charity] Club, held in a grand downtown hotel. In 1935 she visited the Women's Auxiliary of B'nai B'rith in Chicago and presented a poem in praise of the organization, of which she was a member in Detroit. She wrote patriotic verses celebrating the American and Jewish flags, Chaim Weizmann, FDR, and Eleanor Roosevelt. She kept many clippings in praise of the First Lady and sent her poem to the White House, receiving an appreciative reply from Mrs. Roosevelt's secretary in November 1941. There were verses to holidays, nature, love, moral strengths and values. And as each grandchild was born, there was a celebratory verse. About my brother Mark, born in 1943, she wrote:


Playlet for Zedakah Club
INITIAL DONOR LUNCHEON
Hotel Statler, February 28th. 1933
"The Dream of Haroun al Rashid"
Directed and Written by
MRS. DAVID WERBE
Interpreted and Versified by
MRS. MIRIAM G. SLOBIN

SUNBEAM MARK

A fair little sunbeam was lost in the sky.
He wandered in Heaven, but did not cry.
Soon he heard a strange beckoning sound
And wafted among us, down to the ground.
With his eyes sky blue and such platinum curls
Our dear little sunbeam is the envy of girls,
But none of his loved one would loan him away,
So, Marky, our sunbeam, is ours, every day.

A clipping from 1941 reflects her pride in achieving recognition through publication as a poet.


Mrs. Miriam G. Slobin, Local Poet, Recognized By Publishers

Miriam G. Slobin of Detroit has recently been honored by having some of her poems chosen for publication in ""The Muze of 1941," published by Horizon House, 509 Fifth Ave., New York.

Mrs. Slobin is well known for her able literary work and with the publication of her work in Horizon's House's book of prize poems brings further distinction to a Detroiter. "The Muze of 1941" is an outgrowth of the national poetry contest conducted by Horizon House. Every poem included in the volume has been selected by outstanding critics because of its literary value.

(The poem published in the volume was "Music," on the green card above.)

In 1949, the year before she died, she wrote a poem to me, then age ten—prefiguring, in a way, the task I am now engaged in.

OUR STURDY DANNY

When first, I wrote of our Danny,
He was just a little lad,
But he has grown studious and sturdy,
A credit to his mother and dad.
I love our Danny and his hobbies,
Drawing, Music, Plays and Books.
To know which he will choose for life
Is yet a puzzle, the way it looks.
He now asks me for my verses
And we truly shall be chums,
For he can read them back to me
When my old age really comes.

What was on Miriam's mind

The topics of clippings in her scrapbook open a window into her preoccupations—her thoughts as a wife, a mother, a budding feminist. "Woman's Brain Is As Good as Man's – Scientific Investigation Reveals No Inborn Mental Inferiority in Female Sex." "Prospective Fathers Study Perplexing Problems of Child Care." "What Is the Real Reason Why We Conceal Thoughts?" "Excerpts from Poems to Mothers-in-Law." "Marriage Throws Barrier Between Mother and Son." "The Faithless Husband Pays." We will pick up these themes in 1941, in two long letters that Miriam wrote to her four children after their father died.

One poignant clipping seems to give a clue to some of the difficulties of my grandparents' married life. The headline reads: "Are You Making Your Wife Look Old?" The answers are all too clear: "Mr. Married Man, if the thought ever comes to you that your wife is rapidly losing her attractiveness, that she is beginning to look a bit old, it would be well for you to blame yourself for the care lines which should not be in her face. If you think seriously on this subject you will remember countless instances when you have not assumed the responsibilities around home which should have been yours, and that has put burdens upon her. You have not done your part in caring for the children. You have engaged in undertakings which have caused her great anxiety. Your demeanor at home has been exacting, domineering, complaining and cross. All these things help to bring premature age marks on your wife's face."

Throughout her life she wrote serious poems about war and peace, religion and morality, and nature. We have seen this already in her 1918 poem about returning veterans. In 1945, after World War II, she published a philosophical poem in the *Detroit Jewish News.*

REFLECTION OF TODAY

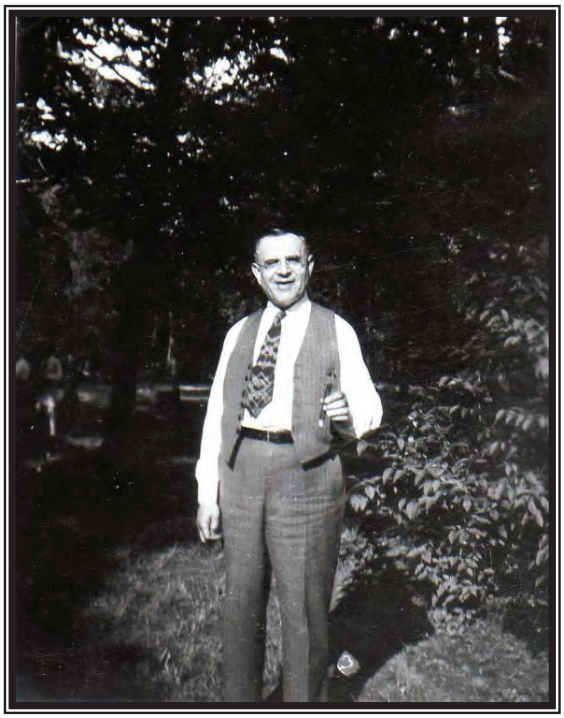
Architectural genius of man brings forth
Edifices of wealth, with the structures of stone.
Mechanical genius of man brings forth
The destruction of wealth of brawn and bone.
Medical genius of man brings forth
Temporary remedies for flesh and blood.
But spiritual genius of man denotes
The real antidote to stem war's flood.
And while ablest minds of ablest men
Plan now Magna Cartas for the world again,
Cold calculation to science ever turns,
Though man's soul for God's truth yearns.
So constituted is man's soul
That following every flimsy goal
It cannot live, survive, create,
While soaked with fear and filth and hate.

Looking back at S. K. Slobin

Sometime around the late thirties Sam set up a real estate company that continued into the 1950s, under Esther's management. I remember the bright neon sign at 9306 Woodward Avenue in Detroit.

There may have been some reconciliation between Sam and Miriam—at least judging from this sweet picture from October 30, 1935. On the back, Miriam has written: "In the character pose of Mr. & Mrs. Scholem Aleichem for a Halloween Costume Party." And on the front there is a note of hope: "In Twenty Years ahead — Mother & Dad Slobin."

Neither of them had those twenty years: he died in 1941, she in 1950—both of sudden heart attacks at age 59. This is probably the last photo of him, much aged, but still with a big cigar.



He passed away on April 21, 1941, in the Strathmore Hotel, where he and Miriam had been living in his last years. He was clearly an active and much appreciated member of the Jewish community. The guest book from his funeral has 231 signatures. There were numerous floral tributes and representatives from the societies and synagogues he had belonged to: Craftsman Masonic, Knights of Columbus, B'nai Brith, Warsaw Club, Shaarey Zedek, Beth Tphila Emanuel. The guest book is carefully filled out by Miriam, with notes of every gift and contribution.

April 21-41

S. K. SLOBIN DIES

Passed at 310 Mon-am

Was Prominent in Mercantile and Fraternal Circles Here for 30 Years

Chronicle Apr 25-

Samuel K. Slobin, for years a prominent merchant and real estate man in Detroit, died of a heart attack early Monday morning at the age of 59. Funeral services were held Tuesday afternoon with Rabbi Harold N. Rosenthal officiating, and burial was in Machpelah Cemetery.

Mr. Slobin was born in Poltava, Russia, in 1881, emigrated to England in 1904 and came to this country in 1905, settling in Bay City, where he was married. He came to Detroit in 1910 and was engaged in mercantile business, later becoming active in real estate. He was one of the men who developed the business frontage on Joseph Campau in Hamtramck.

He was active for many years in Pisgah Lodge of Bnai Brith, Knights of Pythias and synagogue circles, and was an organizer of the Hamtramck congregation, which he served as president. He was also a member of Shaarey Zedek. He was a member of Craftsman Masonic Lodge.

Surviving him are his wife, Mariam; two sons, Sidney and Norville, and two daughters, Mrs. Esther Adelson and Miss Shirley Slobin; two brothers, Mendell of Detroit and Israel of Los Angeles, and two sisters, Mrs. Ida Israel of Detroit and Mrs. Celia Brown of Los Angeles.

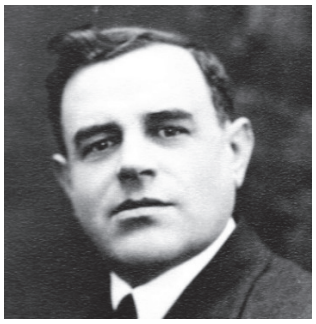
What else do we know about the man? My father said that he was devoted to books and had collections in Yiddish and English (the complete works of Sholem Aleichem in Yiddish and a four-volume *Legends of the Jews* survive). He enjoyed singing Russian songs and, according to my father, his favorite was a gypsy romance, "Moy kostyor v tumanye svetit" (my campfire is glowing in the dusk), about a fellow whose gypsy lover leaves him, predicting that he'll find another girl. Significant, or simply romantic? He was actively involved in Jewish charities, social organizations, and synagogues. And he was known for helping people. My father's first cousin, Bob Israel (the son of Morris Israel and Sam's sister Ida), told me several times that he was eternally grateful to his Uncle Sam for having saved him from the temptations of the notorious Purple Gang (Jewish prohibition-era gangsters) by providing him with a job and alternative life possibilities.

Putting together bits and pieces, he seems to have been vain and vulnerable, risk-taking, hyper-active and lethargic, constantly striving, on the move, probably short-tempered.

He had many setbacks in his life, personal and financial. He felt forever guilty when Esther fell off her bike as a small child and fractured her right arm at the elbow. He spared no money or trips to medical specialists to restore her arm, but it withered and remained a shrunken arm for the rest of her life. Sidney, who had been a tall, handsome athletic youth, was stricken by an arthritis that bent him over. Again, his father searched for medical help across the country, accepting the best medical judgment that removal of the thymus was the cure. The operation left Sidney physically and emotionally crippled for life. The stresses of competitive business life before and through the Depression, constant smoking, marital tension, and other things we'll never know about—all of this must have contributed to the rapid decline of S. K. Slobin. I think that in the end he couldn't cope anymore.

Perhaps an overview of his changing face, from 1910 to 1940, can suggest what sort of man my grandfather was.









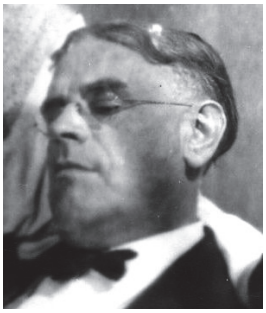










WE



Miriam on her own

That summer Miriam went to Northern Michigan to recuperate. She wrote a memorial poem that she read to meetings of the Order of the Eastern Star and that the *Detroit Jewish Chronicle* published on September 19, 1941.

Prayers to My Dear Departed
By Mrs. S. K. Slobin[6]

Oh Father, dear parent, please pray for us there,
When you were our Baal Tefile here, God answered your prayer.

Oh, Brother, dear Brother, for us your life was spent,
Ask God to ease our Unsane Tokef by whose decree you went.

Oh, Sister, angel Sister, your suffering here was great,
Now with Olem Habo there, plead for us at Heaven's Gate.

Oh, Husband, my Husband, like Kores years, here, was your stay,
Perhaps God wants you there to pray for us a better way.

Oh, Donald, baby son, even an innocent infant's voice
Like Moses, sent from Heaven can make earth's sufferers rejoice.

Oh, grandparents, brave ancestors, who so upheld our Jewish creed,
Vow our Tfilo-Tzuvo, Zdoka now, to save brethren who starve and bleed.

(In loving memory of my father, Samuel E. Greenberg, brother, Harry Greenberg, sister, Mrs. Sarah G. Lebeson, husband, Samuel K. Slobin, baby son, Donald.)

Miriam also wrote two long and serious letters, one to Norval and the other to her four children, all of them already married. The letters are written neatly, in blue-black ink, on both sides of lined paper from a loose-leaf notebook: six pages to Norval and ten pages to her four children. She was a fifty-one-year-old widow with limited means and many grievances. Apparently Sam had left her with no money and there would have been no social security for the widow of an independent businessman. (The second letter indicates that Sam had established a real estate business.) I will quote large segments of these letters: they provide the best insight we can glean of her personality, her state of mind, her relations with her children. She also reflects back on how unprepared she had been to be a young mother, coping with a mother-in-law and living in conditions that did not match the home she had come from. The letter to my father was written from our regular family vacation area—Crystal Lake and nearby Frankfort,

---

[6] A *baal tefile* is the head of prayers. *Unsana tokef* (*unetanah tokef*) is a Rosh Hashona prayer addressed to God's judgment. *Olem habo* is the world to come—that is, the afterlife. I don't know what *Kores years* refers to. *Tfilo-Tzuvo, Zdoka* (*tfilo-tsavoeh*) is a prayer dealing with last will instructions. All of these words are in Miriam's ashkenazic transliteration. Baby Donald died in infancy and is buried in a Detroit cemetery.

on Lake Michigan. Norval was thirty; I was two at the time. I am struck by the formal, even stern tone of the letter. Is this how personal letters were written in the first part of the last century, or is those how Miriam chose to relate to her son? Her despair is heart-rending. At the same time, I can understand my father's need to be away from the maelstrom that had been his parental home and to be creating a safer nuclear family of his own. My parents remained married for sixty-five years; Miriam and Sam's other three children all had marriages that ended in divorce.

My dear פחאָר *my eldest son Norval,*[7]

You know how one can sleep around the area of Crystal Lake and Frankfort. Now that I have had enough sleep here and plenty of time on my hands I think it a good idea to converse with you in this manner. I will be better able to express myself and explain myself.

I have had time to reminisce over the past, realize the present and build some little hope for the future days that are left to me. First, let me say I am grateful to possess a son like you who has the gift to instruct people. I once meant to become a teacher but was not wise enough then to find the opportunity. Now it is still my hope that you will be obliging enough yet to tutor me on certain subjects.

Judy, Norval, Danny at Crystal Lake, 1940

I often mentioned arithmetic. I may yet need to use it strenuously. Then I must learn how to keep in memory what I do read, and how to read to be best benefited. You did not wish to confide any illnesses to me, but I want to confide this. If I do not get my brain to work and not allow it to think back too much it will undermine me. You can help me much.

Whatever thoughts you have harboured about the bygone days of your childhood and upbringing, I'm sure you are now thankful that it was not worse under the circumstances. With a darling little boy like Danny for a son, you now have chances to compare things well. You could have the right to plan somehow, when to have him come – I could not. You could insist to have a proper environment surround him, his own parents in a peaceful sanitary abode trying to harmonize on the way to rear him, God bless him. I could not. You had at least the vital necessary material means to bring a child into your home – at the time of your arrival, I did not. You thought at times you had too much grandmotherly influence. It had to be there because she had to be there – your

[7] A linguistic footnote: She intends the Hebrew word for first-born, בכור, but writes it in Hebrew letters as it sounds to her in Yiddish: *pkhor*. There were similar spellings of Hebrew words in her Yiddish letter to Sam, indicating that she had not had Hebrew education. In her Tacoma diary she wrote of needing help in the synagogue to make her way through the Hebrew prayers. By contrast, my maternal grandmother's Yiddish letters have correct spellings of Hebrew words, reflecting the fact that her father, who wrote and published in Hebrew, had hired a tutor for her when she was young. Miriam's Yiddish was household speech with early training in writing Yiddish using the Hebrew alphabet. As far as I know, the only Yiddish-speaking people in her home would have been her parents, and it was probably important to them that she be able to read and write Yiddish letters and notes. My two grandmothers were about the same age, but whereas Miriam grew up in Bay City, my maternal grandmother grew up in a full Yiddish environment in Ukraine. The two grandmothers spoke Yiddish to each other.

deceased Bobe, may she rest. You will not find that a handicap on my side. Watch the other side.

In a few ways you handicapped us instead Norval, if you will here tolerate my frankness. While I was truly understanding through your romance with Judy and glad you found a harbor of peace and love, even early, I must say that your very constant absence undermined Sidney's health at that time. He was so very restless being left to himself. He could find no substitute for your companionship just then. If you had only severed it more gradually. Well you know what I had to do so tryingly for him, with such antagonism.

I do appreciate greatly the true consideration you did extend to me setting your wedding date to suit my hay fever, not inviting the Browns, remembering me on Mothers Day, though just a card on birthdays would help. I never missed yours. [She recounts a family conflict on the occasion of the last joint birthday of Norval and Sidney, from which Norval was absent and Sidney was distressed.] *Your idea of acting neutral to both parents – because it was the best method – was not so good just at that time. Your father then, may he rest, may have been better adjusted mentally to benefit his condition.*

Now my dear son, there is little use to mention too much about the past except where it can benefit the present and future. Therefore I want to say further dear Norval, if you want to preserve me a while yet to keep me yet from being a burden to anyone, please take note of a few things.

Be just a bit more attentive by seeking me a bit instead of ever waiting for me to seek you as I do. You are courteous enough when I do come, but why can't I expect at least a weekly phone call or visit with Danny Boy now.[8] *I conscientiously kept reminding the others to be instrumental in finding you a home. It was my first good intention to see that you receive a fifty dollar gift to get a car which you graciously returned later in the face of your furnace necessity. If there is anything I really omit it is because of your omissions. You could not even phone me when Danny had his tonsils out.*

I have tried to be as self-reliant as possible, substituting other things for those I wished and could not have. To keep up my spirit for present and future to help self-reliance a tiny bit more attention to vital wishes would help.

Sidney feels grateful to Esther that she is striving so to provide for me.[9] *I would still rather be independent and earn my own living. Since I am left so entirely without means I must guard health more, and be careful how I tax it even to earn. Besides, women of my years with no real training and without sturdy health cannot expect so much in positions these days. It is a miracle how I paddled on this long. I know dear Norval that you have no surplus whatever and I am so pleased to see you all along with your dear wife and baby, and you look nice and have a few comforts and pleasures.*

Since you could tutor Esther into passing her brokers license and Sammy [Esther's husband] *into getting citizen papers and the Keisman boy to grasp our language so quickly – I'll expect you to add a little in some way to my existence too, dear Norv – do you farshtay me* [understand] – [There are no more pages; it's not clear if the letter ends here.]

The letter to Miriam wrote to her four children is even more of a *cri de cœur*, with distress about her own state, along with pointed remarks about the characters and personalities of her children. And, again, we have no information about how it was responded to. This letter, however, indicates a variety of sources of income.

---

[8] I can't resist noting that I received the same message from my father when I myself was a married adult with a son.

[9] At the time, Sidney was 29 and Esther was 24; Shirley was 19.

My dear dear Children

I have returned from Frankfort this year with some recuperation from much needed rest and change after the loss we have had. Here I have had plenty of time to reflect on the past, present and future. It seems that Providence must be holding me here for some good purpose, if I have survived such heartache, grief and humiliation I have so long endured. Heaven and the doctors know that I did all in my power to preserve the health and abilities of your father. He is at rest, and I have long been alone, and will be.

I would like to resolve to keep up health for myself now, so as to go on without ever being much burden to any of you. For this very reason, I ask all of your cooperation.

I would desire my "Pchor" my eldest born son Norval, to contribute at least a little bit of time and attention to my welfare. I hope I'll never need his material aid. [She repeats here much of what she wrote to Norval separately.] *I appreciate all he thinks he does do to make me happy. He is very cordial and courteous when I come to his home and shares his dear Danny with me then. He asks me to sup or dine when I come and is nice about delivering me, where I wish when I'm through, but I would so appreciate if he made the advance to phone or come over and offer me a little use of his fine teaching ability. That would be financial gain to all of us.*

As for my Sidney, I would enjoy just a service from him, at times socially with the proper spirit. Norval is not the social man that Sidney is and has a little boy to keep him at home more so. I do not ask Sidney to take me places where it would take money, but just a bit of escorting like visiting a good friend or taking me on a needed errand. I wish he would keep up his rest and vitality for his own sake somehow, so as not to be so slow and uncertain. I do like his frequent compliments and the certain sincere interest he does take in my welfare and his willing treat when he can afford it. I do not enjoy seeing him gush over strangers (ladies) too much … Mainly I would like to see him give his Anne [Sidney's wife] *a fair and square deal at all times.*

Miriam in front of Slobin Realty Co 9306 Woodward Ave., Detroit

Now you may wonder, what can I request from my mainstay, Esther. She has been earning for me and bearing great responsibilities since last April. She has been sweet about many things, but can also be very bitter, at times. I do try to overlook and understand it. Perhaps if I am frank now, it will go no further and will be of great benefit to her also. Please realize Esther dear, that I'll ever feel that I do own a share in your father's business. Heaven knows, and you should know what sacrifices I have really made to keep it going and finally bringing you into it. So help him and me and thereby help yourself. [She is referring to the Slobin Realty Company, where Esther worked until her early death in 1953, at age thirty-six.] *I have earned and contributed before you did, a few hundred dollars selling dresses here and there from our Clairmount address to Pinehurst.* [Street names here and later refer to locations of houses.] *I brought in about six hundred dollars or so from the Detroit Times, and kept up our Carter house where you received your married start, paying only ten dollars per week – room and board for two. The difference was added from my income. Then nearly seven hundred dollars of my earnings at Murrys went to keep*

your father through his illness on Gladstone and to get the start for your very present stand at the Strathmore [the hotel where S. K. Slobin spent his last months]. *This is besides all that I was receiving from my dear brothers and mother to share with you.*

I have not been able to apply myelf to help you as I wished because of the jury work which followed. That too has earned over a hundred dollars in cash, which meant my trip North. It saved twenty dollars on the rent and thirty dollars salary. The extras that you spent cash for me for since April amounted to seventy dollars or so, and you had at least that much from our old car besides the full use of it.

Above all Esther, dear, I'll ask you nto to humiliate me again over money. Your attitude over Dr. Erman's five dollars kept me from taking more hay fever treatment and the cleaner's bill meant as much saving as expenditure, and was exaggerated. I'm sure I'm trying to practice exonomy where I can. I do not smoke, drink or entertain. I may have to begin.

What I received as a ten dollar salary, I really earned by being personal maid, office girl and mother. I want to feel that I am earning it. You are carrying on a business and making a profit for it. You were the child of mine who was so anxious to furnish security for me. When can it begin? […] *I really want to learn something about the business and believe that we can build a fine Slobin Realty Corporation with all the children in it.*

Now I must also have a few stimulating diversions. I'm getting very weary of just meetings. My heart is quite, quite broken though I'm not carrying it so much on my sleeve. I've been lonely for a long long time and cannot remain so much longer. So, dear brave Esther you may believe that I fully realize and understand your trials too. […]

Well my dear Shirley, now I come to you. I know how much better and securer you feel with your dear husband.[10] *You have been quite a brave scout in weathering a few things. You have kept your dignity and self-respect, though you may have wounded mine quite often. I really struggled to find you bigger opportunities. I thought you wished for them but found that you did not care to struggle too hard for school or position or further luxury. It is fortunate that you are now settled as you are, without a father to be responsible for you. Your father Friedman is doing a nice job for you, now.*

I ask only that you please remember how I did try to build and even earn a home for you a number of times. […] *As it was, I held onto Pinehurst, dug up Carter and kept it as long as possible for you to love and enjoy a nice sweet sixteen party. I made a place for you at the Strathmore even if you didn't like it. I realize why, but could I give more than I had to give? You have been a good and patient girl at other times helping me move from Pinehurst, helping a little on Gladstone, but first a little more patience and consideration before your wedding would have meant so very much to me. You literally walked out. I feel that those stabs that were added to my life, before and after your father's passing have sunk so deeply that they may not heal. I feel a certain physical destruction going on within, no matter what I do to continue to keep up – without.*

After controversy and indecision, I finally did win Esther over to your large wedding – to dress and come etc. I did maneuver a shower and special gifts and may have added more had you remained home with me to plan. You were getting down physically and needed assurance and stimulation, which I may have added. Instead, you depleted me with your indifference.

Now, I'll hope that you'll ever be happy and sometimes realize fully what really interfered and spoiled my life. I'd enjoy planning a family night – even at the Strathmore one night a

---

[10] Shirley married Arthur Friedman on August 10, 1941, as attested by clippings from *The Detroit News* and *The Detroit Free Press*, in Miriam's scrapbook. A clipping from a Bay City paper notes that the bride's grandmother, Ida Greenberg, and uncle, Matt Greenberg, attended the wedding. Another clipping lists several showers that were given before the wedding, including a luncheon hosted by Mrs. Samuel Edelman—that is, Esther Slobin Edelman.

week. I'll leave it to you to invite me to any special evenings or occasions you may wish, and even spend an afternoon off with me yourself or go shopping with me to help Esther.

I mean to resurrect a little of my life yet, instead of collapsing too soon and giving you all the expense of an added monument. I'll try to plan for that too before I leave this world. If my boys and girls are willing to lend their sincere interest and love, I could linger longer. I'll ever do my share as long as strength permits.

I am not making demands on your dear mates, my children. I almost think they have done better than you. Sammy is the crude one but he will learn too in time, because he is really kind within. He may even join the others in calling me Mom. I'm very pleased with Anne and Art has made a nice start. Judy has improved immensely.

Now for the Slobin Slogan all together

United we stand,
Divided we fall.

Mostly, I'll fall, if you do not help me stand yet a while as

Your own loving
and devoted
Mother.

This picture was taken sometime in 1942, probably by Shirley's husband Art Friedman. (Esther's marriage to Sammy Edelman was short-lived.)

Esther Sidney Anne Miriam Shirley Judy Norval

Miriam's last years

The meetings and organizations and poetry writing continued through the 1940s. Ida Kimmel Greenberg died in 1946, after enduring the suicides of two of her children. Her name is in the visitors' book at the funeral of S. K. Slobin in 1941. She lived to meet at least two of her great-grandchildren. I've discussed my visit to meet her when I was six, and we've seen a four-generation picture with Ida, Miriam, Norval, and little Danny in Detroit. Great-grandmother also met Shirley's daughter Carol (now Joy Wasserman), who was born in 1943. Here is a four-generation photo on the stoop of the Bay City house on 211 Sheridan, with Ida, Miriam, Shirley and Carol Friedman.

Miriam Ida Carol Shirley

Miriam's youngest brother, Bert Greenberg, died at 43 of a heart attack in 1948. He had enlisted in the Navy in 1942 and I remember him as a cheerful young man with a sailor's cap. His obituary describes him as "general manager of Matt Greenberg Lumber Sales." The three brothers, Bert, Matt, and Hy had remained single while carrying for their aged mother and running the lumber business from the house.

After the deaths of Ida and Bert, Matt married and moved out to live with his wife, who ran a tourist home. Hy remained alone in the old house, with his hunting dogs. Miriam did not suffer the loss of her remaining brothers: Matt died in 1969, Hy in 1974.

Bert Greenberg

Hy Greenberg

My father's Bay City uncles weren't like any of my Detroit relatives. It was hard for me to believe that these Michigan hunters and lumber merchants could speak Yiddish. Matt was even more of a puzzle. He looked and talked like my father, but was the only Republican I'd ever met. He and Dad would have long political discussions when we visited Bay City. I was astounded that my father's Uncle Matt ridiculed Dad's devotion to FDR and the New Deal. Matt was, after all, a small town successful businessman.

The Jewish Hunters of Southeastern Michigan

Hy Greenberg

Matt Greenberg

Sidney and Anne had a daughter, Sheila, born in 1942. And my brother Mark was born in 1943. Grandmother Slobin had time to enjoy her young grandchildren. Sheila's parents were soon divorced and she remained with her mother. For a while they lived across the river in Windsor, Ontario; later Anne remarried and moved to Brooklyn. Sheila came back often to visit and she, Carol, and I were close friends. Miriam welcomed the granddaughters with verses.

OUR ELF, CAROL JOYCE

I love a little lassie,
Whose style is ultra classy,
Her smiling eyes are dark,
She chats with fiery spark,
Insists she will serve herself,
Our dear Carol is that little elf.

PRINCESS SHEILA KAREN SLOBIN

A pretty princess from a fairy book,
Wooed our love, with her first look,
Deep as a pool are her lovely blue eyes,
Sweet as music, her "ohs" and "whys"
Sheila darling, your name is a lovely song,
Which lives in our hearts the whole day long.

Grandmother Slobin lived in a one-bedroom apartment building on Gladstone where she entertained us occasionally with lunches or family dinners. She took me to see my first movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, when I was three or four (the movie was released in 1939); when I was eight she took me with her to hear a great cantor sing Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur. (This was in the B'nai David synagogue of which Mendel Slobin—Sam Slobin's brother—was the president.) I remember these rare outings with Grandmother as very special.

The last grandchild that Miriam met was Shirley and Art's son, Douglas Earl Friedman, born in 1945. Of course, Miriam welcomed him with a verse.

PRECIOUS DOUGLAS EARL, "THE EARL"

Have you seen our Donald Duck,
Who became an Earl by luck?
He is so cute so good,
A joy in his neighborhood.
In his home, he's a priceless pearl.
And in ours, he's a reigning Earl.

In the summer of 1948 an unknown photographer (probably Norval) captured her with three of the grandchildren outside of her apartment. This may be the last picture of Miriam with my generation. She died of a sudden heart attack in March of 1950, at age 59. The physical and emotional strains that she had described to her children nine years earlier had taken their toll.

Grandmother Slobin
Marky Danny Sheila

As the family sat shiva for her in Norval and Judy's home, Miriam's two daughters were pregnant. Esther had married John Pintarich in 1949; their first son, Michael, was born in 1950. Shirley and Art Friedman's third child, Mark, was also born that year. Both Michael and Mark were named after Miriam. The circle of grandchildren was completed with the birth of Paul Pintarich in 1953.

If there is a family curse, it didn't go away. Three of Miriam's children died young, of physical causes: Esther at 36 (1953), Shirley at 46 (1968), Sidney at 56 (1969). Only Norval lived on, until 86 (1997). And if there is a curse, it hung over my generation too. Three of us died young: Douglas of suicide, Sheila of drug overdose, Paul of cancer. Miriam was spared further grief.

On September 4, 1949, she wrote a holograph will for her four children, laying out her desires for her funeral and burial.

> *My dear and precious children –*
> *Norval – Sidney*
> *and Esther and Shirley*
>
> *I started this idea of being prepared for the worst, while ever hoping for the best, so –*
> *In case I am ever so incapacitated that I cannot convey my thoughts to you – or leave this world – suddenly through God's will only – I leave these notes – just to make it easier for all of you – my dears.*
> *Do not grieve for me seriously or go into prolonged mourning past a week or month, but –*
> *Please do remember how I struggled for all of you – against such adverse circumstances.*

She specified details of the funeral service, requesting a simple casket and a white dress with a carnation. S. K. Slobin had purchased two rows of cemetery plots next to the graves of his parents. Miriam requested:

> *Use the first lot – of the adjoining Slobin burial lots – on Machpelah Cemetery – not the row in which your Dad is resting.*

Her children had her buried at her husband's right hand, according to convention, and with matching tombstones.

Miriam Greenberg Slobin's last public words were in the form of a poem that she wanted read at her funeral.

IF I WERE BORN AGAIN

If I were born again, I wish that it could be
Into a safer, saner world
Where all peoples could be free;
Where Justice were not blind
And Love so far would see,
That bread and health be plentiful
For all, and you and me.

If I were born again, I wish that it could be
Into a happy, beautiful world
Where all the blind could see;
Where there could be no maimed,
Where there would be none blamed
For any wrong, not even you and me.

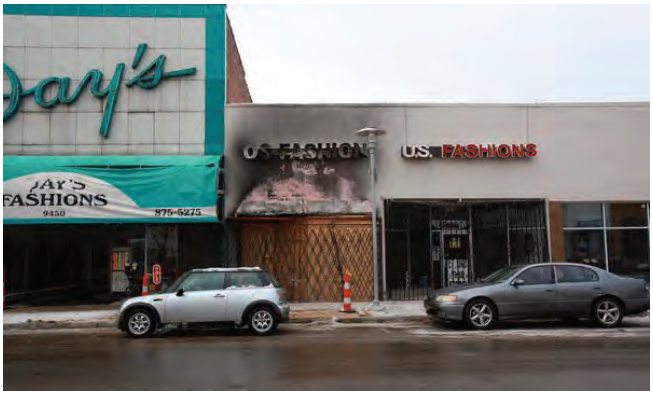
If I were born again, I wish that it could be
Into such a world, where war could never be,
Where money were not God,
Where future generations trod
In racial and political harmony.

If I were born again, I wish that it could be
With the very same beloved ones
That Heaven gave to me;
Where neither Time nor Death could change
My life to disarrange
All that first was dear to me.

Epilogue – Michigan Sites a Century Later

Hamtramck

The world that S. K. Slobin worked to build up rose and fell in the course of a century, and now is rising again. A *New York Times* headline of December 28, 2010, says: "Michigan Town Is Left Pleading for Bankruptcy." The article reports: "Hamtramck — once a community of more than 50,000 people but now fewer than half of that — grew up around an enormous auto factory that John and Horace Dodge built here a century ago." The Dodge factory was long since gone, and the *Times* provided a bleak picture of Joseph Campau Avenue, the main street that S. K. Slobin helped to develop, the street where my father was born. But then GM revived Hamtramck with a thriving assembly plant that produces the electric Chevrolet Volt, as well as Cadillac DTS and Buick Lucerne. GM is hiring and the population is now around 23,000. What was once a Polish town is now a diverse community with Bangladeshis, Yemeni, Bosnians, Iraqi Chaldeans, and others. In 2015 Hamtramck elected the first majority Muslim city council in the United States. The original Polish population and culture has remained, providing wonderful images of ethnic diversity, such as this one of the Polish Market on Joseph Campau (www.csmonitor.com). But the address where S. K. Slobin had his store, where my father was born, is now a block of overgrown fields, as seen on Google Earth.



Detroit

The decline of my hometown is well known and need not be recounted here. Many of the houses in which the Slobins lived are gutted, abandoned, or gone, while others have been restored and are lived in. A large and complex metropolis is now a half-empty, distressed city with tracts of vacant lots, beginnings of urban farming, and lively renewals of music and the arts in restorations of cheap houses. There are details of Detroit family homes in Part One of this memoir.

Here is the Strathmore Hotel, where S. K. Slobin died in 1941, and Google Earth's view of the building in 2010.

Strathmore

Rosebush

I visited Rosebush, for the first time, in August 2011. It has remained a village, with a few shops and churches, vacant lots, a few shaded streets with seemingly comfortable homes, and an active public library where children were working on computers and a book discussion group was gathering. The population was 370. The site of S. K. Slobin's store seems to still be there, though reduced to a single story. Compare his postcard view of 1909 and the same place in 2011, without the color.

1909

2011

Here is the whole remaining ensemble in color.

A side view of what I think is the building of S. K. Slobin's store shows evidence of an earlier second story and old brickwork.

Here I am, standing at what I'd like to think is the same place that my grandfather and great-grandfather were standing in that 1909 photo.

Perhaps the biggest surprise in Rosebush, though, was the church across the street—the Ojibwe Baptist Mission, with signs in English and Ojibwe.

Rosebush, in Isabella County, lies in the heart of an Indian Reservation—but no one in the family ever mentioned Indians. A Vietnam veteran in the library said no one had paid any attention to the Indians until they got a casino. As he put it, "It's only because of the Indians that we're here at all." And he added that the Indians were obliged to distribute funds every year, and that the citizens have to line up and submit grant applications in the hope of receiving some support. What a turn of events from a history of Isabella County published in Chicago in 1884. A chapter on "Indian History" by a certain "Major James W. Long, formerly U. S. Indian Agent," proposes that the Indians are descendants of "Arabians" as described in the Arabian Nights, corresponding to the Biblical descendants of Ishmael, "of whom it is said in Genesis xvi, 12, 'And he will be a wild man: his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand will be against him…' What has been true of the Arabians, has been singularly true of the North American Indians…" The Slobins settled in Rosebush 25 years after this was written. Was this still the image of the native inhabitants? Did S. K. Slobin and his parents think of the wild Cossacks of the Ukraine? Or were the Indians, along with the white farmers, the American versions of *muzhiki*, peasants—strangers with whom to do business, but not to feel at ease with? In any event, the new immigrants certainly would have felt at home in the landscapes of flat fields and the cold winters of the Old Country and the New World alike.

Ukrainian field

Michigan field

Postscript -
Looking at Old Family Pictures

Two family portraits – Ukraine 1912

Liepah family

Pekar family

Uman, Ukraine, Russia, 1912

They look out at me
always
from these two frames –
his side
her side –
all they took with them
when they fled for their lives,
with their lives,
were these two windows
into the life they were leaving.
Already, in these images,
I see the ones they left behind
in the Jewish cemetery
to be leveled later
by Germans or Ukrainians.
The little girl in both frames
is my mother.
Now they are all gone.
But I am here,
seeking something,
seeking the moment just before
just after
the opening and closing of the shutter.

They had put on nice clothes.
They had come to a photo studio
where they were posed
and composed
into these permanent arrays,
his side into a cloudy heaven,
her side into an anonymous room.
They had planned this moment.
They wanted to freeze time
for unknown moments.

Indeed, they had different pretensions.
My Liepah great-grandfather looks out sweetly,
his hand relaxed.
My Pekar great-grandfather is grim,
his hands tightly balled up.
My beautiful Tatar-eyed grandmother
looks directly at the lens, proud, erect.
All the visible hands
tell their own stories.

What were my ancestors thinking,
in 1912,
a decade before they fled?
What did they do after the shutter clicked?
Was it a morning?
Did they go home together and have lunch,
the Liepahs one day,
the Pekars another?
Or did they scatter to their separate dwellings?

Who were these two compositions for?
Who paid for them?
Where are the other prints?
Where did they hang?

All I have are these many eyes
looking at me
or somewhere else
forever.

Portrait of a Young American Family – Detroit 1913

Slobin family *Detroit 1913*

Polished confidence
of my father's parents,
the same era,
on the safe side of the world.
The young parents look out
through the photographer
to the future,
showing off their two little boys –
but not to me.
My grandfather's mouth is fixed
and his gaze is somewhere beyond.
He is looking straight through me.
He is making a point.
My grandmother, at 23, looks straight ahead
with maternal pride –
but to whom?
This portrait presents itself
as a landmark
on the road
to the American dream.

The Old World family portraits
do not radiate pride or forward movement.
None of those ancestors look safe.
They simply assert:
        This is who we are.
        This is who we have to be.

My two-year-old mother
in both portraits
stands alone
on the margins
untouched
not sure what to do with her hands.
My two-year-old father
on his father's arm
looks ahead
with confident curiosity.

So much life
to sense
in these static images.

Portrait of a Midwestern Immigrant Family –
Bay City, Michigan, 1896

Greenberg family *Bay City, Michigan 1896*

My great-grandparents
ending their westward trek
from the Baltic to New York
to the promise of Michigan.
It is a generation earlier.
We can sense hesitant pride
in these faces that look ahead
with steadying hope
and a shimmer of doubt –
young, brave, and alone
in an unknown land.
They are posed in their finery –
he with two rings and a gold watch fob,
she with three velvet-clad young ones.

Again there is a little girl standing on the margins,
my grandmother,
at six years looking quizzical,
safe in her father's shadow,
fingers curled, ready for what may come.

And again we long to know the before and after.
For whom this fine show,
this elegant presentation,
ending up
color-tinted behind bowed glass
in an arched gilt frame?
It can only have been for these parents themselves —
there was no other family there in the Midwest —
an ornament for their own new home.

What were the peregrinations of this early icon?
On what walls did it live
before coming to rest for a while
much further west
on the redwood wall of my Berkeley home?

And I, who know the life-journeys of these ancestors,
their pains perhaps outbalancing their joys,
look in vain for hints in their faces.

Supplements, 2021

Musing About Old Family Pictures

Photos reflect what is now misnamed
the "inner world" of a family.

Different poses, different pursuits
disclose the disparate pretensions.

-Boris Khersonsky
from "Two Photos: Odessa 1915"[1]

Berkeley, 2019

Mark Strand, one of my favorite poets, once wrote a little essay titled, "On the sadness of a family photograph."[2] He looks at a photo of himself at age four with his sister and mother. This makes him sad: because that moment is gone, because his mother is dead, because that moment of happy unity is in the past, because the person who took the picture—his father—is not in the picture. He is moved by "the way it is so much about the moment in which it was taken. Like childhood itself, it is innocent of the future" (p. 18). And then he looks at a photo of his mother and grandmother from before he was born. "I experienced my death in reverse—I was born too late to have been there. ... I experience a sadness that has to do with my own absence from a period in my mother's life" (p. 24).

This has never happened to me in looking at old family pictures. Rather than feeling my absence, I create my presence. As long as I am looking, I am there with them. It is me that they're looking at from within the frame. And so I enter into their world. Old photos delight me because the people are frozen in that moment of time—and it is a moment in which I can be with them.

I do shudder at their mortality, because they were so alive at that moment. I find their eternal presence uncanny, but it doesn't touch my own mortality.

Not so for Strand. After reading poems by Rilke and Ashbery and Charles Wright about the sadness of their family photographs, he concludes with "the sad moment when we become history—the photographic moment." For him, the poems say: "They were here, you can see they were here, and now they're gone" (p. 31).

Yes, I can feel that too—but being able to feel it reaffirms my sense of being here now and my sense of being able to be with them then.

I use old family pictures to try to discern who my ancestors were. I have portraits from the waves of immigration that ended up with my birth in Michigan: my mother and her parents, who came from Russian Ukraine in 1922, bringing two 1912 family portraits with them; my father's parents, already in Detroit in 1913; and my paternal great-grandparents, who left the Baltics to settle in Michigan in 1896. I see different kinds of people, different views into the future in these long-past faces and poses. And I ponder the moment with the photographer, way back then.
I've gazed at, gazed into these image as long as I can remember. They hung in my grandparents' homes, in my childhood home, and now they are on my own walls. These images are threads of

---

[1] Khersonsky, Boris (1996). *Family Archive (translated from Russian by Ruth Kreuzer and Dale Hobson).* http://www.dale Hobson.org/khersonsky/archive.html

[2] Strand, Mark (2000). *The Weather of Words: Poetic Invention.* New York: Knopf (pp. 18-31).

Ariadne leading back to origins, clues to who those people may have been. And in staring at them, poems began to form in my mind. The poems and portraits are on the preceding pages.

A few years after writing those poems, I discovered the remarkably powerful Yiddish poetry of Anna Margolin (1887-1952). She was one of several modernist poets writing in Russia, and then New York, between the wars. Her poem, *mayn shtam redt* (my tribe speaks) cast a different light on interactions with family pictures. She came from a prosperous family in Brest, now Belarus—quite different from my Ukrainian and Lithuanian ancestors. Here's my translation of her poem (the original Yiddish is on pp. 176-7).

My tribe speaks - by Anna Margolin *(translated from Yiddish by Dan Slobin)*

My tribe:

men in satin and velvet,
faces long and palesilken
faintingly glowing lips.
their thin hands caress faded folios.
in the depths of night they talk with God.

and merchants from Leipzig and from Danzig.
crisp cuffs. noble cigar smoke.
Talmudic wit. German courtesy.
their gaze is clever and matte,
clever and satiated.
Don Juans, dealers and seekers of God.

a drunkard,
a couple of apostates in Kiev.

My tribe:

women like idols adorned with diamonds,
darkened red by Turkish shawls,
heavy folds of Satin-de-Lyon.
but their bodies are weeping willows,
fingers in their laps like withered flowers,
and in their faded veiled eyes
dead desire.

and grand-dames in chintz and linen,
broad-boned and strong, and mobile,
with contemptuous easy laughter,
with calm speech and uneasy silence.
toward evening at the windows of their poor houses
they emerge as statues
and their dimming eyes twitch with
gruesome desire.

and a couple
that I'm ashamed of.

all of them, my tribe,
blood of my blood
and flame of my flame,
dead and living mixed together,
sad, grotesque and grand
they trample through me like through a dark house.
trample with prayers and curses and laments,
they jolt my heart like a copper bell,
my tongue is tossed about,
I don't recognize my voice –
my tribe speaks.

Translation leads one deep into the mind of another, and one's own mind. After working on Margolin's view of her family, I was surprised to find a different view emerging of my own Russian Jewish family. And a poem about my tribe formed itself.

My tribe - by Dan Slobin

Di ale, mayn shtam,
blut fun mayn blut
un flam fun mayn flam [...]
troyerik, grotesk un groys
tramplen durkh mir vi durkh a tunkl hoiz.
tramplen mit tfiles un klales un klog [...]
mayn shtam redt.

All of them, my tribe,
blood of my blood
and flame of my flame [...]
sad, grotesque and grand
trample through me like through a dark house
trample with prayers and curses and lamentation [...]
my tribe speaks.

-Anna Margolin
mayn shtam redt
My tribe speaks
(*Lider*, 1929)

They glare and grumble,
ruddy beards, blue eyes,
high cheekbones,
heavy braids, wigs
they grasp and cling.
Proud while afraid.
Loving and lonely.
Looking behind and looking ahead—
eyes on other generations—

the past and future ancestors.
And the present:
alive, transient, breathing, sighing.

Languages of songs and gossip,
of bureaucracies of God and Tsar,
of Talmudic debates and jokes.
Never silent.

Drawing tight the cords of family.
Patching the walls that exclude the excluders.
Living inside with the outside always in sight.
Cautiously domesticating wanderers
that get through the walls.

My tribe:
they look at me with their big sad eyes,
their irony and mockery and longing.
They bring steaming bowls of comfort food,
gazing with love-melting eyes,
the eyes that glare.

Something grander than the moment
is always waiting in the distance,
hovering somewhere in past or future.

But the music is for the moment
and it fills all moments along the road—
dancing, romancing,
and above all, remembering.

My tribe longs to fulfill its promise—
whatever it may be.
My tribe is small
and grand.

I'm never done with these images. They remain on my walls. Where else could they be, since at age 80 I am their current custodian. All of the family pictures looked down on me this spring as I set to work in the kitchen to prepare for the Passover *seder* with my children and grandchildren. Going downstairs, I found myself speaking to the old portraits—now simply with the nostalgia of memory and continuity.

Passover generations

I make a chicken soup –
for the ancestors
I combine matzo meal and eggs
so my daughter or granddaughter
can make matzo balls –
for the ancestors
and I lay out apples and walnuts and wine
so my son can make *charoses* –
for the ancestors
and horseradish to be ground
and salt to be combined with water
so my grandson can make tears
and the boiling of eggs and little potatoes –
all for the ancestors

And the ancestors look out from their frames
as I pass their pictures on my redwood walls
and they smile at me in my mind

I look at mother, grandmothers, great-grandmothers
and even a great-great-grandmother
and I think:
every one of the ancestor women
knew how to make chicken soup
and matzo balls

I look at father, grandfathers, great-grandfathers
and even a great-great-grandfather
and I think:
every one of them
knew how to read the *hagode*
and hide the *afikomen* when they were grown
and find it when they were little

And so, ancestors:
there will be a small echo of your *sedorim*
here on the distant shores of the Pacific
with your descendants unto the seventh generation

Come and join us, as it says in the *hagode*
kol ditsrich yeysey vyifsoch
let all who are needy come and make *pesach*
You must be needy.
And we need you.

All of this writing and thinking about family portraits begins to pull them off the wall when I encounter them, stepping out of my Berkeley study. There is a large, framed portrait of my mother as a girl, still in a somewhat safe world in 1915. The object itself is interesting in the light of my musings about portraits. It's based on a small photograph that my grandmother brought from Uman, in Ukraine, to Detroit. At some point she engaged an artist to make a 17" x 43" charcoal reproduction of the original 4" x 6" photo. I remember it from my earliest childhood, when it hung in my grandparents' dining room in the same ornate frame. And now I find myself looking intently at the girl whom I knew only as my mother. One day I wrote in my journal about such an encounter.

Every time I come up the stairs I look into the eyes of my six-year-old mother. She stands there looking hopeful, a bit anxious, in her beautiful white lace outfit, a bow in her hair, heavy white stockings; standing slightly pigeon-toed, holding onto the prop that the photographer has provided. It looks, perhaps, like the handle of a plow. She holds onto it with her right hand to steady herself; her left hand rests uncertainly across her waist. A locket, probably gold, hangs down over her chest between what will grow into the breasts that were not able to nurse me 79 years ago. Somewhere inside of her is the one egg out of hundreds of thousands that will become me 24 years later. That sweet little Russian Ukrainian Yiddish girl, there in Uman sometime during the First World War, she could not have conceived of being an adult in far-off inconceivable America. All I can see—always at the top of my stairs—is a hesitant look of a little girl into a timeless future life, frozen forever in that waiting posture and gaze of 1915. And I, looking now, 110 years since she was born, I know the entire future life that lay ahead of her back then.

Family Photos as Clues

I've become the repository of family photos, hundreds and hundreds of them. The old ones—from times I have no personal access to—were indispensable when I sat down to write this family memoir. The images brought to life the people I knew from stories, letters, documents. I knew three of my grandparents, but not my paternal grandfather. He remained a mystery to me, the subject of stories and rumors, the writer and receiver of letters in Russian, Yiddish, and English. But that somehow wasn't enough. I tried to get to know him through looking into his eyes, as it were. Current technology allowed me to scan photos and create a set of mug shots sampled through his adult life. I found the collection of faces remarkably revealing. The personality I saw somehow amplified all of the verbal details I had been immersed in and all of the pictures of him with other people. Summarizing his life at the end of the memoir, I wrote: "Perhaps an overview of his changing face, from 1910 to 1940, can suggest what sort of man my grandfather was." And I concluded: "Putting together bits and pieces, he seems to have been vain and vulnerable, risk-taking, hyper-active and lethargic, constantly striving, on the move, probably short-tempered" (p. 144). After looking into his eyes I felt I had finally gotten to know the grandparent I had never met. (The mug shots are on page 145.)

Photos make it possible to look at a face, a self, as it changes over time. One begins to see early traits, gradual hardening or maturing of a personality. I've taken to doing such surveys of relatives, dead and alive, and also of myself. In the memoir, in addition to the exploration of my paternal grandfather, I briefly surveyed the changing faces of my two grandmothers: Sima Liepah (p. 77) and Miriam Slobin (p. 90). In rare instances, we have such progressions of images from the ages before photography. Think, particularly, of Rembrandt's remarkable series of deeply probing self-portraits over decades of his life. And so, unlike Mark Strand, I do not end with "the sad moment when we become history." Rather, I delight in the possibility of stepping, however inadequately, into history.

Anna Margolin (1887-1952)
אננא מארגאלין

מײַן שטאַם רעדט

מײַן שטאַם:

מענער אין אַטלעס און סאַמעט,
פּנימער לאַנג און בלייכזײַדן,
פֿאַרחלש'טע גלוטיקע ליפּן.
די דינע הענט צערטלען פֿאַרגעלטע פּאָליאַנטן.
זיי רעדן אין טיפֿער נאַכט מיט גאָט.

און סוחרים פֿון ליפּסק און פֿון דאַנסק.
בלאַנקע מאַנקעטן. אײַדעלער סיגאַרן-רויך.
גמרא-וויצן. דיטשע העפֿלעכקייטן.
דער בליק איז קלוג און מאַט,
קלוג און איבערזאַט.
דאַן-זשואַנען, העכדלער און זוכער פֿון גאָט.

אַ שיפֿור,
אַ פּאָר משומדים אין קיעוו.

מײַן שטאַם:

פֿרויען ווי געצן באַצירט מיט בריליאַנטן,
פֿאַרטונקלט רויט פֿון טערקישע טיכער,
שווערע פֿאָלדן פֿון סאַטין-דע-ליאָן.
אָבער דאָס לייב איז אַ ווײַנענדיקע ווערבע,
אָבער ווי טרוקענע בלומען די פֿינגער אין שויס,

mayn shtam redt[3]

mayn shtam:

mener in atles un samet,
ponimer lang un bleykhzaydn,
farkhalishte glutike lipn.
di dine hent tsertlen fargelte foliantn.
zey redn in tifer nakht mit got.

un sukhrim fun laypsik.
blanke manketn. eydeler sigarn-roykh.
gemore-vitsn. daytshe heflekhkeytn.
der blik iz klug un mat.
klug un iberzat.
dan-zhuanen, hendler un zukher fun got.

a shiker,
a por mshumdim in kiev.

mayn shtam:

froyen vi getsn bazirt mit briliantn,
fartunkelt royt fun terkishe tikher,
shvere foldn fun satin-de-lion.
ober dos layb iz a vaynendike verbe,
ober vi trukene blumen di finger in shoys,
un in di velke vershlayerte oygn
toyte lust.

un grand-damen in tsits un in laynvnt,
greytbeynik un shtark, un beveglekh,
mitn farakhtlekhn laykhtn gelekhter,
mit ruike reyd un umheymlekhn shvaygn.
far nakht baym fentster fun oremen hoyz
vaksn zey vi statuen oys

[3] Margolin, Anna (1929). *Lider*. New York (pp. 10-11). / Amherst, MA: National Yiddish Book Center https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yiddish-books/spb-nybc208331/margolin-anna-mrglyn-nn-lider

און אין די וועלקע פֿאַרשלייערטע אויגן
טויטע לוסט.

און גראַנד-דאַמען אין ציין און אין לייוונט,
נרייטבייניק און שטאַרק, און באַוועגלעך,
מיטן פֿאַראַכטלעכן לייכטן געלעכטער,
מיט רויקע רייד און אומהיימלעכן שווייגן.
פֿאַר נאַכט ביים פֿענצטער פֿון אָרעמען הויז
וואַקסן זיי ווי סטאַטוען אויס
און עס צוקט דורך די דעמערענדע אויגן
גרויזאַמע לוסט.

און אַ פּאָר,
מיט וועלכע איך שעם זיך.

זיי אַלע, מיין שטאַם,
בלוט פֿון מיין בלוט
און פֿלאַם פֿון מיין פֿלאַם,
טויט און לעבעדיק אויסגעמישט,
טרויעריק, גראָטעסק און גרויס
טראַמפּלען דורך מיר ווי דורך אַ טונקל הויז.
טראַמפּלען מיט תּפֿילות און קללות און קלאָג,
טרייסלען מיין האַרץ ווי אַ קופּערנעם גלאָק,
עס וואַרפֿט זיך מיין צונג,
איך דערקען ניט מיין קול —
מיין שטאַם רעדט.

un es tsukt durkh di demerende oygn
groyzame lust.
un a por
mit velkhie ikh shem zikh.

zey ale, mayn shtam,
blut fun mayn blut
un flam fun mayn flam,
toyt un lebedik oysgemisht,
troyerik, grotesk un groys
tramplen durkh mir vi durkh a
tunkl hoyz.
tramplen mit tfiles un kloles un klog,
treyslen mayn harts vi a kupernem glok,
es varft zikh mayn koyl –
mayn shtam redt.

Seeking "The Old Country"

In 1959, at age twenty, I was a guide at the first U.S. Exhibition in Moscow. That remarkable summer experience is documented in my memoir, Glimpses of the USSR and Russia in Four Eras*, along with later visits in 1966, 1989, and 2006* (https://danslobin.academia.edu/research). *I made two unauthorized attempts to visit Uman—successful in 1959, blocked in 1966. I related those experiences in that memoir, excerpted here.*

My mother's family came from Uman (Умань)*, a provincial city in central Ukraine. I grew up hearing the older generation talk about Uman and how things had been "*in dreym"*—Yiddish for "at home"—that was how they talked about what we called "the old country." There was even a discussion group,* di umanyer geografisher gezelshaft (The Uman Geographical Society)*, with branches in Detroit and Chicago, where they kept their memories alive. As described in what follows, I made a sneak visit to the legendary city. This aroused great interest among the Umanyers, who were then in their sixties or seventies, and I was invited to Chicago to tell of my adventure and show my photos. In both Detroit and Chicago, the old-timers pored over the images—their first views of their hometown—trying to identify every building and arguing about who lived where, what happened where. The following pages are what I wrote in April 1960, a half-year after my return from the Soviet Union. I made a second visit to Uman, again breaking the rules, in 1966, as described in my memoir of the Brezhnev era, in the next section. My mother's own memoir is in my family history,* From the Pale of Settlement to Michigan: Stories of My Grandparents and Their Families (2016).

*Uman is in the region of western Ukraine that had belonged to Poland, as part of the lands of the Pototski family. The city was, and still is famous for a pleasure garden, the Sofievka, that a Count Pototski built for his sweetheart, Sofia, in the 18th century. When my grandmother would talk of events that had taken place a long time ago, she would say "*dos is geveyn in pototskis tsaytn" *(that was in Pototski's times). Uman was the site of repeated massacres of Jews—by Poles, Cossacks, Ukrainians, Russians, and Nazis. It became part of Russia in 1793, incorporated as a district city in the Kiev Government District. Uman was an important wholesale grain center and the location of a horticultural institute. At the beginning of the 20th century, when my mother was born, Uman had a population of 29,000, of which 74% was Jewish. In modern times it has become a major Hasidic pilgrimage site, due to the fact that an important sage, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810), is buried there. Breslover Hasidim make annual Rosh Hashana visits to the grave of the Breslover Rebbe. No one in my family ever made mention of this, but now Hasidic tourism is a major source of income for Uman.*

There is a brief history of Jews in Uman on the website of Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center (https://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/index.asp?cid=1089).

It is reproduced on the next page.

Jews lived in Uman since the 17th century. The Jewish community of Uman was almost completely destroyed in 1648, during the Chmielnicki Uprising. During the 18th century the local Jews suffered greatly from attacks by the Haidamaks. In 1768 Haidamak troops of Ivan Gonta and Maksym Zalizniak slaughtered several thousand Uman Jews. Decades later, this event, known as "the massacre of Uman," so deeply affected the founder of Bratslav Hassidism Rabbi Nakhman (also known as Nakhman of Bratslav) that he decided to spend the last year of his life in Uman and asked to be laid to rest in the local cemetery, where the victims of the massacre had been buried. With time Rabbi Nakhman's burial site became the site of pilgrimage for his followers and remains so for Bratslav Hassidim to this day. Only in the 19th century did the Jewish population of Uman begin to grow significantly, reaching 17,945, or 57.9 percent of the town's total population in 1897. In the 19th century Uman was an important center of the Haskala, the Jewish enlightenment movement. At the turn of the century, Uman had a government sponsored Jewish school for boys, a vocational school for Jewish girls, and three private Jewish schools for boys – all with Russian as the language of instruction.

In the early 20th century the Jews of Uman were active politically. Many of them affiliated with the Zionist movement, with the socialist Bund, or with Russian, mainly socialist, parties. During a pogrom in Uman in 1905 one Jew was murdered and much Jewish property was looted or destroyed. A Jewish self-defense force prevented more extensive damage. The Jews of Uman suffered greatly from the violence accompanying the years of revolution and civil war in Russia. In a wave of pogroms that swept Uman in the spring and summer of 1919 approximately 1,000 Jews were murdered, Jewish women were raped, and Jewish property was looted or destroyed.

In 1917 a school for adults under the aegis of the Kultur Lige organization, which promoted Yiddish education and culture, was opened in Uman. Under Soviets in the 1920s and 1930s there were several Yiddish schools, including general educational, vocational schools sponsored by ORT (the Society for Handicraft and Agricultural Work), and evening schools. For a short time at the beginnig of 1920s in a number of Jewish schools Hebrew was the language of instruction. A branch of the Zionist HeHalutz movement existed in Uman in the 1920s. The Soviet authorities opposed the pilgrimage of Bratslav Hassidim to the burial site of Rabbi Nakhman. In the 1920s a police station with Yiddish-speaking policemen operated in the city.

The ban imposed by the Soviet authorities on all private commercial activity in the 1930s led to changes in the occupational structure of Uman's Jews. Many Jews sought employment in industry or agriculture. A number of Jewish families left Uman for Birobidzhan in the Soviet Far East. Many Jews, especially younger ones, left Uman for Kiev and other large cities to seek for new educational and vocational opportunities. In 1939 Uman's 13,233 Jews comprised 29.8 percent of the town's total population.

After the German invasion of the Soviet Union, refugees (including Jews) from the western areas of the USSR arrived in Uman. However, very few Jews succeeded in leaving Uman before it was occupied by German troops on August 1, 1941. Quite soon after the start of the occupation, the persecution and murder of Uman's Jews began. Within the first weeks of the occupation, several dozen members of the local Jewish intelligentsia were murdered. Jews also were forced to work at various kinds of hard labor. On September 21 (or 19), 1941, approximately 1,000 Jews were murdered in a pogrom carried out by local Ukrainian policemen and German soldiers. Another 1,500 Jews were murdered by members of Einsatzgruppe C during the following days. At this time also the Jews of Uman were registered and ordered to wear armbands with the Star of David, which were later were replaced by yellow patches on their chests and backs. In late September or early October, the Jews of Uman who had survived the massacres of late summer-early fall 1941 were concentrated in the neighborhood of Rakovka (a Jewish neighborhood in the center of Uman), which became a ghetto. Although the ghetto was not closed, its inmates were strictly forbidden to leave and were forced to perform various types of labor. The ghetto was raided regularly at night by German and Ukrainian policemen, who engaged in looting and the abuse of its residents. The German authorities imposed exorbitant "taxes" on the ghetto dwellers. To ensure the timely collection of these taxes and to provide the Germans with workers for forced labor a Jewish council, headed by two Jews named Samborskiy and Tabachnik, was appointed. Members of the Jewish Order Service of the ghetto were known for their brutality toward the ghetto inmates. In early October 1941 members of the 304th Order Police Battalion carried out a large-scale massacre during which most of those in the ghetto were murdered. Only skilled workers and those Jews who avoided the massacre by going into hiding were still living in the ghetto in late 1941. The ghetto was liquidated in the second half of April 1942. The able-bodied Jews were deported to a labor camp [...] The remaining ghetto inmates were shot in the forest not far from the city. In the spring of 1942 the Germans established in the city a labor camp, to which Jewish deportees from Romanian-annexed Northern Bukovina and Bessarabia were taken. Most of the inmates of this camp were murdered between 1942 and 1944. The Red Army liberated Uman on March 10, 1944.

This is how I looked in late summer of 1959, shortly before the first trip to Uman. The photo is from the Kuskovo Estate, near Moscow.

April 1960

Uman, to me, has always been a name associated with mystery and antiquity. Here were played out the stories of my mother's childhood and the lives of my ancestors—stories of revolution and terror, of beauty and simplicity. When I left for the Soviet Union in June 1959 I didn't think that there was any possibility to visit Uman. As the summer wore on, however, several *Umantsy* came to visit the Exhibition in Moscow, and the fantastic idea began to grow in my mind. They told me that it was only 200 km from Kiev to Uman and that one could cover this distance by bus in less than a day. I checked with the American authorities in Moscow and found out that Uman is in an unrestricted area. Technically, therefore, Americans were allowed to travel there.

My excitement grew. I wrote home, through uncensored diplomatic channels, about the possibility of travel to Uman and asked my mother to send me a map of the city and the places she remembered. [*She had left in 1920 at age 11.*] Soon the map arrived, and I carried it with me, in my wallet, studying it from time to time.

The Exhibition closed at the beginning of September, and the guides were given a few days to travel around the country. At last my chance arrived. I flew to Tbilisi and from there to Kiev, arriving in Kiev in the early evening. After registering in a hotel, I found a taxi and asked the driver to take me to the bus station. He asked where I wanted to go and he took me to the *Avtobusnaya Stantsiya na Stalinke* [the bus station on Stalin Street], an ancient wooden building on the outskirts of the city. On a big wooden placard on the outside wall was painted the bus schedule. I searched for the name of Uman and finally found it at the end of the list. For the first time I saw the legendary name in official print. The city had become a reality. The sign announced that buses run to Uman from Kiev three times a day, starting with 7:05 in the morning. I went into the station for further information. I found myself in an old room with many wooden benches and a big tile stove. Sitting on the benches there were numerous little old women carrying heavy bundles. I went up to the window that said *Napravlenie Uman'* [Direction – Uman] and found out that tickets could be bought in the morning.

Returning to the hotel, I went to bed early. Before going to sleep I studied the map carefully, so as to remember all the details. As soon as I felt I knew the map well, I went to sleep.

I got up at 5:45 in the morning and quietly crept out of the hotel at 6:15. No one was stirring. No one noticed me. On my way out I passed the ancient doorman, his sleeping head drooping, his long white beard falling across his chest. Knowing that Soviet taxi-drivers make note of where they pick up and drop off passengers, I walked for several blocks into the heart of Kiev and took a cab from there. I was dressed like a

Russian, wearing a big, blue raincoat covering me from head to toe. It was dirty and several sizes too large. The night before, in Tbilisi, I had mistakenly taken the raincoat of a fellow guide. He is about 5′10″, while I'm 5′4″. Beneath the coat I had hidden my camera and light meter. Over my arm I carried a big Soviet *syetka*, a shopping net, with food for the day.

I arrived early at the station, but already there were crowds of people milling about. A line was waiting in front of the Uman window. Around me I heard people talking. It was very important that no one know my nationality. I listened to the others. Some asked for a ticket ***v*** *Uman'*, others said ***na*** *Uman'* [*two possible prepositions*]. The man in front of me said "*odin bilyet na Uman'.*" I said the same, and got my ticket. It cost 34 rubles and 80 kopecks ($3.48). Everything was going well. I was told all summer that I looked like a Russian, spoke like a Russian. I told myself I had nothing to worry about.

The bus was an ordinary city bus—no Greyhound luxury liner! The ride of 200 kilometers (125 miles) took seven hours, with innumerable stops. The passengers were jolly and friendly, joking with one another. The little old peasant woman sitting next to me, wrapped in black, was reading science fiction in Ukrainian, chuckling to herself from time to time.

I'm sure that, on this trip, I saw parts of the Soviet Union never before seen by an American tourist. The road was alternately cobble-stone and dirt, though this was the major highway between Kiev and Odessa. Animals ran in the streets. There were no private cars on the roads, and, except for occasional army trucks, all vehicles were horse-drawn. Other than electrification, nothing seemed to have changed in the past fifty years. Every now and then the bus passed clusters of little huts with whitewashed walls and thatched roofs. Apparently there was no running water, since each hut had a well next to it. In the villages there were few new buildings, and those that were built recently were distinguished from the others only by the dates which appeared on them. The scenery, however, was amazingly beautiful. (The color photos are from slides I took on the same route in 1966: more detail about that in the next section.)

chernozem – the rich black soil of Ukraine

The steppe, gently rolling, spread out in all directions under the vast dome of a bright blue sky. The harvest had been completed in some fields, and golden haystacks were piled up on the rich black soil. They dotted the horizon like giant artifacts of some ancient civilization. Occasionally a lone figure would be seen against the sky—a man with high boots, often accompanied by a dog, a flock of crows flying off into the distance beyond his head. A figure from Chekhov, painted by Brueghel. And then we passed huge cornfields—collective fields, not broken up by fences. Here and there, in the midst of the swaying corn, one could see small figures of women, laboriously picking the corn ear by ear, coming out from time to time to the roadside to add their handfuls to the many piles. The bus made many stops along the way. One, which I remember very well, was in Byelaya Tserkov', where my Great-Aunt Ruchel was from [*the site of a Nazi massacre of Jewish children; now Ukrainian Біла Церква*]. Old men and women got on the bus and passed through the aisle, reaching out their hands for food and money in the name of the Lord: *Gospodi! Daite na pitanie!* All of the passengers gave them food or money.
Later we stopped in Zhashkov [*now Жашків*] for lunch and I found that even in a town of some size there was no running water. When I asked for the lavatory, they sent me to a privy behind the stables.

Zhashkov, 1959

village near Uman, 1966

At last, after a seemingly endless ride, we passed sign on the edge of the road: УМАНЬ. I was really there! The bus stopped at the Uman station at 2:00. The last bus back to Kiev was leaving at 4:10. There would not be another bus to Kiev until 3:00 in the morning, and the next day the guides were being flown back to Moscow and out of the country. Our visas would expire then. I had two hours in which to see everything I wanted to see, to learn as much about the city as I could.

My first problem was to find out where I was. I thought of my mother's map. The names were pre-revolutionary. Certainly, I thought, streets like Nikolaevskaya and Bazylyanskaya—named for either a Tsar or a Saint—must have Soviet names now. But Pushkinskaya—they would never change such a street name! My hunch was right. I asked for Pushkin Street and, after vague directions from several people, found my way there. I wandered about feverishly, taking as many pictures as I could, looking for places fitting my mother's descriptions. [*Black-and-white photos are from 1959.*]

вул ПУШКЇНА – Pushkin Street

home of *der feter aron* [Uncle Aaron] at № 9 Pushkin Street

Street names had changed. House numbering schemes had been altered. Time was short. I especially wanted to find Bazylyanskaya Ulitsa [Saint Basil Street], the street on which my mother and her family had lived. I looked for the oldest man I could find and asked him, saying that a friend of mine had lived there a long time ago. This was a lucky idea. He remembered the old name and told me that the street was now called *Vostochnaya Ulitsa* [East Street]. But I couldn't find any street with that name. The problem was that he and I had spoken in Russian, and the street signs are in Ukrainian. Although the languages are very close, the Russian word for "east," *vostok,* has nothing to do with the word for "east" in Ukrainian, *skhid.* Finally after much blundering, I found the street and what I thought was the correct house, pictured on the next page. [*It fit my mother's description: a brick duplex with one story at street level and a lower half-story on a slope down from the street. She and the others from Uman recognized the house in this picture.*]

Liepah family home on the former Bazylyanskaya Ulitsa [St. Basil Street]

home of a well-to-do Jew (Yona Frankel) on Bazylyanskaya Ulitsa

a neighborhood street

By now it was 3:00. I had one hour left. I wanted to see the Sofievka Park and the Jewish cemetery, at least, and as much more as possible. I realized that it was impossible to get to all this on foot, so I rushed back to the bus station to see if there were any cabs in the town. Soon I found a taxi, and told the driver that I wanted to see the Jewish cemetery. This was, of course, a surprising request, and it soon came out that he too was a Jew. In the presence of a fellow Jew I felt free to tell my whole story and seek help. I pulled out my treasured map and showed it to him. He read it carefully and said: "Whoever drew this map was here a *long* time ago!" That cabbie was my savior. Without him I would have seen nothing. [*In retrospect, it was clear, though, that this was a foolish thing to do. The driver and his family had an unpleasant visit from the police after I had left.*] As we rode, he told me the story of the destruction of the Jews by the Nazis, the destruction of the cemetery, the destruction of the Old City, the nearby site of a concentration camp where at least 9,000 Jews had perished. He took me to an empty field, filled with rubble, and said, "Here was the Jewish cemetery." To one side was a new cemetery, with graves and tombstones of Jews who had died in Uman since the war. I stood on the field, looking down on the city on one side, and the broad stretch of Ukrainian fields on the other, looking up at the vast dome of blue sky, filled with white clouds, and I tried to think of all of my ancestors, lying buried in this empty field where the Jewish cemetery had been. I felt that I had come all the way back. There was one lone, old house on the edge of the field. The cabbie said, "That is a very old house. Your people will remember it. Take a picture of it." I did so, and we left.

Jewish cemetery 1959

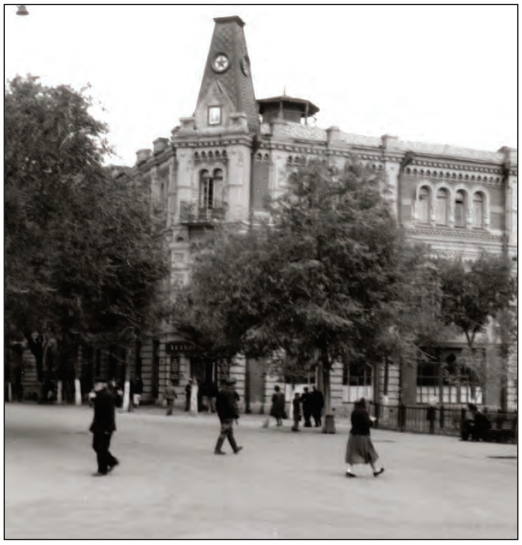
Jewish cemetery 1913

It was almost 4:00. My bus was to leave in ten minutes and there was still so much to see. My cabbie saved me again. He told me I could wait until the 5:30 train. We had time to go to the Sofievka. The park is still lovely. He showed me the stone bench where Graf Pototski proposed to Sofia. The lake. The statues. The shaded lanes where my great uncles remembered trysts. The "Island of Love." The greenhouses. We saw the rest of the city. The Rathaus. The ruins of the Old City, where only empty fields can be seen now. All the synagogues but the one near the Rathaus had been destroyed. Only that one was kept by the Nazis—to be used as a factory.

This is one of several entrances to a large, square market place, where I ran into difficulties on my return visit in 1966, as described in the next section. My mother said that the shop of her father, Shimen Liepah, was on the street facing this entrance.

All the while, my cabbie kept trying to think of names of relatives he thought he had in Detroit. Finally he suggested that we go and ask his old mother. He thought the name was Sklyar, but was not sure. As we rode along the streets of Uman, we met his mother, who had been out shopping, and went to her house. She, of course, was very excited. She spoke Yiddish with me and tried to remember the names of American relatives. We reached her house—a little, one-room, brick building—and she began rummaging through boxes of pictures. Finally she called out and handed me an old picture. On the back was written, in English, "To all of you, with our love, August 31, 1931." She said that the name of the woman was Gittel. I looked at the faces. A light seemed to glimmer and I asked: "Gittel Posner?" She cried out in amazement: "That's it!" This was a picture of a Detroit friend of my grandparents, Gittel Posner, with her husband and children; the cabbie's mother was Gittel's niece. She had not heard of Gittel's death in 1950, and was, of course, shocked. The mother's name is Khaika Monastyrskaya. She asked after the Vinitskis and was able to trace the family trees. The scene was an unforgettable mixture of excitement, grief, and incredulous confusion. She begged me to stay for dinner, to stay overnight, but my train was soon to leave and I had to say goodbye.

The cabman took me to the train station, passing more locations that my mother later recognized.



District Court House on the corner of Nikolaevskaya and Sadovaya – in 1917 my mother heard Kerensky speak from this balcony (leader of the Provisional Government that followed the overthrow of the Tsar in the February 1917 Revolution)

my mother's school (женская гимназия – girls' gymnasium)

train station
(with white-on-red political slogans)

We parted sadly, but I managed to board the train at 5:30. Twelve hours later, at 5:30 AM, I arrived in Kiev. The train never went more than 25 miles per hour, and stopped for ten or fifteen minutes at a time in the middle of nowhere. The benches were hard. The excitement was over. For fear of revealing my identity I spoke to no one. But I had seen Uman, and I was happy. At 6:00 in the morning I convinced the old, bearded doorman to let me into the hotel in Kiev, and I went up to my room, still not quite believing that the entire adventure had really taken place. The next day the traveling guides we were flown back to Moscow and thence to the United States.

USSR 1966 *(written in 2013)*

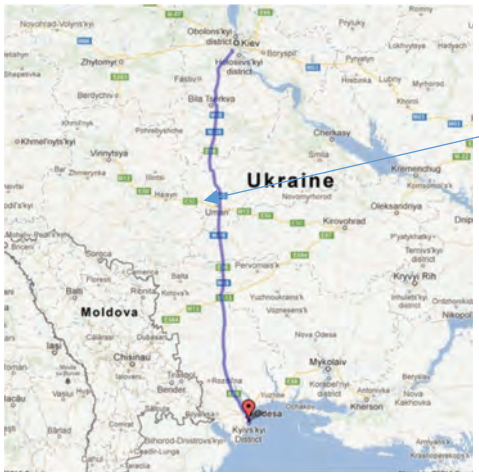
In the summer of 1966 I took part in the first International Psychology Congress to be held in the USSR, participating in academic meetings at the Congress in Moscow, and later in Leningrad. I was a 27-year-old Assistant Professor from Berkeley, but had a privileged role in the Congress because since 1962, I had been editing an American translation journal, *Soviet Psychology & Psychiatry.* Soviet colleagues saw me as a way to recognition in the West. I was traveling with my attractive young wife, Ellen, who spoke some Russian and knew how to charm people. It was the first year in which tourists could rent a car and travel without a guide, and after the Congress, Ellen and I drove from Moscow down through Russia to Kursk, then into Ukraine to Kiev and Odessa, finally to Kishinev in Moldavia. Here I am with our sturdy Volga, much like the 1950 Ford that I had as a graduate student. We stayed in campsites with two-person tent-cabins and rudimentary canteens.

Ellen and Dan in Leningrad

Of course, we had a fixed itinerary and schedule to follow. The main road was two-lane, with a good deal of truck and bus traffic, occasional military convoys, tractors in the countryside, horse-drawn vehicles on the unpaved shoulders. Buying gas was always a challenge, since there were few stations with great intervals between them. So there was always a traffic jam at a gas station. Sometimes we had to wait for up to an hour to get to the pump. It was exciting to be on our own, away from Moscow and Leningrad, and I took many pictures of houses, streets, people. People in smaller towns seemed to be more friendly and relaxed than in the cities. Shopkeepers knew their customers. There were adequate stores in the provincial towns, including many bookstores and second-hand bookstores.

It was rather amazing that we were allowed to move without constant surveillance, though I knew we were checked at each campsite and gas station. We were allowed to take pictures, provided we followed a printed page of guidelines we had been given (no military installations, no institutions, no airports, and so forth). At one point we were delayed by a road crew spreading fresh asphalt on the road ahead and I took a photo of the young women in blue overalls working on the project. A woman policeman in uniform came up and challenged me, but when I presented the page of restrictions (in Russian) she backed off and let me continue. So I was encouraged, after leaving Kiev, to make a slight detour to Uman.

In 1959 I had succeeded in photographing places that my mother and my grandparents' generation recognized and remembered, and in 1966 I was eager to go back and to do more systematic color photography. Uman was only a few kilometers off the main road, but it was not listed on our itinerary. Still, we decided to risk the detour. It was still early in the day—a sunny day with a blue sky—and we thought we could get back onto our scheduled route in time. The first place I found in Uman was the *bazar*—the marketplace where I knew my grandfather had had a little dry goods shop before the 1917 Revolution. This was one place I was eager to visit, since I hadn't identified it on my visit in 1959 (though it later appeared that I had photographed one of the entrances, as shown in the 1959 report).



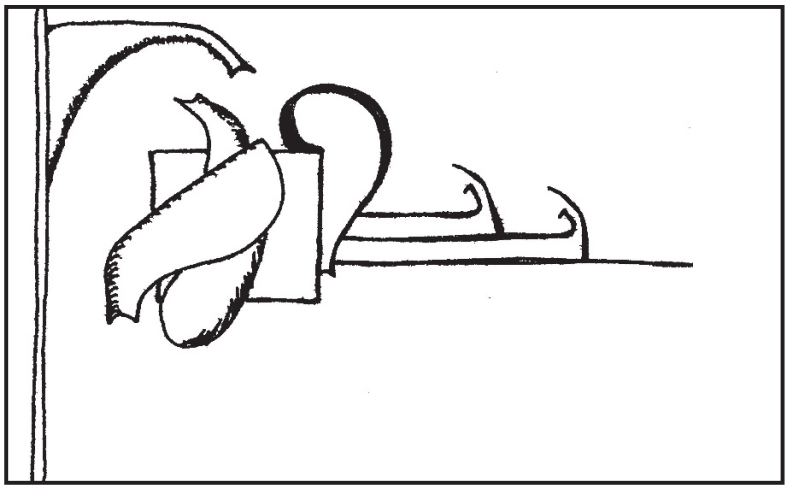
It was like a middle-eastern open market surrounded by old buildings with little shops on four sides and rows of stands in the center. As I'll explain, my pictures are all lost, but here are pictures of a marketplace in Kiev which was similar to the one in Uman.

The *bazar* was especially important to me because of a significant story in my grandfather's life, as related in the memoir above. He had had faith in the Revolution and stayed on after many family members and friends had left. But one night in 1920 he didn't come home and, as my grandmother told me many times in my childhood, she found out he was in jail. There was a daily list of prisoners posted on the wall and he was among those scheduled to be shot the next day. He was among the petty bourgeoisie who were being liquidated. She was desperate and talked to everyone she knew. A friend said that before my grandfather had his own shop, the two of them had worked in another shop together, where they had been union members. The only possible help might be to find his union card. She found it and went to the prison during the night, presented the card, and said that an error had been made: he was not a member of the bourgeoisie as charged, but a member of the proletariat. My grandfather was released that night. When he came home his faith in socialism was gone and the family arranged to escape. They made their way illegally, at great risk, to safety in Kishinev, which was then Romania but in 1966 was in the USSR as the capital of Soviet Moldavia (and now, as Chishinau, is the capital of independent Moldova). That was where our road travel was headed. But on the way I was especially eager to see the place where my grandfather's budding capitalist venture had led to his near-death experience and the forced emigration that, ultimately, made my own life possible.

Ellen and I parked outside of the marketplace and I was happily taking pictures of people and produce stands like the ones in Kiev—when suddenly a stern and burly woman asked what we were doing there. She was menacing, and apparently an official; remembering my Moscow experiences with arrogant petty bureaucrats, I pretended not to understand her. But she became so threatening that I began to answer, trying to do so in broken Russian. It turned out to be a big mistake to let her know I understood what she was saying. (In writing this now, I remember having evaded arrest in Moscow one night in 1959 by stubbornly speaking only English and walking on.) She escorted us to the headquarters of the marketplace, a sort of mid-nineteenth century low, whitewashed building, and told us to wait there. There was a long wooden table and two little desks by the entry where women clerks were writing. Ellen and I began to get nervous and decided to leave rather than wait, but when we moved toward the door the two clerks jumped to the doorway and crossed their arms over the entrance, standing guard over us. Suddenly the situation turned alarming. After a while the head of the marketplace appeared—a large Ukrainian peasant-looking man with a shabby suit jacket, exuding authority. He sat at his desk at the end of the long table and motioned us to sit there.

I remember the event now, almost a half-century later, as an amusing scene from Gogol that began to morph into Kafka. He asked me to explain what we were doing there and said, emphatically, that it was forbidden to photograph the marketplace. I told him that we had been photographing earlier on our trip and had a list of restrictions that did not mention marketplaces. I offered to go to the car and get the list, but he said that Ellen would have to stay there while I was away. She was terrified of being left alone as a hostage, and so that path was blocked, and we launched into a truly bizarre discussion. First off, he insisted that a marketplace was an institution (учреждение) and that it was forbidden to photograph institutions. I said I had no idea that a marketplace was an institution, and he said, mockingly, that everyone knew that and that I shouldn't play dumb. By now I was so angry and frightened that I ended up talking fluent Russian, which left me in the trap of having to debate with this Ukrainian peasant overlord. I decided that it could be dangerous to appeal to sentiment and speak of my grandfather's shop there before the Revolution, since he may well have determined that I was Jewish, evoking unknown anti-Semitism plus disdain of those who left the fold. So I tried to impress him, explaining to him that I was an American professor who had been invited to present a paper at an international congress in Moscow. He then asked why an American professor would want to take pictures of a marketplace. I said because we didn't have marketplaces like that in America. Bad move: He became defensive, feeling treated as an inferior. We went around this circuit several more times, with no way out, and then he became threatening, saying he could have us immediately deported from the country. In retrospect, I see that he had never encountered a foreigner on his turf before and was worried about what the consequences might be for him. But I also felt that he could, indeed, have had us deported. Eventually he called in the mayor, and the mayor called in the chief of police. It got to look more and more like a scene out of Gogol. It was clear that they had no idea what they were supposed to do, and they tried to call some superior in Odessa, which was very difficult, given the primitive telephone they had in the building. They finally did get instructions from their superiors and I was told that I would need to sign a confession and surrender my film. I asked what it was that I was confessing, and they said "deviation from the itinerary" (отклонение от маршрута). I agreed, since that seemed harmless, but I was unwilling to give up my film. I explained that I had taken many pictures on that roll and didn't want to have to give them up. The head of the marketplace told me not to worry; that he would have them developed and sent to me. I told him I didn't think that could be done, since this

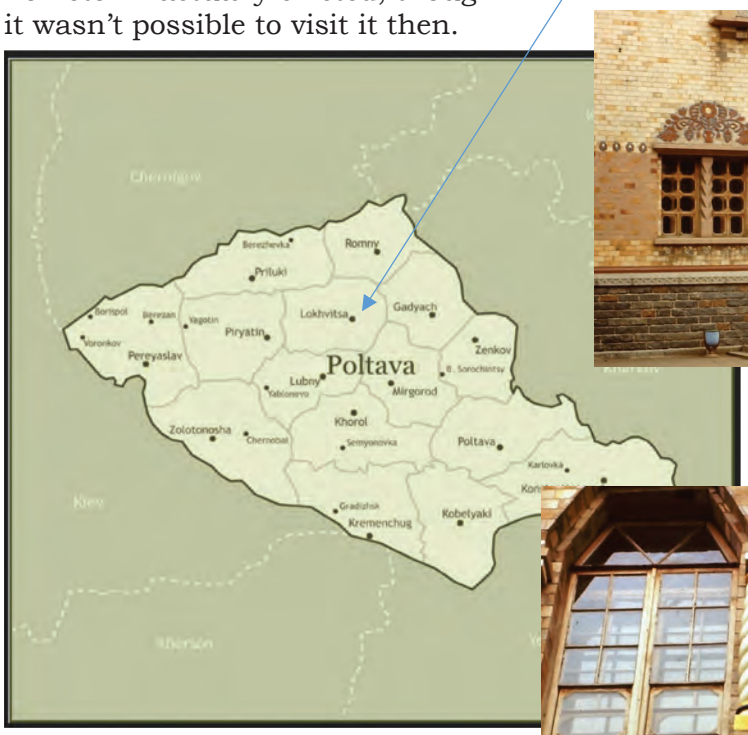
was a new kind of ektachrome that they didn't have in the USSR. Another bad move. The three officials didn't like this challenge, and insisted they could develop any kind of film. I saw that I had no choice and surrendered the film, ready to sign the confession. And they asked *me* to write it! I was astounded. It appeared that none of them trusted their literacy skills sufficiently to write an official confession. They gave me an old steel pen, which I had to dip repeatedly into an inkwell, and a sheet of paper. By then it was late in the afternoon and we were tired, hungry, and very shaken. I managed to write and sign a "confession" which satisfied them and asked if we could be released. I was still hoping to wander about the town a bit before driving on—but no luck. We were to receive a military escort to our car and the escort would stay with us until we were back on the main highway and on our way to Odessa. We were given a very young and nervous soldier to accompany us, and when we finally got into the car, with Ellen in the front seat and the soldier in the back, she and I were both shaking and close to tears. I explained to the soldier what we had hoped to do in Uman, that my family had lived there, and how frustrated we were to have been blocked. He was sympathetic and apologetic—but he had his orders and we sadly drove off a few kilometers toward Odessa and dropped him off at some appointed spot. Even now, all these years later, I am gripped by the memory, and I'm sure that it gave me a lifelong vivid empathy for true victims of totalitarian authority.



Dan Slobin, 1983

Lokhvitsa – the Other Ukrainian Family Site

On Page 102 I made brief reference to Lokhvitsa, the birthplace of my paternal grandfather, Samuel K. Slobin. My grandfather, Shneur Zalman Zlobinsky, left Lokhvitsa in 1902, leaving behind his parents and five siblings. He arrived in the United States in 1905 and changed his name to Samuel K. Slobin (adding a middle initial from his mother's maiden name). In 1966 I drove through the Ukrainian countryside and stopped in Poltava. The provincial museum had coats of arms of each major town, including Lokhvitsa. I was happy to see that the legendary family hometown actually existed, though it wasn't possible to visit it then.



Лохвица (Lokhvitsa)

The Yad Vashem website gives this information about the Jewish history of the town (https://www.yadvashem.org/untoldstories/database/index.asp?cid=475):

A Jewish presence in Lokhvitsa was first mentioned in regard to the mid-16th century. In 1636 50 Jews were killed during the Pavlyuik rebellion. During the Chmielnitsky uprising in 1648 some local Jews were killed and the rest apparently fled. The Jews in Lokhvitsa were mostly artisans or worked in commerce. In 1897 the local Jewish population of 2,500 comprised 36 percent of the

total population. At the end of the 1920s most Jewish artisans were members of industrial cooperatives or worked for state enterprises. In 1930 a Jewish kolkhoz, Nayer Veg (New Way), was founded. It included 188 families and owned 84 hectares of land. There were 2,095 Jews in the town in 1939, comprising 19.3 percent of the total population. Lokhvitsa was occupied by German troops on September 12, 1941. Many Jews apparently succeeded in leaving the town for the Soviet interior before the German troops arrived. On May 12, 1942 the 287 Jews who remained were shot. The town was liberated by the Red Army on September 13, 1943.

The Zlobinsky (Slobin) family would have been familiar with houses like these.

The surrounding Ukrainian fields are reminiscent of Michigan. And the winters of Michigan would also have been no surprise.

My father's cousin Esther in Moscow: A Soviet life across eras

As I've reported in the memoir, my paternal grandfather, S. K. Slobin, prospered in the early years of the 20th century, managing to bring his old parents and a crew of younger brothers and sisters to Detroit. My father, Norval Slobin, grew up with all of those Russian aunts and uncles and cousins. One of the cousins, Esther, was among the last to be brought over, coming with her parents on the eve of the Depression. She came young enough to be Americanized, but old enough to be both Russian and Soviet—I mean, with a *russkaya dusha* (Russian soul) and leftist tendencies. Depression era US wasn't to her liking, certainly not in Detroit, where Henry Ford was fighting the unions. And it was rumored that she had left a boyfriend behind in Russia. Although she was about the same age as my father, he had been born in Detroit (in 1911) and she in Russia. Her ideological orientation was already Soviet when she came to the U.S.; he was raised first in Yiddish, she in Russian. So, in 1931, she went back to the Soviet Union, to Moscow, where she married and developed a good career as a translator in the Foreign Languages Publishing House, since she had been in the States long enough to acquire near-native English.

She and my father, first cousins, apparently had some mutual affection, and he kept up with her for a while, but lost contact during the War. When I went to Moscow in 1959, as a guide at the U.S. Exhibition, no one knew if she was alive nor how to track her down. My parents and grandparents had learned only recently, little by little, that most relatives who hadn't emigrated had perished in the Holocaust.

By the time I was back in Moscow in 1966, Cousin Esther had made contact again, and she and my father were corresponding in Russian. He had gone to the USSR in 1962 and had met her in Moscow, reestablishing their warm connection from the 1930s, when they were in their twenties. So I knew how to find her in 1966, and she and I had some marvelous times together, immediately feeling close. Although she remained close to my Dad, she hadn't missed most of the Detroit family; she had married a Russian (that is, non-Jewish) man, and had a married daughter and brand-new grandchild. I met them all in their small but fairly comfortable Soviet apartment. Esther was, for me, a good window into a life of survival in the Soviet Union through the War, the Stalin era, and—at that time—the dreadful Brezhnev period of "stagnation." She had no regrets about having spent her life in the USSR, but was not starry-eyed about that world either, and recounted many difficulties. At the same time she had a good grasp of the many insufficiencies of life in the West. Here she is with her daughter and grandson.

These are observations that I find in my 1966 notebook:

Esther and her husband have different last names; the same is true of their daughter, Ira. This is Soviet practice. They don't wear wedding rings: that would be "Philistine."

No one had expected the big changes under Khrushchev; they were all surprised. Khrushchev certainly did some things wrong. He tried to mix into art, literature—into all fields; he didn't spend enough on agriculture. But all of this has improved by now. The standard of living continues to go up and people have rising expectations. She says that they could get a better apartment if an inspection committee decides that they're too cramped. More is

available. Esther buys fruits and vegetables from a колхозный рынок (a collective farm market where peasants can sell their produce privately). The quality is better and the prices tend to be higher, but not always; they could even be lower.

It's difficult to travel abroad (that is, within the East Bloc countries). Currency exchange is a problem. She went to Romania on a tour, but was only allowed to take 300 rubles (but she did take more). Internal travel within the Soviet Union is free, but one is not allowed to make hotel reservations. Therefore it's hard to visit big cities unless you can find private accommodations, which is possible. If you go to a hotel you have to show your passport (everyone has an internal passport). This is supposed to keep unmarried people from sleeping together. The passport is not a hardship—except for people of "Jewish nationality," which is entered in the passport. Other nationalities don't have problems. She pointed out that the passport requirement is valuable in catching criminals.

She agreed with my observations of nervousness and hostility, which she attributed to "low culture" of many Muscovites, hot weather, and a large immigrant population in the city. But women feel free to walk the streets at night.

She's sad that it isn't possible to get all the foreign publications she'd like, but adds that sex and crime books would have a bad effect It's good that jamming of the radio has stopped, though the Voice of America is boring and often false (for example, there was a story on good race relations in Cleveland shortly before there were race riots there). She doesn't read much literature from other Soviet or socialist languages, and regrets that there are no current satirists. There's a feeling of Russian cultural chauvinism, especially vis-à-vis Poland. As for Germany, East German literature is probably bad and West German probably good.

In general, Esther and her husband have an attitude of resigned cynicism, while sincerely devoted to the system and, especially, to Russian culture. They resent apparent class distinctions. For example, when a restaurant posts a sign "мест нет" [no space]*, free spaces are often available. Important people and foreigners will be let in; young people won't be. Foreigners are no longer a curiosity in Moscow as they were earlier.*

After having spent some wonderful time with her—dinners at their home, wandering about Moscow—I asked her to help me work on my conference paper in Russian, since I had decided that what I really cared about was communicating specifically to Soviet colleagues, rather than all of the Westerners who were at the international conference. I had come with a paper to deliver in English, but changed my mind. And so she and I worked together for many hours, and I couldn't have made a successful Russian scientific presentation without her expert help.

I saw Esther last, again in Moscow, in 1989. She was apprehensive about Gorbachev's *glasnost'* and *perestroika*. She didn't trust him or the system to really change, and she didn't feel at home anymore. She was in her late seventies then, and I think there were too many changes for her. She found the growing materialism crass and, like many of her generation, had some nostalgia for the severity of earlier years, which had taken on a feeling of circumscribed safety and familiarity.

Her daughter, on the other hand—already divorced—was quite cynical about everything. She had no identification with her mother's values or memories, and no great hopes for a reformed or post-Soviet future. She was totally apolitical and non-ideological. Our long conversations were about relationships, pop culture, personal stories.

Cousin Esther died shortly after that visit. She wouldn't have enjoyed the Moscow or the Russia that were emerging.

The 1989 trip was in the waning days of the USSR. There were hopes for glasnost and perestroika, and I watched long sessions of the Supreme Soviet on my hotel TV, marveling at Gorbachev's attempts to cajole the opposition into speaking up and debating with him and each other. He sat on the dais and lectured the participants like a school teacher. The last trip, in 2006, was again to a Russian conference, this time an international cognitive science conference where I had been invited to give a plenary lecture. By then the Soviet Union was gone. Gorbachev and Yeltsin had done their work, and the Putin era of oligarchy and naked capitalism was already in full swing.

My mother, born in the Russian Empire in 1909, had lived on to 2003. I remember her bemused observation, in old age, remembering the last Czar, remembering the March Revolution and having heard Kerensky speak in her town, then the October Revolution, and what seemed to be a permanent Cold War world of East versus West. She said, "I saw the Soviet Union come and go and I'm still here!"

Yokheved Lipa, Uman, 1913

Judith Liepah, Detroit, 1923

Dan Slobin & Judith Liepah Slobin, Detroit, 2002

Dreaming in a plane over Russia – 2005

Flying West – 30,000 feet above a former homeland. *The plane from Japan has flown over Asian and European Russia, curved across Finland and across the water to Estonia. And now, approaching Latvia, I muse that it is somewhere near here where my Kimmel ancestors flourished and fled. I didn't get to know them well enough. But, at this moment, my father and his mother and the house in Bay City, Michigan, seem so close: the ancient Kimmel Yiddish great-grandmother and her sons, my great uncles, who were strange because they were American and not Yiddish; and the late visit—in 1982—to the old house on Sheridan Avenue and the Jewish cemetery. Dad looking for his relatives among the tombstones; me thinking about the dramas that may have taken place there.*

Passing close to Riga, Vilnius, Warsaw, Minsk... I feel my ancestors down there. Someone knew some of those roads or lakes or rivers. Maybe the Kimmel lumber came from one of those dark green places below. Maybe a young girl, in the eighteenth century, wondered what it would be like to grow up. Maybe a boy in the seventeenth century was trying to please his mother. Maybe some trace of face or habit, or even shape of spine, or susceptibility to illness or madness lies down there in ancient, buried DNA that I have bits of—right here and now—in this Austrian airplane, served by charming young Japanese women in red dresses, while I listen to Sibelius in my earphones—the echoes of Finland. And the Germans moved through here, raking up and burning all of the DNA that was left. But I am still here. Bialystok off to the left now; the map on the screen shows that our plane-arrow is headed for the Vistula. Heavy with associations here, as we pass over old Yiddishland to land in Vienna. Moving from the lands of the Romanovs to the lands of the Habsburgs. Now all lands of the EU. Ever-changing configurations of the map of this little peninsula of Eurasia, so drenched with the suffering and madness and glory of my various peoples.

Yiddish letters

I had little first-person documentation available for the writing of this memoir, and I've included the few surviving letters. My father, Norval Slobin (1911-1997) had one letter from each of his grandfathers and several from his father, and I had two postcards from my mother's father. As for grandmothers, I had many letters from my mother's mother, and only one English-Yiddish letter from my father's mother. She was the only grandparent born in the United States, and she left several letters in a fine English cursive. The Yiddish letters are interesting linguistically, with idiosyncratic cursive forms and varying spelling patterns, reflecting the geographical origins of the writers. English words are readily integrated in all of the letters, with varying transliterations.

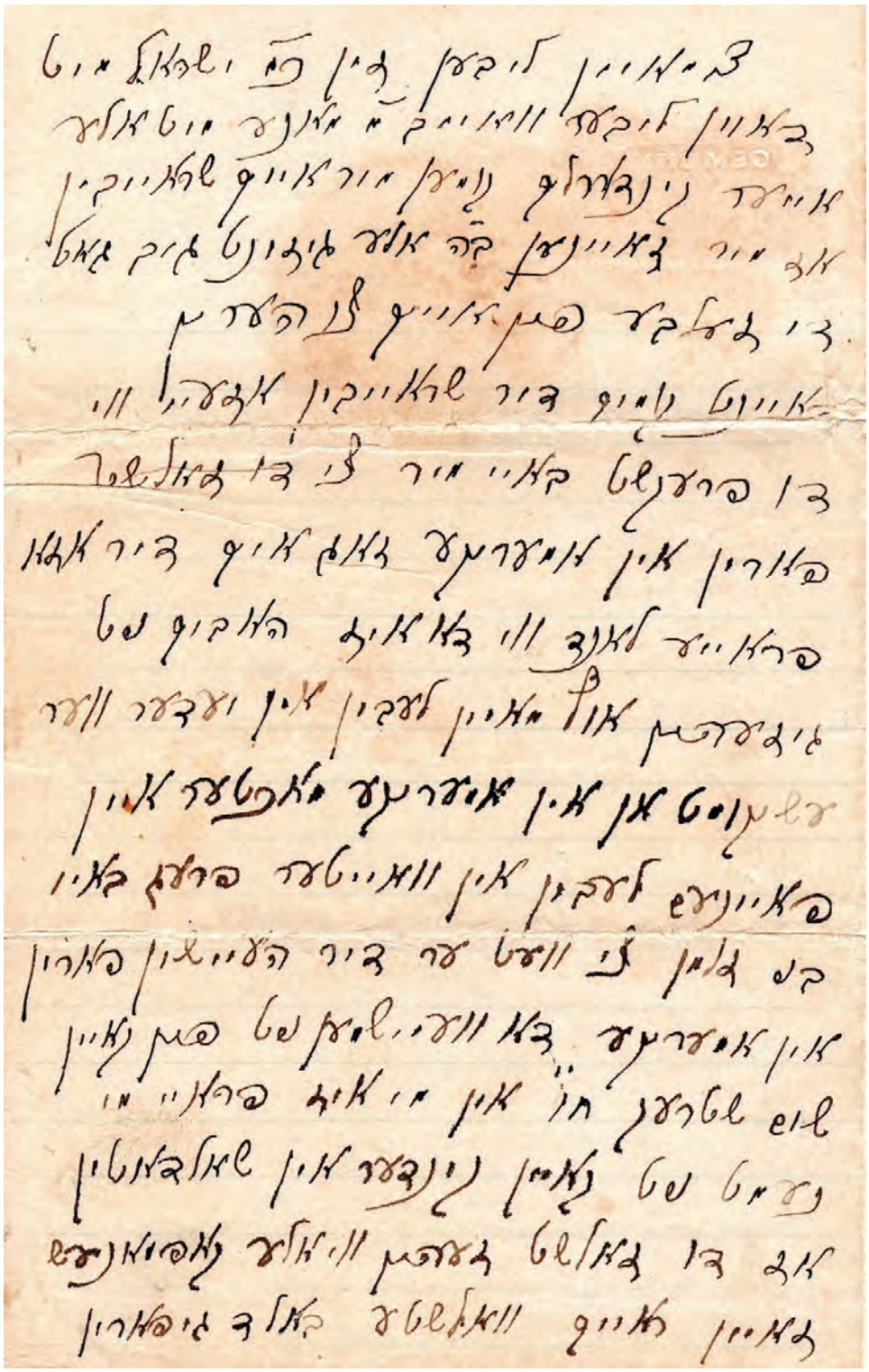
I don't know how the grandparents learned to write Yiddish. The men would all have had early *kheder* training in Hebrew, and may have used the Hebrew alphabet intuitively for writing in the vernacular. My American-born grandmother spoke Yiddish with her parents, and perhaps one of them taught her to read and write Yiddish. My maternal grandmother, the daughter of a writer, told me that her father had hired a tutor to teach Russian to her and several other girls, and perhaps he also taught them to read liturgical Hebrew and to read and write Yiddish. Although there were many Yiddish publications in the Pale, there was no standard orthography, as reflected in the several sorts of spellings in the grandparents' letters. Nor was there a standard cursive form for the Hebrew alphabet. Some of the grandparents wrote in a clearly legible hand, separating each letter, while others had invented various shortcuts. All of this has been well investigated. I include these few letters for the light they cast on the language, as well as the personalities and origins of the writers.

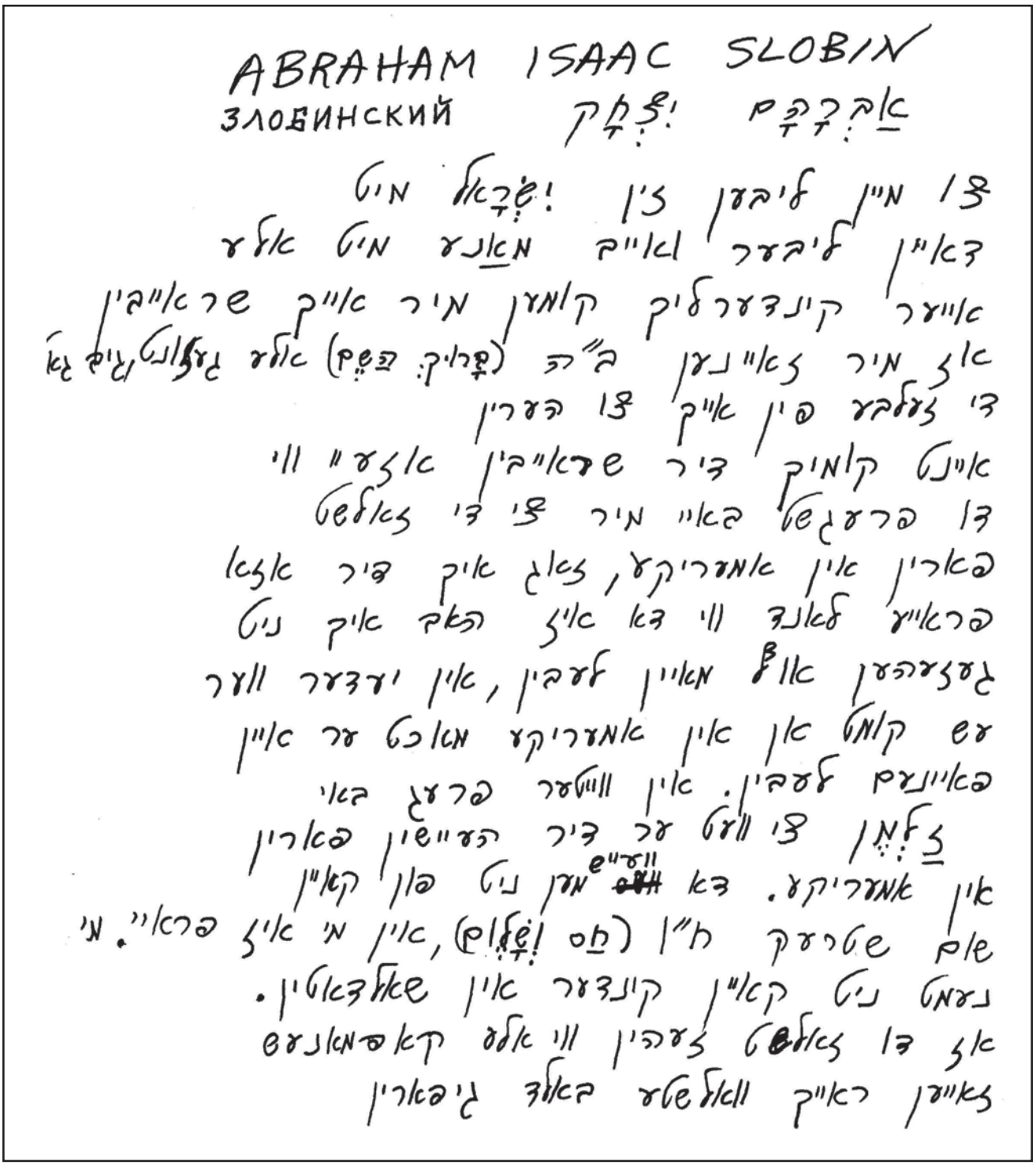
There were two major Yiddish dialects in the family: the Northern or Lithuanian dialect of the Greenbergs and Kimmels, and the Southern or Ukrainian dialect of the Slobins and Liepahs. My father's grandparents represented the two dialects, and he remembered endless arguments about pronunciation. The shibboleth was apparently the word for 'bread'—*breyt* in the North and *broyt* in the South. Due to the lack of a standard orthography at the time that the first letters were written, in the beginning of the 20th century, the spelling represents the contrasting speech patterns as neatly as if one had a tape recording. Where a Northener wrote the second-person pronoun as **דו** *du,* a Southerner wrote **דיא** *di*. Where a Northener wrote **בייא** *bei* 'by', a Southerner wrote **בא** *ba*. The Southerners, like Cockneys, spoke an "H-dropping" dialect. In the many letters I have from my maternal grandmother, she often inserted the letter **ה** *h* where it didn't belong, or left it out where it did, since she never pronounced it. For example, she wrote **ערען** *eren* for **הערען** *heren* 'hear', but **האבער** *hober* for **אבער** *ober* 'but'. My great-grandfather Abraham Isaac Slobin wrote **איינט** *aynt* for **היינט** *haynt* 'today'. And all of them, North and South, inserted **ה** on the basis of German spelling, which was the preferred or prestige spelling before the standardization of Yiddish removed all of those superfluous forms. Thus they wrote **זעהען** *zehen* on the model of German *sehen* 'see' instead of Yiddish **זען** *zen*, and the second-person plural pronoun as **איהר**, on the German model *Ihr*, rather than standard Yiddish **איר** *ir*.

All of the letters were written in America, and all of them have many English words, accommodated to the Hebrew alphabet. In all of them, Hebrew words are written in Hebrew orthography, without insertion of vowels.

My father provided careful transcriptions and translations of the letters of his father and grandfather. The translations are in the memoir, above. Here are his transliterations for anyone who has tried to decipher the examples in the text. The letter-writers rarely made use of punctuation, which my father added for clarification.

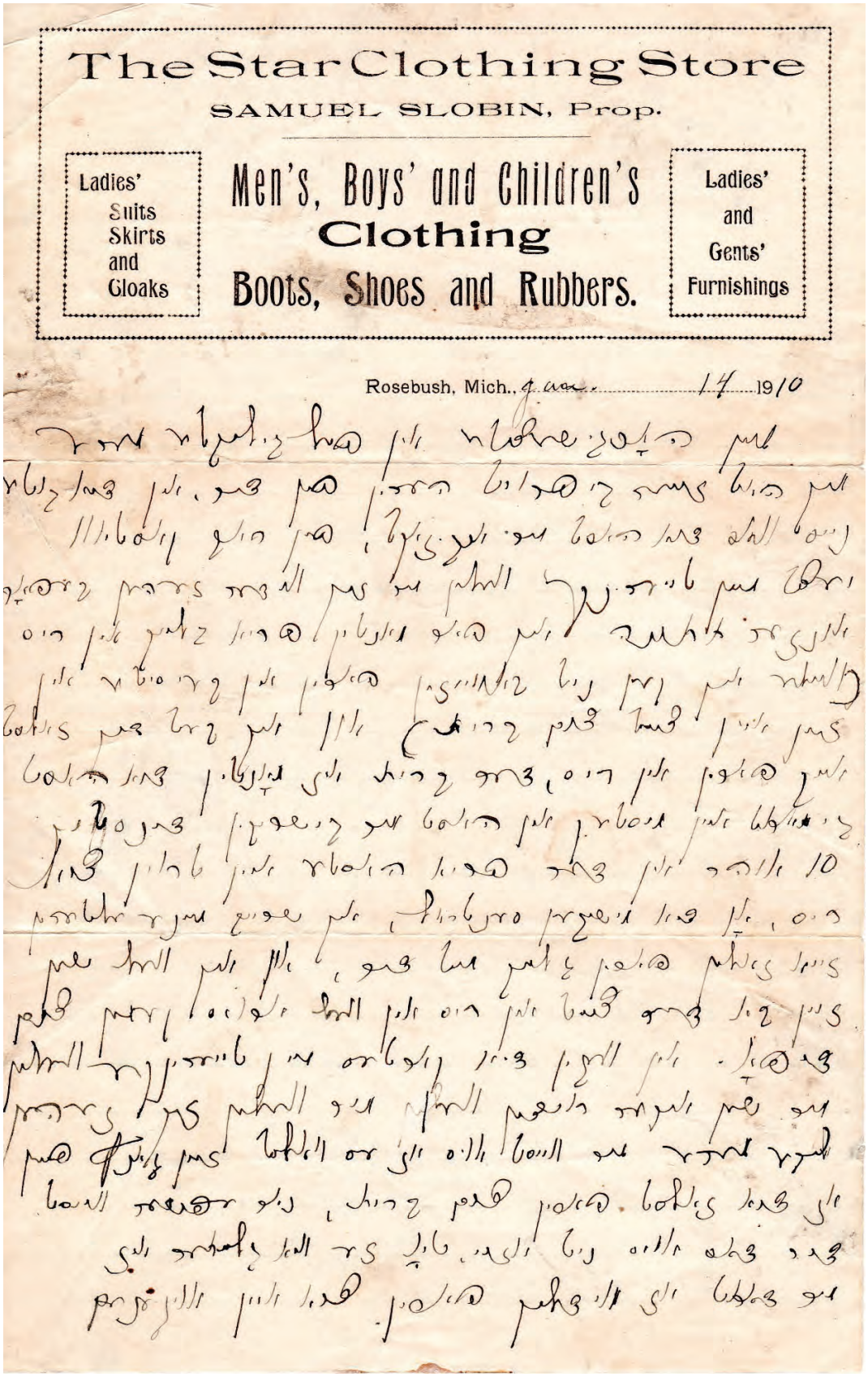
Abraham Isaac Slobin (1833-1914) *(pp. 104-5)*




ABRAHAM ISAAC SLOBIN
זלאבינסקי יצחק אברהם

אין אייראפע איז דער ווילנער גאון
דער "אליה רבה" פון זיין צייט
אבער ער איז אויך באקאנט
מיט זיין קינדערלעך קומען
אין ארץ ישראל. ער איז
אין אמעריקא. דא ###### אין
זיין קהל
בית המדרש
פון זיין
פאטער
אין קומט
אין אמעריקא אוכט אר זיין
אס קומט אין אמעריקא
פרייהייט אלעס אויף אמעריקאנער
דעמאלט איז דא אויך
פרייהייט
אין אמעריקא, כאטש אויך
פיר אלעמען
דו פרעגסט
אויב מיר
זאלען
אויך קומען
דיר שרייבן
זאלען וויי
די ענטפער
אויף דערין
אויך מיר כאטש (בתוך הפיסקא) אלעס ענטפערט זיך
קינדערלעך קומען מיר אויך שרייבן
דאלין עיקרי וויייס אמעריקא מיט אלעס
אז מיין עיקרי כין יצחק מיט

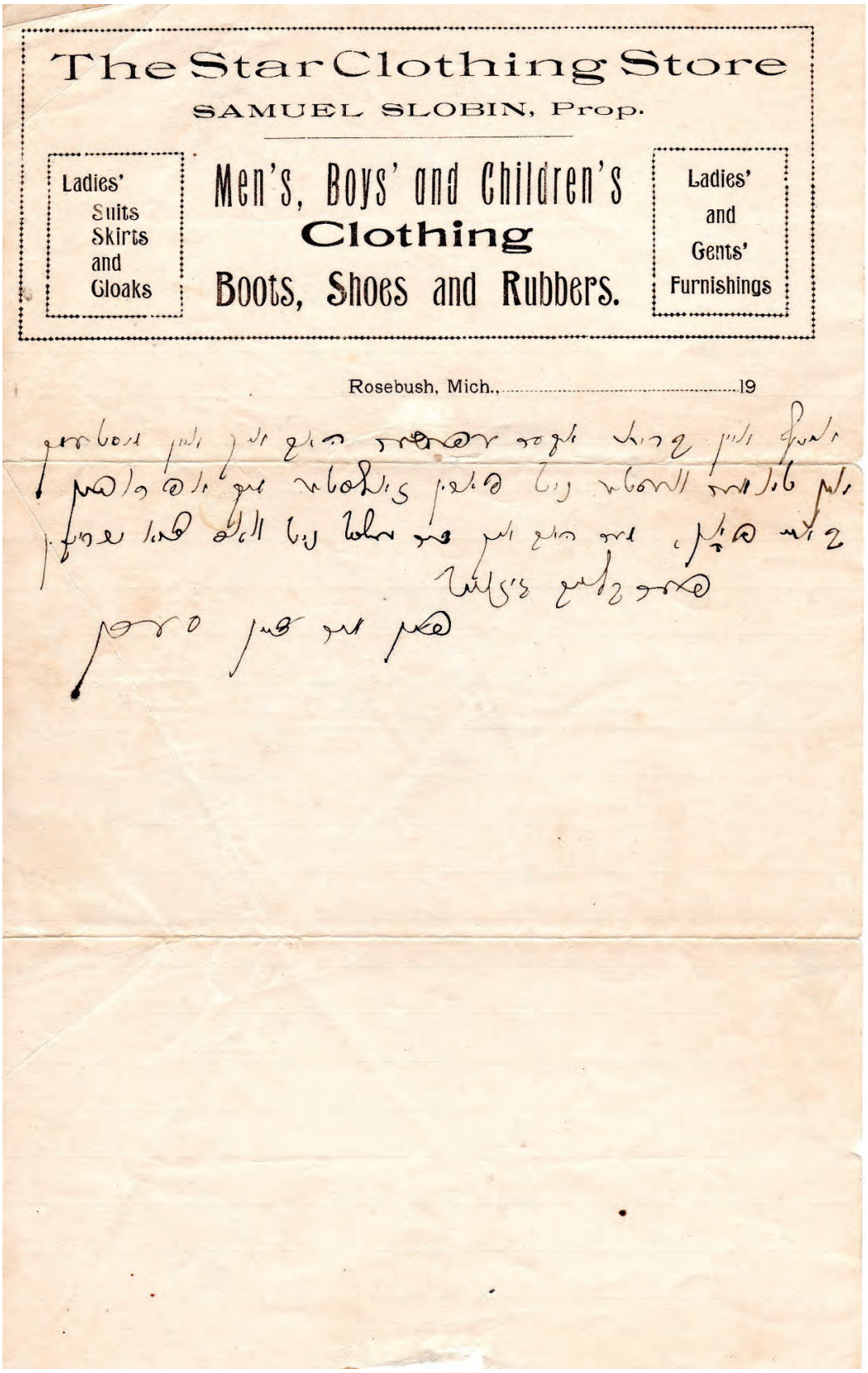
Samuel Kostoff Slobin (1881-1941) *(p. 111)*



SAMUEL SLOBIN
Rosebush, Mich., Jan. 14, 1910

מײַן הײַבּ־זשאַגער איז פֿון זשלובטער מדרש:

איך האָב צ״ער זשעדויט הערן פֿון דיר, אַז דו זאָלסט
נישט וואָס דוא האָסט מיר אַרזשאַקט פֿון חוש קאָמפּאָלל.
יצחק, מײַן טײַערינקע, וואָלטן מיר ליב וויזאַר צוהאַן בשפּאָר
אונדזער חתונה. אָבער מאָמענטיק פּרובע שלייק אַין רוס
כוועלט איך קאַן נוט באַווײַזן פֿאַרוואָס אין דעם סוד אַין
ניין אַין שוים שלום בּיזית) אָבער דאָס דיק ליאַסט
איך פֿאַרוואָס אַין רוס. זאָל בּרוית איך מאָמענטיק. דו האָסט
זשאַמאָל אַין מוסטאַק אַין האָסט מיר זשאַריבּן דינסטיק
וו אַהער אַין זאָל פּרובע האָסט אַין טרוין שוין
רוס, אַזוי די מישאַן סטאַרטעד. איך שרייב מײַנע עלטערן
ני אַלײַן פֿאַרוואָס מוט דיר, אָבער וועל שאַן
ניין בּא זאָל שוים אַין רוס אָבער וועל אַרויסקומען שוין
די כּאָל. אַין וועלן די קאָרטס, מײַן טײַערינקע, וועלן
מיר שאַן אויפֿער רוידען וועל מיר וועלען ניך לאַכּען.
שוּבּע מאָרש, מיר וויסן אַלוס זשעט ווערט ניין זשונג בײַן
אַלץ דיר לאָמפּאָס פֿאַרוואָס שוים בּרוית, נאָר פּשאָר וויסן
דיר דאָס אַלוס נוט אַלץ, טאָל סע וו זשלובטער אַלץ.
מיר האָבּן אַלץ מוזיקליק פֿאַרוואָס שיך אַוועקשאַ



The Star Clothing Store

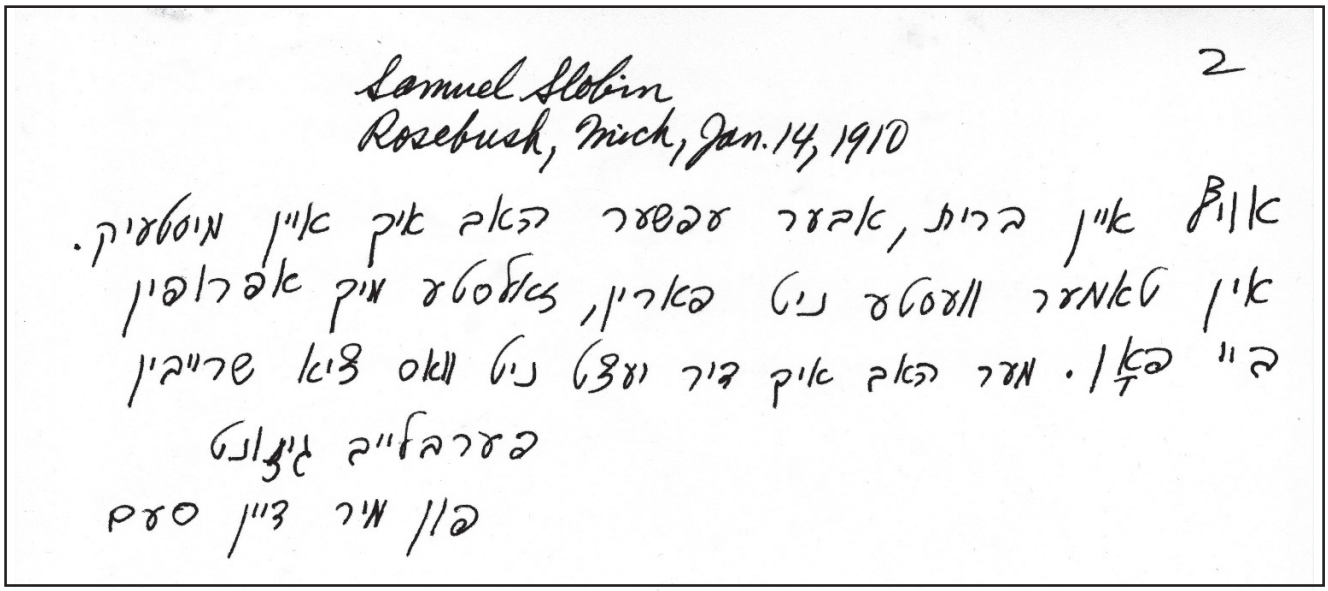
SAMUEL SLOBIN, Prop.

Ladies'
Suits
Skirts
and
Cloaks

Men's, Boys' and Children's
Clothing
Boots, Shoes and Rubbers.

Ladies'
and
Gents'
Furnishings

Rosebush, Mich., ... 19



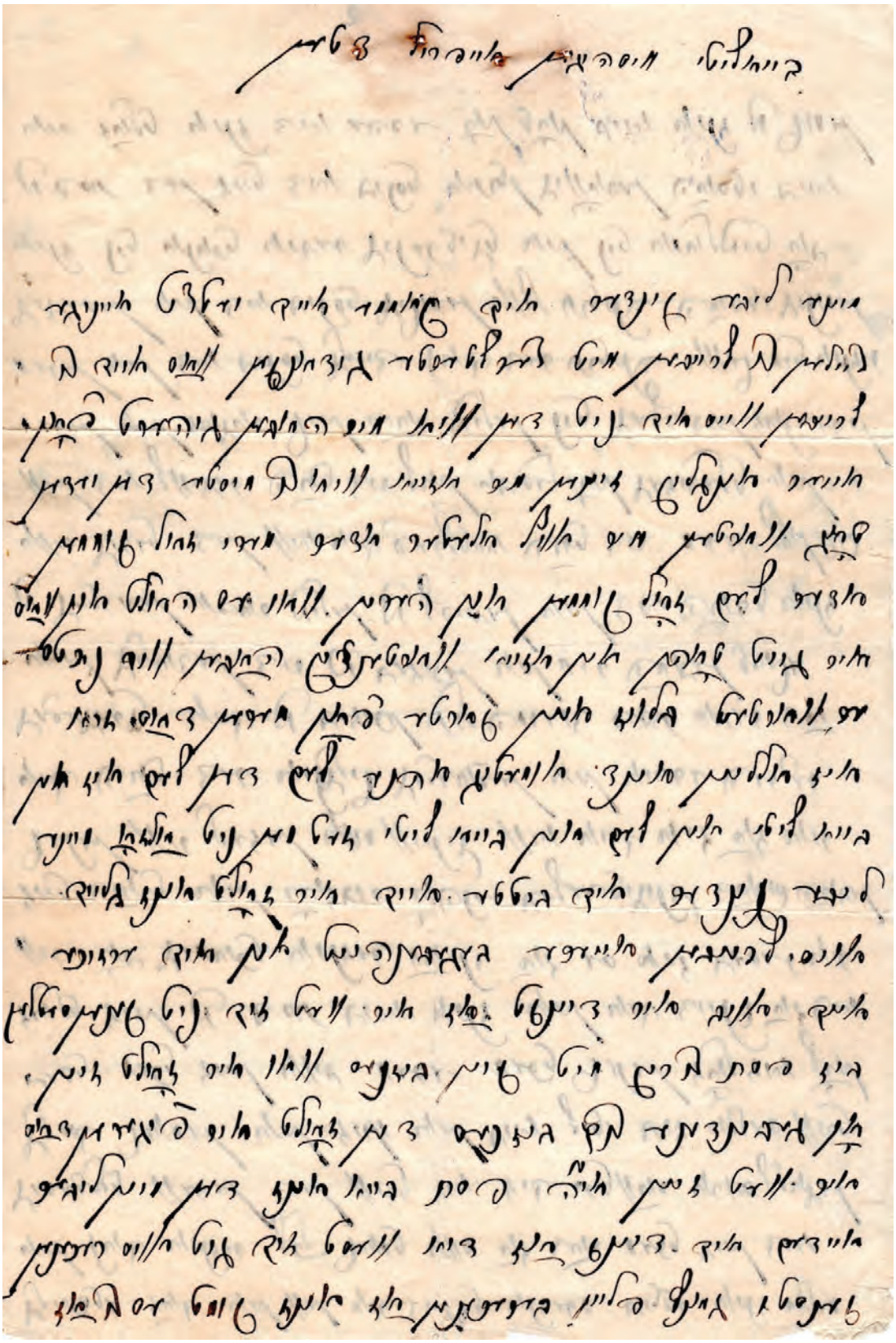
2

Samuel Slobin
Rosebush, Mich, Jan. 14, 1910

אויך איין ברוית, אבער שפעטער הבאה איך איין מוסתיק.
איין טאמער וועסטו נישט קאנטסט איך אפרופין
ב"ה פסח. אדר הבאה אויך דיר ווצץ נישט וואס צוזא שרייבין
פערבליב ישראל
פון אייר זיין סטם

Samuel Elijah Greenberg (1885-1921) *(pp. 113-14)*

The letter writer came from the former Prussian area of Kurland. His Yiddish is marked not only by German spelling, but also German vocabulary and syntactic patterns, as will be evident to the reader of Yiddish.



SAMUEL ELIJAH GREENBERG

שמואל אליה גרינבערג

בייזשוטי מיסהיגין אויפריכט ז.טען

מיינע ליבע קינדער אין קאמאר אויך ווען איך בין
קיין שרייבען צו שרייבען מיר צערטרעסטע ביזונדערקיין. וואס איך בין
שרייבין וויס איך ניט, דען וויא מיר הויבען זיך הערט פֿאַר
אויער שוואַרציקין, צינדען מיר אלעיכא וווי צוזאַמען, דען ווען
טאָג וואַרטען מיר אויף אַ וועגעלע, אדער מערי קאמאן
אדער סעם קיין קאמאן, אזוי הערין וואוו עס הויעט אזוי וואס
אויר זיין טאָהן. אזוי אלעיכא וואַרטעדיק האַבען וויר ניכטס.
ערוואַרטעט בלויב אויך קאַרטע פֿאַר מערען, וואס נישט
אויך אויפֿיין אויבן אומעטיך אהינע סעם, דען סעם אויך אין
בויא שוטי, אזוי סעם אין בויא שוטי פֿעט מען ניט. צוזאַמען מיינע
ליבע קינדער, אויך בין אויך אויר קיין אזוי ליידיק
אויסשרייבען אויערע בעזעצעניי, אזוי אויך ערקלערע
אויך, אוויב אויר ווילט אין אויר ווערט ניט קיינען וועגען
ביין פֿסח קלויבט מיט קיין בישנעס וואוו אויר פֿאַרט צין
אַן שבועדנע צום בישנעס, דען קיין אויר פֿירערן דאָס
אויר ווערט צין (חג יבוא בשלום) פֿסח בויא אזוי,
דען מיין ליבער

2

SAMUEL ELIJAH GREENBERG

איר קלעמ אונ דו שהרש לאן טאָן ביז אונ אין קוואן
אז פסח, דאן צייט דיזן בונס אַ תּתן ג'ולורן, הכּוסטו ביזן
אונ נט אַ נאכט אויבער ג'נאכטוק אין נט אַ מאל צוויי אַלע
ג'ג'סאן, אוון דיזן בונס ערקוואן אוועק תּוֹנֶה הכּוסטו ג'נוואן
מארצן, אוון די בונס ג'עיק נאך דער לתּנה אוועק מיט אונערר
ווען די שווינגר הכּוט דיר שאן אויסעע לאן ג'עיזעעס אוון דיר
אויס ג'ירעט, דאן ווי איך פארגס"ל הכּוט דיר מארצ שאן קוים
צו ג'עטרובן אַ פאר צ"ען צו שרובן, אוון די הכּוסטו אונ
אין ג'עפאדן דיר צו בעזוכן, אוון מיר הכּבן טאקט
ג'עפינג איך אויף צו בעזוכן תוֹנֶ בַּאוזוד פסח, אויבער דיזן
אויך הכּוט דער אונג'איק ג'טרובן אין אויער הערצער,
קענען ווייר עסן אויס ווייניג ווי אויך איך אויך אויר
צייט דיזן אין כּוֹלְצְבוֹס אַהבה בעסער ג'ונג. בּרוּך הכּבן
ווייר אַבֶּ ג'מאכט אונ'ער אַינג, אַז עס איך בעסער אויר
צו פסח בייא אונ, אוון איך דענק אַז דיזן
מארץ צין, אויך מארץ ווערט קענען, צוליב איז שאן
בעסט דאן צייט דיזן בונס אַ תּתן ג'ולורן, הכּוסטו ביזן
אונ נט אַ נאכט אויבער ג'נאכטוק אין נט אַ מאל צוויי אַלע
ג'ג'סאן, אוון דיזן בונס ערקוואן אוועק תּוֹנֶה הכּוסטו ג'נוואן
מארצן, אוון די בונס ג'עיק נאך דער לתּנה אוועק מיט אונערר
ווען די שווינגר הכּוט דיר שאן אויסעע לאן ג'עיזעעס אוון דיר
אויס ג'ירעט, דאן ווי איך פארגס"ל הכּוט דיר מארצ שאן קוים
צו ג'עטרובן אַ פאר צ"ען צו שרובן, אוון די הכּוסטו אונ
אין ג'עפאדן דיר צו בעזוכן, אוון מיר הכּבן טאקט
ג'עפינג איך אויף צו בעזוכן תוֹנֶ בַּאוזוד פסח, אויבער דיזן
אויך הכּוט דער אונג'איק ג'טרובן אין אויער הערצער,
קענען ווייר עסן אויס ווייניג ווי אויך איך אויך אויר
צייט דיזן אין כּוֹלְצְבוֹס אַהבה בעסער ג'ונג. בּרוּך הכּבן
ווייר אַבֶּ ג'מאכט אונ'ער אַינג, אַז עס איך בעסער אויר
צו פסח בייא אונ, אוון איך דענק אַז דיזן
מארץ צין, אויך מארץ ווערט קענען, צוליב איז שאן

3

SAMUEL ELIJAH GREENBERG

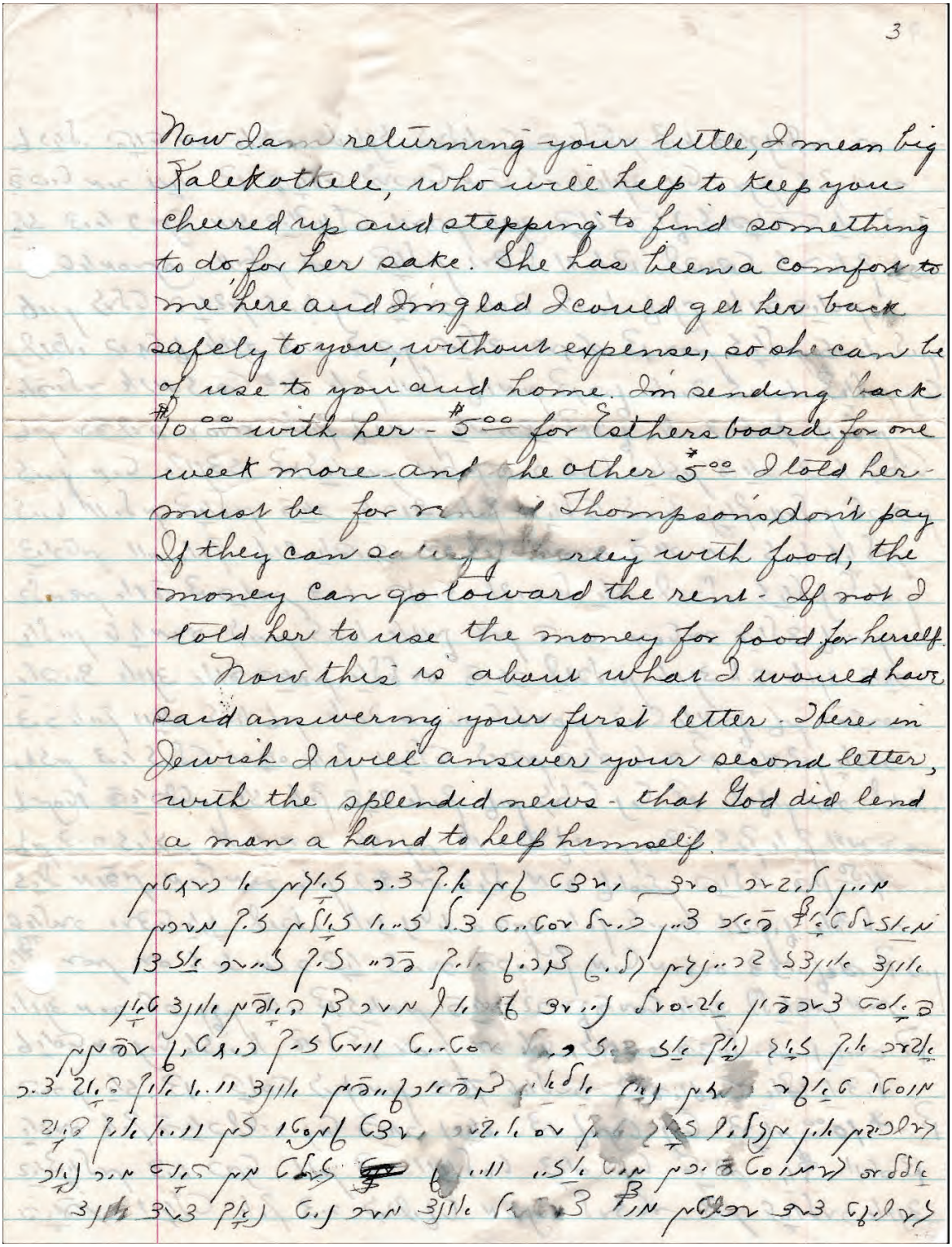
אלויס שרייבער, אלון יאר־אַן־הַיִּפְּ אלונג קיין אמעריקע נאכן
אויך הבאלטער, דאס איר צי־נאן שאנק אלדרידין. דאס
שוין׳ער הבֿאט אפֿקאר פֿר־טכֿלך ניוואָרק בויט אויך
קאמער/ שׂרֿבער צוא הבֿרט ניק צעלבסט אַבֿ ניבאלטן. אין
הבֿרט ניבֿינקט אין וויבט ראוויס הבֿרען פֿסלן אויך׳
אויך אוי׳ך שׂרבֿער וויבֿער בויט הי׳ר שׂאלבֿרן׳ קען אוי׳ך
ניט אוועק קאמער. צאלבסט קי־נר נ־יאס׳ הבֿבֿר אוי׳ך
אויך ניט ווֿאס מיט בֿל ט־ה־יאן. פֿרבֿלייבט ראצ׳ינ׳
ווי אס ווינטט אויך אוי׳ער אוי׳ך ניבֿרבֿער אפֿטערין

סאס אוונ׳ך שׂוי׳ך ר׳ינבערך

די קינדער. פֿטֿן מיר, בֿער צעלבסער
אוי׳ך ראי׳סאן ווי׳ר שוין מיט מֿאי׳סאן מיט שׂוי׳ך׳ין מיט
די קינדער. פֿטֿן מיר, בֿער צעלבסער

Miriam Greenberg Slobin (1890-1950) *(pp. 137-139)*

This third page of a seven-page letter from 1934 shows the switch from one language to another in the same hand. Note that my grandmother has described the switch as "Here in Jewish," rather than Yiddish.



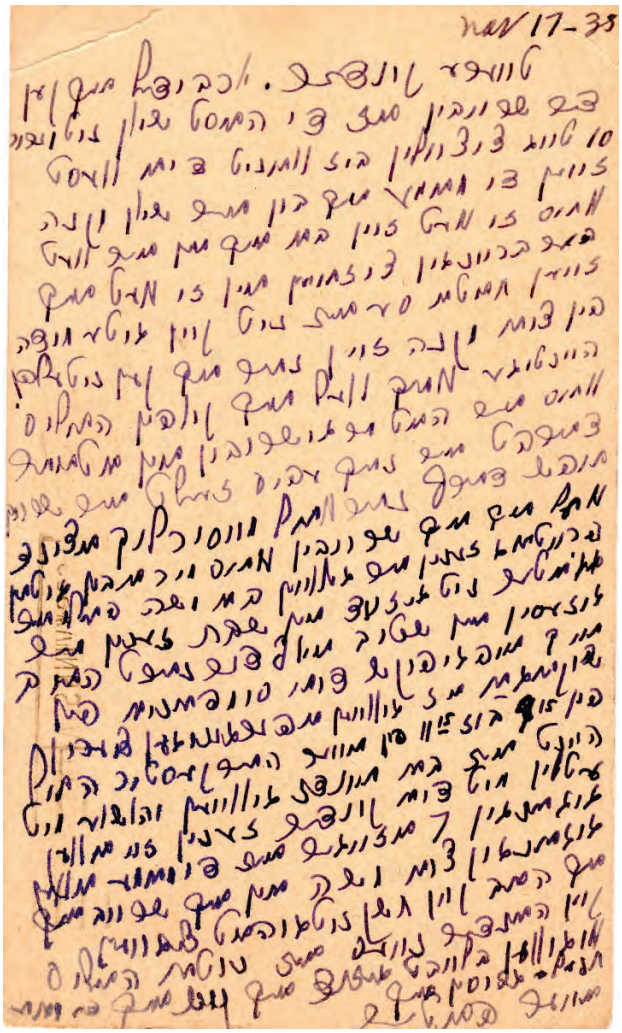
3

Now I am returning your little, I mean big Kalekotkele, who will help to keep you cheered up and stepping to find something to do for her sake. She has been a comfort to me here and I'm glad I could get her back safely to you, without expense, so she can be of use to you and home. I'm sending back $10.00 with her - $5.00 for Esthers board for one week more and the other $5.00 I told her must be for r[illegible] Thompsons don't pay If they can [illegible] with food, the money can go toward the rent - If not I told her to use the money for food for herself.

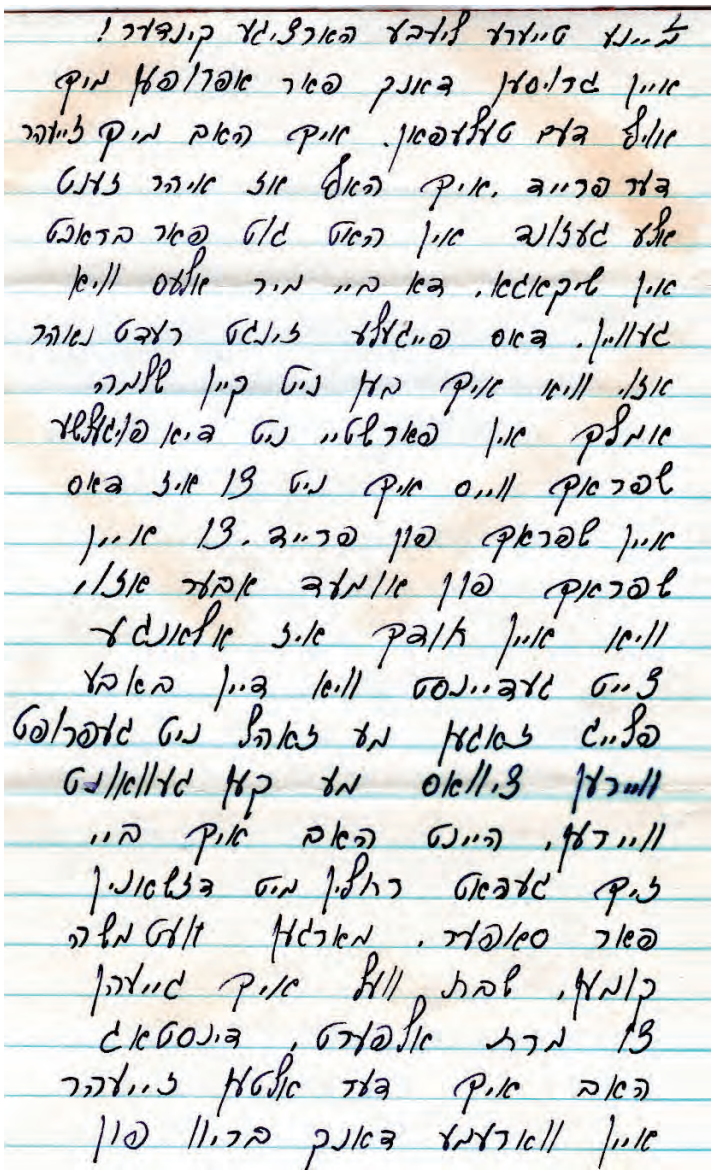
Now this is about what I would have said answering your first letter. Here in Jewish I will answer your second letter, with the splendid news - that God did lend a man a hand to help himself.

Finally note the differences in handwriting between my two maternal grandparents.

Simon Liepah (1885-1952)



Sima Baker Liepah (1888-1979)



Dan Slobin, 1975

The Pale of Settlement (Russian: Черта осе длости, chertá osédlosti; Yiddish: תּחום-המושבֿ דער , der tchum-ha-moyshev; Hebrew: ת חוּם ה מוֹש ב , t'ḥum hammosháv) wasa western region of the Russian Empire with varying borders that existed from 1791 to 1917 in which permanent residency by Jews was allowed and beyond which Jewish residency, permanent or temporary,[1] was mostly forbidden. Most Jews were still excluded from residency in a number of cities within the Pale as well. A few Jews were allowed to live outside the area, including those with university education, the ennobled, members of the most affluent of the merchant guilds and particular artisans, some military personnel and some services associated with them, including their families, and sometimes their servants.

The archaic English term pale is derived from the Latin word palus, a stake, extended to mean the area enclosed by a fence or boundary.

The Pale of Settlement included all of modern day Belarus, Lithuania and Moldova, much of Ukraine and Poland, and relatively small parts of Latvia and western Russian Federation. It extended from the eastern pale, or demarcation line inside the country, westwards to the Imperial Russian border with the Kingdom of Prussia (later the German Empire) and Austria-Hungary. Furthermore, it composed about 20% of the territory of European Russia and largely corresponded to historical lands of the former Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Cossack Hetmanate, and the Ottoman Empire (with Crimean Khanate and Principality of Moldavia). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pale_of_Settlement