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'The Power of Pearls': Memoir of a Russian Jewish Immigrant to the American South

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“THE POWER OF PEARLS”:
MEMOIR OF A RUSSIAN JEWISH IMMIGRANT TO THE AMERICAN SOUTH

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts
History

by
Leah Cannon Burnham
May 2016

Accepted by:
Dr. Steven Marks, Committee Chair
Dr. Alan Grubb
Dr. Megan Shockley

ABSTRACT

Abe Wolfe Davidson was a Russian Jewish artist who immigrated to the South in 1922. He created public and private sculpture and encouraged artistic culture in the region. Davidson wrote an autobiography prior to passing away in 1981 and his daughters donated the unpublished memoir to the Clemson Special Collections. He provides an insider's perspective to artistic culture in the region during the first half of the twentieth century. His memoir also describes life in the Jewish Pale of Settlement and the immigrant experience in the American South. This thesis analyzes the historical significance of Davidson and the value of his memoir. This study also links Davidson's memoir to its historical context.

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I am indebted to Dorothy McCulloch and Punky Burwinkle for allowing me to edit and annotate their father's memoir. Mrs. McCulloch graciously welcomed me into her home and showed me her private collection of artwork and documents. I would also like to thank the Clemson University Special Collections.

I am especially grateful for the love and support of my husband, Craig. This work would not be possible without his daily encouragement.

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A NOTE ON EDITING AND ANNOTATIONS

I chose to edit the most egregious grammatical errors in order to provide consistency and also to improve readability. Davidson is responsible for the words within parentheses, while I provided definitions and additional information within brackets. I used what has been processed by the Clemson Special Collections as Version D of the memoir, but inserted two pages from Version C to replace two pages that were missing from Version D. I also chose to separate the memoir into four parts to improve organization.

Because the memoir's content is historically rich, I chose to annotate it in order to link Davidson's memoir to its historical context. Memoirs can be better understood when they are interpreted in connection with historical events and information. I hope that the annotations make the memoir more accessible to readers.

INTRODUCTION

Abe Wolfe Davidson was a Russian Jewish immigrant whose artistic career flourished in the South during the twentieth century. Davidson created public sculpture for South Carolina and Georgia legislatures and also for universities, including Clemson University, Furman University, Mercer University, and the Citadel. He also designed the sesquicentennial half-dollar of Columbia, SC in 1936.¹ He was the first vice-president of the Fine Arts League, which he helped to create in 1935, as well as the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project gallery director in Greenville, South Carolina, from 1937-1938.² This gallery would later become the Greenville Art Museum. He was the director of the art program at Brenau University in Gainesville, Georgia for almost twenty years, retiring in 1966. Prior to his death, Davidson was in the process of sculpting a statue of SC Senator Strom Thurmond.³

Davidson not only had a remarkable career in art, he also had a remarkable life. Davidson was born in 1903 in Vitebsk, then in the Russian Empire, now part of Belarus. As a Jew, Davidson and his family faced discrimination in Russia. He later experienced the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the Civil War that followed. Demonstrating artistic talent at an early age, Davidson was offered the opportunity to study art at the Vitebsk Government Art School, headed by Marc Chagall and Kazimir

¹ A. Wolfe Davidson, Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

² Lila Easley Earle and Evelyn Pack Daniel, "Art: Architecture and Painting," in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, ed. Alfred S. Reid (Greenville, SC: Furman University, 1960), 70.

³ "Davidson, artist, succumbs," *The Greenville News*, October 28, 1981.

Malevich, during the Russian Civil War. In 1922 at the age of 19, Davidson and his mother emigrated to Greenville, South Carolina, to rejoin immediate family. In the American South, Davidson witnessed Jim Crow and participated in the home-front war effort during World War II. Davidson passed away in 1981 at the age of 78, leaving behind numerous pieces of public and private art and his unpublished memoir.⁴

Toward the end of his life, Davidson recorded his story for both his descendants and posterity. Davidson realized the historical significance of the events he witnessed and also his own historical agency in transforming artistic culture in South Carolina. He transcribed his family story in an effort to preserve this information, fearing that his story would be forgotten if left unwritten. Leigh Gilmore writes, “An autobiography is a monument to the idea of personhood, to the notion that one could leave behind a memorial to oneself (just in case no one else ever gets around to it) and that the memorial would perform the work of permanence that the person never can.”⁵ Davidson’s story exhibits characteristics of both a memoir and autobiography, so it does not fall into one category. Lee Shai Weissbach claims that “the line between the two genres of memoir and autobiography is a vague one, if it exists at all.”⁶ Davidson’s manuscript can be considered both, as it is both a collection of his memories of events and also a carefully written life story.

⁴ “Davidson, artist, succumbs,” *Greenville News*, October 28, 1981.

⁵ Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 12-13.

⁶ Lee Shai Weissbach, “Introduction,” In *A Jewish Life on Three Continents: The Memoir of Menachem Mendel Frieden*, trans. and ed. Lee Shai Weissbach (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), xv.

His memoir is a remarkable document and a valuable primary source. He offers the perspective of a Jew in Russia and the southern United States. Most significantly, Davidson's memoir provides a participant's perspective of art in upstate South Carolina during the 1930s and 1940s. Little has been written about art in South Carolina, or for that matter in the South as a whole, during this time period. Davidson's memoir is therefore an invaluable resource on art history in the modern South.

Davidson's memoir can be divided into four parts: his ancestors' memories, his memories of Russia, the immigration process, and his life in the United States. Like many memoirists, he commences with the oral history of his family, weaving together his mother's past and its effect on his childhood. Because Davidson did not personally experience the events he describes, this portion of the memoir cannot be considered reliable as an account of his family's experiences in the Russian empire. Davidson includes secondhand and third-hand information, which the reader must treat as fiction; however, this portion of the memoir is still highly valuable, as it contains a rich oral history of life in rural Russia and the Jewish Pale.

Davidson's mother, Chasia, was a formative force in his life and memory, for it is her stories that affected the telling of his autobiography. Davidson describes how Chasia was deprived of her inheritance: her father, Zalmon, gave her mother's pearls to her stepmother, even though they had been promised to Chasia. Upon her father's death, Chasia's stepmother obtained all their family valuables, and the pearls were passed to her stepmother's niece. Pearl necklaces were not only monetarily valuable, but also culturally

significant to Jews: Jewish women wore pearl necklaces on the Sabbath.⁷ Davidson suggests this stolen inheritance eventually led to their emigration. While Chasia's father was still alive, her brother, Berry, was so infuriated by the injustice that he chose to move to America. Berry was the original connection to America, which led to the immigration of all Chasia's sons. Davidson's proposed titles of the memoir also indicate the emphasis he placed on the stolen pearls: "The Pearls Brought Us to America" and "The Power of Pearls."

The memoir provides rich detail on Jewish culture, including Jewish traditions and myths. Davidson describes Jewish marriage customs in great detail, telling of his own mother's experience in the marriage to his father, Chaim Meyer Davidson. Davidson illustrates admiration of and ambivalence towards Jewish Torah scholars; scholars were very knowledgeable but knowledge could be dangerous in Russia. Also, there were few rabbinic jobs available and wives often had to provide for the family; Davidson illustrates Chasia's fear of this.⁸ The memoir also provides information on Jewish mourning practices, through the deaths of Chasia's father as well as her son, Aaron. Davidson links his family's suffering to the trials and tribulations of Jews in the past.

Davidson provides a vivid picture of life in the Jewish Pale, including details of everyday life among the Russian peasants. Chasia interacted with the peasants while working at her father's tavern and listened to their recollections of the emancipation of the serfs. He repeats Russian and Jewish myths about the peasants, describing them as

⁷ Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is With People: The Culture of Shtetl* (New York: Schocken Books, 1952), 42.

⁸ Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881 to 1914* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2010), 357.

ignorant and unable to take care of the land without the guidance of a landlord. Slezkine describes relations between Jews and their peasant customers: “Each side saw the other as unclean, opaque, dangerous, contemptible, and ultimately irrelevant to the communal past and future salvation.”⁹ Jews prided themselves on outwitting peasants.¹⁰ Davidson illustrates this in his descriptions of his mother’s interactions with the peasants, as he writes of situations in which the peasants were amazed at Chasia’s knowledge and skill.

Chasia’s memories also display that Jews were integrated in Russian society despite common perceptions. Chasia interacted with the peasants more than with Jews, and Davidson suggests that she felt more comfortable around the peasants. The memoir displays that oppression was sporadic and Davidson’s family generally experienced positive interactions with both rich and poor non-Jews. Davidson portrays his mother as a go-between for the Pan and the peasants, telling stories of his mother speaking on behalf of the peasants because the Pan favored her. This special relationship with the local aristocrat, too, could be a fantasy of the sort he and his family might have imagined in retrospect, although historically the Polish nobility had a longstanding reliance on Jewish factors for business purposes.¹¹

Davidson goes on to examine the complex and often difficult relationships between Jews and Russians. Chasia claimed peasants within his village participated in a pogrom against her family in 1906 and later Russian officials performed a shoddy investigation, which did not result in justice for the Davidsons. The memoir also

⁹ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 106.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹¹ Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume I, 1350 to 1881*, 35.

illustrates that his family feared the tsars and believed the tsars were all-knowing and would personally punish rebellious Jews; this is evident in the story of Aaron, the revolutionary, as Chasia believed tsarist troops injected Aaron with tuberculin germs to make sure he suffered a slow and painful death.

Jews were a marginalized group in Russia, facing discrimination under the Tsarist regime. Richard Pipes writes that “a Jew, no matter how assimilated and patriotic, remained in the eyes of the authorities as well as the Orthodox Church an outsider.”¹² While discrimination was endemic, the harassment faced by Russian Jews was also occasionally violent. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza argue that there were “three major waves of anti-Jewish rioting” in the Jewish parts of the Russian empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹³ The first wave of pogroms occurred from 1881-1882, the second from 1903-1906, and the third from 1919-1921.¹⁴ Klier writes that pogroms were “spontaneous” and often emerged in urban areas before spreading to rural areas. Anti-Jewish violence “tended to be less brutal and lethal” in the countryside.¹⁵ The pogroms of 1881-1882 were far less deadly than those that followed in 1903-1906 and 1919-1921. Klier and Lambroza write, “whenever the social and political fabric threatened to come unraveled...the Jews presented a weak and poorly defended target,

¹² Richard Pipes, *The Russian Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 87.

¹³ John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza, “Forward,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. John D. Klier and Shlomo Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

¹⁴ Klier and Lambroza, *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, xv.

¹⁵ John D. Klier, “The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian History,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, 14-15.

one which local authorities felt little incentive to protect.”¹⁶ Though Davidson’s family was never physically harmed as a result of the pogroms, their property was destroyed on several occasions. Aviel Roshwald writes that Russian Jews could psychologically escape their situation through Hasidism and physically escape by emigrating.¹⁷ Davidson’s father seems to have escaped through Hasidism and Davidsons’ brothers through emigration.

The second part of the memoir contains Davidson’s memories of Russia. It is difficult to separate Davidson’s memories from Chasia’s, but Davidson’s consciousness probably began around the age of seven, which was in 1910. Four older brothers, one by one, emigrated to America in pursuit of economic opportunities and to escape discrimination in Russia. Chasia found the departures very difficult, but realized her sons were safe in America. Davidson describes his family’s lengthy emigration process, revealing that his family debated moving to America for a number of years before finally deciding to leave Russia. The remaining Davidsons made plans to move to America the during summer of 1914, acquiring passports, selling their possessions, and visiting the graves of their relatives, but World War I prevented their departure.

He describes life in Russia during World War I, the Russian Revolution, and the Civil War that followed. Davidson includes some details that he probably did not witness, such as frontline desertions and battles of the Civil War; he acquired much of this

¹⁶ Klier and Lambroza, “The Pogroms of 1903-1906,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, 193.

¹⁷ Aviel Roshwald, “Jewish Cultural Identity in Eastern and Central Europe during the Great War,” in *European Culture in the Great War: The Arts, Entertainment, and Propaganda, 1914-1918*, ed. Aviel Roshwald and Richard Stites (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 91.

knowledge later in life. His memoir illustrates the confusion many Russians experienced when the war began, not understanding why Russia was at war with Germany. He also displays the patriotism of Russians and their trust in the “Father Tsar.” The memoir provides a picture of the hardships Russians faced during WWI, particularly hardships within the Pale.

Davidson developed a hatred of the Germans during their occupation of his province during WWI and suggests that the Germans dealt harshly with the Russian peasants and Jews. Roshwald argues that Jews initially welcomed German occupation and describes it as a “mixed blessing” for Jews. He writes that “the German occupation authorities introduced basic principles of civil equality and the rule of law to the Russian territories that fell under their control, and Jews clearly benefited from the elimination of the legal discrimination and systematic persecution that had been directed against them under the tsar.”¹⁸ Though the Germans treated Jews as equal citizens, Germans enforced strict military rules and engaged in cultural insensitivity. Germans forced Jews to bathe in their ritual baths for sanitation purposes and required that Jews remove head coverings for identification-card photographs; both practices violated Jewish tradition.¹⁹ This may explain Davidson’s opinions of German occupation.

He illustrates the chaos and excitement that followed the February Revolution and then the October Revolution. Constant political and economical upheaval in Russia caused Davidson’s life to be filled with uncertainty. He ate very little during this time period, which caused health problems later in life. He provides a vivid picture of rural

¹⁸ Roshwald, “Jewish Cultural Identity,” 102-103.

¹⁹ Ibid., 103-105.

Russia during “War Communism” and NEP. Hyperinflation led to a black market and barter economy; Davidson shows that dealing on the black market became a way of life for all Russians.²⁰ The memoir provides fascinating stories of Davidson’s participation in the night-watch patrol and his work under a goldsmith who traded in the black market. He also illustrates how war and revolution affected train travel and communication.

When the Provisional Government replaced the tsarist regime in 1917 during the Russian Revolution, it “abolished all of the tsarist empire’s anti-Jewish legislation.” This gave Jews hope of equality.²¹ Later, the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government and a civil war ensued. Jews, especially, suffered, with “as many as a quarter of a million” deaths during the Russian Civil War and the Soviet-Polish War.²² Christopher Read writes, “there is no doubt that White forces and their Ukrainian nationalist allies conducted the worst massacres of Jews seen in modern Europe,” describing the massacres as “Europe’s first anti-semitic holocaust” of the 1900s.²³ Davidson’s father, Chaim Meyer, was a casualty of the civil war in Russia, disappearing in Kharkiv while away on forestry business. This death would be a devastating blow for Davidson’s religious faith.

These events brought devastation, poverty, and famine, but it was during this time that Davidson discovered his artistic talents. Creative passion and artistic ability would

²⁰ For the broader context, see Steven G. Marks, “The Russian Experience of Money,” in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22: Book 2: Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory*, ed. Murray Frame et al (Bloomington: Slavica, 2014), 133.

²¹ Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III, 1914 to 2008*, 8.

²² Klier and Lambroza, “The Pogroms of 1919-1921,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, 292.

²³ Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 155.

shape the remainder of his life. In order to understand his pursuit of a career in sculpting and his involvement in art activity in South Carolina, one must understand the influence of the Vitebsk Art School on Davidson. His experience there solidified his interest and made a career in anything other than art undesirable for him.

When a Red Army officer took an interest in Davidson's amateur clay artwork, Davidson was offered an opportunity to attend the art school at Vitebsk and study under Kazimir Malevich. Marc Chagall, the renowned Russian Jewish avant-garde artist, created the school when he was appointed as Commissar for Fine Arts in the Vitebsk region in August 1918. Chagall brought in talented teachers and "for a short time...the small town of Vitebsk in the former Pale of Settlement became the center of avant-garde art."²⁴ Kazimir Malevich began teaching at the school and clashed with Chagall, vehemently attacking both Chagall's artwork and his teaching principles. Though the details of the dispute are unclear, Chagall chose to leave the art school because of Malevich.²⁵ Malevich eventually replaced Chagall as its director and changed the emphasis of the art school to Suprematism.²⁶ Suprematist art consists of geometric shapes in basic colors and laid the foundation for many subsequent trends in abstract art and design.

²⁴ Anke Hilbrenner, "Center and Periphery in Russian Jewish Culture during the Crisis of 1914-22," in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22: Book 1: Popular Culture, the Arts, and Institutions*, 205.

²⁵ Victoria Charles, *Great Masters: Marc Chagall*. (New York: Parkstone International, 2005), 22-23.

²⁶ Gerry Souter, *Malevich: Journey to Infinity* (New York: Parkstone International, 2012), 189.

Davidson describes the Vitebsk Art School and Malevich's teaching techniques in his memoir. He writes of the free atmosphere Malevich created and the emphasis on non-objective art. He also illustrates Malevich's dynamic personality and describes Malevich's reaction to those opposed to Suprematism. Davidson illustrates how he and other art students at the Vitebsk Art School endured poverty while pursuing their art education.

The third section of the memoir deals with Davidson's immigration to the United States. The family almost lost hope of ever emigrating, but finally received word and supplies from America. His older brothers arranged for the remaining family members to be smuggled across the border into Latvia; Davidson describes the route as an "underground railroad." Much like the underground railroad African-American slaves took to freedom in the North, Davidson and his mother secretly moved from place to place until crossing the border to freedom. The mother and son feared being caught and turned over to the authorities, but Louis, the sixth son, bribed peasants and officials to protect his mother and younger brother. Davidson provides a riveting portrayal of a remarkable escape.

Davidson describes the journey across Europe and each city the family visited, starting with Riga. As an artist, he was impressed by the architecture of Berlin and Paris. The last stop before sailing to America was Cherbourg, where the family passed through inspections to travel; Davidson provides great detail on this process. They set sail on the

Homeric, a White Star Line Ship, in September and arrived at Ellis Island on September 28, 1922.²⁷

Davidson's maternal uncle and four brothers emigrated to the United States well before the First World War; Davidson and his mother followed in 1922. His Jewish family was not alone in their emigration to America. Antony Polonsky writes that 1,749,000 Russian Jews emigrated to the United States between 1880 and 1930.²⁸

The last portion of his memoir depicts Davidson's life in the United States, primarily in the South. At this point in the memoir, he ceases referring to himself in third person and transitions to first person. This is possibly because many of the events he describes in Russia were as much his mother's memories as his own; after he moved to America, he relied solely on his own experiences. The transition could also be an attempt to distance himself from painful experiences in Russia. Davidson most likely viewed himself as a different person after immigrating to America.

There were about 4.25 million Jews living in the United States by the end of the 1920s. Most were immigrants or children of immigrants from Eastern Europe. The wave of immigration was slowed by World War I, but it picked up again immediately after the war, until nativist legislation during the mid-1920s reduced the number of immigrants allowed into the United States.²⁹ Davidson and his mother immigrated not long before the door closed.

²⁷ "Statue of Liberty- Ellis Island Foundation," online at www.libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger-result.

²⁸ Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881 to 1914*, 21.

²⁹ Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 2.

Many Eastern European Jewish immigrants settled in towns that their family and friends suggested offered economic opportunities. Weissbach argues that there were large clusters of families in southern towns because of this.³⁰ Davidson and his mother immigrated to Greenville, South Carolina because his older brothers had already laid roots there.

In 1927, 195 Jews lived in Greenville, which was one of six cities in South Carolina that had triple-digit Jewish communities.³¹ The total population of Greenville was about 27,000 in 1927, making Jews less than one percent of the population.³² In 1927, Camden had 108 Jews, Columbia 590, Georgetown 135, and Sumter 200.³³ Charleston had the largest Jewish population in South Carolina in 1927 with a total of 2,100 Jews.³⁴ That same year the total Jewish population of South Carolina was recorded as 6,851.³⁵

Greenville, South Carolina was a booming “New South” town.³⁶ Like a number of other southern towns, the town experienced a “surge of textile development” during the late nineteenth century, resulting in the creation of numerous mills and the incorporation

³⁰ Lee Shai Weissbach, “East European Immigrants and the Image of Jew in the Small-Town South,” in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 118-119.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

³² Laura Smith Ebaugh, “A Social History,” in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, ed. Alfred S. Reid (Greenville, SC: Furman University, 1960), 24.

³³ Weissbach, “East European Immigrants and the Small-Town South,” 115.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁵ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History*, 350.

³⁶ Albert N. Sanders, “Greenville and the Southern Tradition” in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, ed. Alfred S. Reid (Greenville, SC: Furman University, 1960), 137.

of manufacturing companies.³⁷ Citizens of Greenville considered their town the “Textile Center of the South.”³⁸ The town’s growth also stemmed from the fact that it was a stop on a main railroad line running from New York to New Orleans.³⁹

Historians have largely neglected Eastern European Jews who settled in the small-town South, instead focusing on Jewish immigrants from Central Europe. Weissbach writes, “in accounts of the Jewish experience in the smaller cities and towns of the South, the story of immigrants from Eastern Europe has received far less attention than it deserves.”⁴⁰ Weissbach also argues that smaller Jewish communities have largely remained “unexplored” by historians.⁴¹ Davidson’s memoir is useful as it provides the perspective of an Eastern European Jew who immigrated to a small Jewish community in the South.

In Russia, the Davidsons lived in an all-Russian community; this may explain why the family experienced an easy transition to the small-town South, where few Jews resided. Davidson writes of his first impressions when he arrived at the train station in Greenville. He was struck by the standard of living in America, taken aback by the availability of cars for the masses and widespread food waste. He describes his first baseball game and his first encounter with American government officials. He conveys his evolving opinions of the South and of the United States. Initially he viewed American

³⁷ Ebaugh, “A Social History,” 19.

³⁸ Sanders, “Greenville and the Southern Tradition,” 139.

³⁹ Ebaugh, “A Social History,” 18.

⁴⁰ Weissbach, “East European Immigrants and the Image of Jew in the Small-Town South,” 108.

⁴¹ Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America*, 3.

capitalism as repulsive and wanted no part in managing or owning a store, but eventually came to view many aspects of capitalism as positive.

Davidson writes of his struggle to find gainful employment as an artist. He wanted to pursue sculpture as a career but was given the impression that this was not a profitable profession in the South, so he moved to New York a few months after immigrating to try his luck in a more metropolitan area. He even considered leaving America and moving to Paris, but ultimately returned south. Davidson acclimated to the South, where he found acceptance and met limited resistance. His wife, who was the daughter of a Methodist pastor, converted to Judaism, which did not affect her family's acceptance of Abe. Initially Davidson was not convinced he belonged in the South, but eventually decided to obtain American citizenship and remain in the region.

Davidson faced more favorable treatment in the southern United States than in Russia. Slezkine describes the US as the "only modern state...in which a Jew could be an equal citizen and a Jew at the same time."⁴² Howard N. Rabinowitz writes, "there is much evidence to suggest that aside from the West, the South has been the least anti-Semitic region in the country."⁴³ African-Americans bore the brunt of the discrimination in the American South during the Jim Crow era. Leonard Rogoff argues, "whatever racism Southern Jews experienced was rarely more than impolite. Jews suffered from discriminatory social customs, not legal codes."⁴⁴ Many other immigrants to the South

⁴² Slezkine, *The Jewish Century*, 207.

⁴³ Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Nativism, Bigotry and Anti-Semitism in the South," in *Dixie Diaspora*, 275.

⁴⁴ Leonard Rogoff, "Is the Jew White?: The Racial Place of the Southern Jew," in *Dixie Diaspora*, 419.

did not face favorable treatment but Davidson's memoir significantly describes only a few uncomfortable situations due to his religion and ethnicity.

Davidson draws a connection in the memoir between his treatment in Russia and the treatment of African-Americans in the South. Leonard Rogoff claims that "Jews and gentiles, both black and white, commonly drew parallels between the oppression of Russian Jews and Southern blacks. Northern Jews were far more likely than Southern Jews to assert such commonalities."⁴⁵ Davidson asserts these similarities in his memoir but remarks that many Jews had no qualms about discrimination against African-Americans and did not challenge segregation. There were perhaps many reasons for this, but Clive Webb argues that many sympathetic southern Jews were hesitant to protest because their own acceptance by southern whites was contingent on their adherence to Jim Crow.⁴⁶

Davidson's memoir also provides a glimpse of life in a moonshine community on Paris Mountain just north of the city of Greenville. Though Davidson was not a bootlegger himself, he writes of fascinating and comical encounters with his neighbors who were. Southern mountain people are a subculture of the South and have been stereotyped throughout history. Many of Davidson's descriptions of these people reflect the stereotypes of this time period. Anthony Harkins claims, "inundated by stereotypical portrayals of shiftless, drunken, promiscuous, and bare-footed people, living in blissful squalor beyond the reach of civilization, many Americans outside the southern mountains

⁴⁵ Ibid., 411.

⁴⁶ Clive Webb, "A Tangled Web: Black-Jewish Relations in the Twentieth-Century South," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, ed. by Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2006), 195.

came to see little or no difference between the ‘real’ southern mountaineers and their cultural heritage.”⁴⁷ Davidson may or may not have been affected by the stereotypes, but it is difficult to tell as he did not write his memoir until 1979.

Because Davidson moved to the American South and pursued an art career there, it is essential to understand the artistic culture of the region. Judith H. Bonner and Estill Curtis Pennington explain that the “art of the South can be seen as expanding from mimetic portraiture to more sophisticated responses to national and international avant-garde movements” by 1920. During the nineteenth century, portrait painting was predominant in the South, followed later by landscapes.⁴⁸ After the Civil War, southern artists turned to genre painting, portraying the Lost Cause and sometimes African-Americans.⁴⁹ During the late nineteenth century, impressionism and shortly thereafter, the avant-garde arrived in the South.⁵⁰ They had permeated throughout the South by the time Davidson arrived.

After the 1920s, Bonner and Curtis write, “art in the South reflected artistic trends of Europe and the Northeast, but southern visual arts would evolve in the mid-20th century until they not only kept abreast of international trends but were even in the vanguard.”⁵¹ Most southern colleges developed art programs, and art institutes popped up within the South. Florida offered the Ringling School of Art, Tennessee the Memphis

⁴⁷ Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 4.

⁴⁸ Judith H. Bonner and Estill Curtis Pennington, eds., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, Volume 21: *Art and Architecture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 15.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

College of Art, and Georgia the Savannah Art Institute.⁵² Aspiring artists now had the option of pursuing art education within the South. In North Carolina, artists established the Tryon Art Colony and Black Mountain College.⁵³ The creation of Newcomb College encouraged an art culture in New Orleans, Louisiana.⁵⁴ Regional cooperation was evident in the creation of the Southern States Art League in 1921.⁵⁵ Artistic activity blossomed throughout the region during the twentieth century.

Harlan Greene and James M. Hutchisson argue that a cultural renaissance occurred in Charleston during the early twentieth century, which resulted in a rebirth of literature, poetry, and art.⁵⁶ Many of the participants no longer focused on the past, but “looked to the future, and put down on paper and on canvas a slightly subversive, critical look at the status quo.”⁵⁷ This renaissance reached its zenith during the twenties and early thirties, eventually decaying in the forties.⁵⁸ Though little has been written about it, Greenville also experienced an artistic revival during the first half of the twentieth century, but in Greenville it did not emerge during the roaring twenties as Charleston’s had; rather, Greenville’s art movement bloomed during the Great Depression.

The Great Depression resulted in extreme poverty in the South, particularly South Carolina, but it also led to increased art activity in the region. In Greenville, this was

⁵² Ibid., 35.

⁵³ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁶ James M. Hutchinson and Harlan Greene, eds., *Renaissance in Charleston: Art and Life in the Carolina Low Country, 1900-1940* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 1-18.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 1-18.

largely the result of New Deal programs and also other local efforts. Davidson had already been given the opportunity to create public art at Clemson College, but now he began to participate in a flowering artist culture in Greenville. He became a historical agent organizing and increasing artistic activity throughout South Carolina, particularly in Greenville.

Davidson was one of eighteen artists hired in South Carolina as part of the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), a New Deal program created in December 1933. This program was created to “decorate new and existing federal buildings,” which may explain why Davidson was able to obtain an appointment, as he was one of few sculptors in the state.⁵⁹ George E. LaFaye and Edna Reed Whaley, South Carolina’s PWAP supervisors, hired experienced and emerging artists to depict subjects South Carolinians requested. What resulted was a variety of paintings, murals, and sculptures. Unfortunately, this program was short-lived, ending in June 1934. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) did not make its way to South Carolina until a year and a half later.⁶⁰

Davidson enrolled in Clemson as an architecture student during the summer of 1934 and remained there until the summer of 1936. The business manager at the time, J. C. Littlejohn, arranged for Davidson to receive free tuition, room, and board in return for his creation of a statue of Thomas Green Clemson for the campus. Davidson reminisces

⁵⁹ Nick Taylor, *American-Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA: When FDR Put the Nation to Work* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008), 270.

⁶⁰ Lise C. Swensson, and Nancy M Higgins, eds., *New Deal Art in South Carolina: Government-supported Images from the Great Depression*. (Columbia: South Carolina State Museum, 1990), 7,8,11.

about his time spent at Clemson, describing it as the happiest days of his life. He writes of his treatment at Clemson: “Here I was, an immigrant, limited health-wise to many activities, yet I was accepted without any reservations by all the students and felt no discrimination of any kind.” Though Davidson finished the haunting and iconic statue, which still stands in its central place on campus, he never finished his degree, leaving Clemson after two years. Davidson remained connected with the university throughout the rest of his life and continued to create sculpture for the school. Davidson created a striking neo-classical yet avant-garde bas-relief football panel in 1940, which is displayed on the front of Fike Recreation Center.⁶¹ He later sculpted a bust of James F. Byrnes in 1965, displayed in Cooper Library, and the Tiger mascot in 1970, displayed in front of Littlejohn Coliseum.⁶² Davidson is intertwined with Clemson history, as the creator of treasured university sculpture and as one of the college’s most unique students.

Almost a year after the Public Works of Art Project ended, the Fine Arts League in Greenville was established on May 11, 1935. Marshall Prevost became its first president and Davidson its first vice president. Paula Casteel Hysinger writes, “organized art activity in Greenville did not begin in earnest until 1935, when three local artists and collectors, Marshall Prevost, Abe Wolfe Davidson, and Margaret Moore Walker,

⁶¹ Jerome V. Reel, *The High Seminary: Volume 1: A History of the Clemson Agricultural College of South Carolina, 1889-1964* (Clemson: Clemson University Digital Press, 2011), 250-251.

⁶² A. Wolfe Davidson, Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

established the Greenville Fine Arts League.”⁶³ The league may have been created in an effort to fill the void left by the PWAP, but the creation of an artistic organization is evidence that an artistic movement was occurring in Greenville, which was not simply the result of government intervention. The establishment of the Fine Arts League in Greenville represented a local effort to further organize and expand artistic culture in the region.

It is difficult to determine how much credit Davidson deserves for the Fine Arts League. In the memoir, Davidson leads the reader to believe its creation was his idea, which he suggested to Marshall Prevost. But Lisa Earle and Evelyn Daniel do not mention this conversation when they explain the creation of the league in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*. They suggest the Fine Arts League stemmed from a library art exhibit that took place in Greenville in 1934, organized by Margaret Moore Walker and Marshall Prevost.⁶⁴ Perhaps Earle and Daniel were not aware of Davidson’s involvement in the creation of the Fine Arts League, or perhaps Davidson exaggerated his influence in his memoir.

The Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP), which made its way to South Carolina in late 1935/early 1936, was far more expansive than the PWAP. The total cost for the WPA/FAP for the entire US was 35 million dollars.⁶⁵ The

⁶³ Paula Casteel Hysinger, “History of the Greenville County Museum of Art” in *Greenville County Museum of Art: The Southern Collection*, ed. Paula Casteel Hysinger (New York: Hudson Hills Press, 1995), 13.

⁶⁴ Earle and Daniel, “Art: Architecture and Painting,” 68-71.

⁶⁵ Francis V. O’Connor, ed., “Appendix C,” in *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1973), 305.

head of the WPA/FAP was Edgar Holger Cahill, an art writer and director. The program employed many artists who had never held full-time jobs in art.⁶⁶ As part of this project, art galleries were created in Columbia, Florence, Beaufort, Walterboro, and Greenville to “support educational and recreational art activities.”⁶⁷ Prior to the creation of these galleries, the Gibbes Art Gallery in Charleston was the “only art museum in the state.”⁶⁸ Swensson and Higgins write, “perhaps the most successful [gallery] was in Greenville” due to “careful planning and strong community support.”⁶⁹ Davidson was chosen as director of the WPA gallery in Greenville, and he remained in this position from 1937 to 1938.⁷⁰ Davidson may have been given this position due to his involvement in the Fine Arts League or his connection with Prevost and Walker. Davidson travelled throughout the South examining WPA galleries in other locations prior to creating one in Greenville. The WPA gallery nurtured growing art activity in Greenville. Earle and Daniel write of the gallery: “The constant stream of art-good, bad, indifferent- which passed through the Greenville Gallery did two things for Greenville. It awakened the people to the consciousness of a contemporary art of a new and strange variety.”⁷¹ The art was different from the portraits and landscapes that were common in South Carolina. In general the free exhibits at WPA galleries in South Carolina “gave many South

⁶⁶ Taylor, *American-Made*, 272-273.

⁶⁷ Swensson and Higgins, eds., *New Deal Art in South Carolina*, 10,12.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁰ A. Wolfe Davidson, Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

⁷¹ Earle and Daniel, “Art: Architecture and Painting,” 71-71.

Carolínians their first chance to see a variety of contemporary American art.”⁷² While Davidson was director, the gallery also provided a summer art school two summers in a row. Children were able to receive art instruction from various artists for fifty cents each.⁷³

The WPA/FAP not only provided art viewing and participation opportunities for South Carolínians, but also art education. “WPA/FAP employees provided the first public-school art education in Greenville, Beaufort, Columbia and Walterboro.”⁷⁴ Davidson had already commenced teaching a public school art class at Greenville High School in 1936 and would continue teaching there until 1943.⁷⁵

During National Art Week in late 1940, an attempt by president Roosevelt to increase local art sales, South Carolina reported only \$150 in profits; however, Greenville was responsible for \$105 of this total. The galleries of the United States witnessed increased attendance during this week, but few sales occurred. Many artists from Charleston refused to participate in National Art Week. Hiott writes, “Greenville’s effort, however, was an example of community cooperation.”⁷⁶ Greenville’s profits reflect an organized commitment to, and popular interest in, a flourishing artistic culture in the region.

The WPA/FAP encouraged artistic organizations throughout the South. To put the Greenville branch in perspective, the North Carolina FAP opened the first community art

⁷² Swensson and Higgins, eds., *New Deal Art in South Carolina*, 12.

⁷³ Jim McAllister, “Abe Davidson in Greenville for Opening of Art Museum,” *The Greenville News*, March 15, 1974.

⁷⁴ Swensson and Higgins, eds. *New Deal Art in South Carolina*, 16.

⁷⁵ “Davidson, artist, succumbs,” *The Greenville News*, October 28, 1981.

⁷⁶ Swensson and Higgins, eds., *New Deal Art in South Carolina*, 23.

center in Winston-Salem in 1935.⁷⁷ The state's FAP also created the Greenville WPA Art Gallery, the Wilmington WPA Museum of Art, and Raleigh Art Center, which resulted in the Cary Gallery, Crosby-Garfield School, and Meedham Broughton High School. The WPA/FAP in Florida organized eighteen art centers and galleries. The Alabama FAP only organized one art center in Mobile and one art gallery in Birmingham. The Tennessee FAP organized three art centers and one art gallery. The Mississippi FAP organized two art centers and one art gallery. The Virginia FAP created the Big Stone Gap Gallery, the Children's Art Gallery, and Lynchburg Art Alliance, which resulted in the Alta Vista Extension Gallery and Middlesex County Museum.⁷⁸ Though reasons are unclear, Georgia received limited funding, as WPA/FAP only employed one artist in the state.⁷⁹

WPA jobs were difficult to obtain, so it should be emphasized that Davidson was offered a rare privilege. Suzanne Mettler argues that the New Deal divided Americans into the categories of national citizens and state citizens. White males were treated as national citizens, while "women and minority men were more likely to remain state citizens, subject to policies whose development was hindered by the dynamics of federalism and which were administered with discretion and variability."⁸⁰ Mettler points out that the WPA was created to "employ jobless men" and though there were some jobs available to women, "the number of jobs provided was a small fraction of those offered to

⁷⁷ Nick Taylor, *American-Made*, 280.

⁷⁸ Francis V. O'Connor, "Appendix D," in *Art for the Millions*, 306-307.

⁷⁹ Roger Biles, *The South and the New Deal* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 78.

⁸⁰ Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), xi.

men.”⁸¹ The Federal Art Project of South Carolina only employed at most 27 people. Davidson was able to obtain one of these rare positions. Several women were able to obtain WPA/FAP positions within South Carolina, including Laura Glenn Douglas and Corrie McCallum, but it appears the South Carolina WPA/FAP excluded African-Americans.⁸² Though African-Americans were often the subject of WPA art, there is no evidence that suggests African-Americans “were permitted to participate as artists or as art teachers in any South Carolina New Deal program.”⁸³

The South Carolina WPA funding eventually ended and the gallery closed as a result in February 1940, but this was not the end of the gallery. With or without government funding, Greenville art enthusiasts were determined to continue. The Fine Arts League, along with the support of city and county governments, reopened the gallery.⁸⁴

The Fine Arts League was later renamed the Creative Artists Committee of the Greenville Art Association when it joined the Art Association on October 19, 1953. A few years later, in 1958, the Greenville Art Association bought a property called the Gassaway estate, which became the Greenville Art Museum. In 1960, Earle and Daniel wrote, “If its potentialities can be realized it will be one of the finest museums in the South.”⁸⁵ The Greenville County Museum of Art moved to a new facility in downtown Greenville in March 1974. The museum remains in this location and now possesses a

⁸¹ Ibid., 45.

⁸² Swensson and Higgins, eds., *New Deal Art in South Carolina*, 10-12.

⁸³ Ibid., 3.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁵ Earle and Daniel, “Art: Architecture and Painting,” 72-74.

large collection of contemporary art.⁸⁶ The *Greenville News* featured an article about Davidson's presence at the opening of the new art museum in 1974. Its author wrote it was "a time of special joy for him [Davidson]" and reminded readers that Davidson was responsible for opening the first art museum in Greenville forty years prior.⁸⁷

World War II drew the Davidson family to Georgia, where Davidson assisted the American war effort by working at Bell Aircraft in Marietta. He struggled to find a job after the war and ended up carving ice sculptures for a hotel in Florida for a year. This illustrates his resourcefulness, using his artistic talents in an unconventional way to provide for his family. He often bartered his talents to acquire various things for himself and his family. He taught art at a local girls camp several summers in a row to allow his daughters to experience summer camp. Most significantly, he sculpted busts of all of the presidents of Furman University in return for tuition, room, and board for his daughter, Dorothy. He and his wife, Katherine, acquired jobs at Brenau College, a girls college in Gainesville, in 1948. Davidson encouraged artistic activity in Gainesville and north Georgia as a whole, just as he had in upstate South Carolina, teaching art at Brenau for almost twenty years, and creating public and private artwork until his death in 1981.

One pertinent question is whether Davidson's art was guided by creativity or financial survival. Obviously, he chose the career because of his interest in art, but what determined the type of art he created? He was commissioned to sculpt southern public figures, but he often took artistic liberty with how these figures were portrayed. He also

⁸⁶ Greenville County Museum of Art, "History," Greenville County Museum of Art, <http://gcma.org/history-gcma/>.

⁸⁷ Jim McAllister, "Abe Davidson in Greenville for Opening of Art Museum," *The Greenville News*, March 15, 1974.

created a number of sculptures and paintings of his own accord. For example, he was commissioned to create a statue of Thomas Green Clemson, but he chose to create a bust of Clemson's African-American carriage driver as well.

The last portion of the memoir includes his travel experiences in Europe and the Middle East when he visited his daughter Dorothy, who was working with the Peace Corps in Iran. Davidson's artistic enthusiasm is evident in his descriptions of art and architecture on this trip. He viewed the country of his birth from afar and considered his life. Davidson ends the memoir with a reference to his mother's stories of her stolen inheritance and how this one incident determined the course of his life.

Davidson's memoir is not only a valuable contribution to southern art history, but southern history as well. He offers a unique perspective on the South as a Jew from Russia. The vast majority of southern historians have focused on whites, blacks, or the relationship between the two races. In *Writing the South through the Self*, John C. Inscoe claims, "multiculturalists have been slow to embrace the South as an entity worthy of special attention or to acknowledge those southerners whose ethnicity or national origins do not adhere to the basic Black/White binary that has so dominated analysis of the region."⁸⁸ Historians should embrace southern historical figures like Davidson for representing multiculturalism in southern history.

The examination of Davidson's memoir not only enhances southern history but also American history, transcending the boundaries of the nation-state. In *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, Thomas Bender argues for the thickening of

⁸⁸ John C. Inscoe, *Writing the South through the Self: Explorations in Southern Autobiography* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 187.

American history through the inclusion of a “plenitude of narratives.”⁸⁹ He writes that this allows for a “richer understanding of the nation.”⁹⁰ Bender also explains, “it is impossible to grasp the meaning of the immigrant experience in America... without comparing the reception and possibilities of different groups at their various destinations.”⁹¹ The study of Davidson’s memoir allows for comparison between the treatment of Jews in the Russian Empire and the treatment of Jews in the American South.

The most obvious limitation of the memoir is its subjectivity, but memoir and autobiography are naturally subjective as they provide only one person’s view of events. During the nineteenth century, many historians ceased viewing memoir as a primary source due to Rankean theory. Paul John Eakin points out that self-discovery, necessary in autobiography writing, results in self-creation and so “the self that is the center of all autobiographical narrative is necessarily a fictive structure.”⁹² Davidson carefully chose how to present himself within his autobiography, and this is the self readers are left with. Historians must accept the possibility of untruthfulness or misrepresentation in autobiography. The first part of the memoir is certainly filled with fiction as it was based on the stories of others rather than of Davidson himself. Also, memory is not a static creation; rather, it is constantly evolving as time progresses. Davidson did not write his

⁸⁹ Thomas Bender, “Introduction: Historians, the Nation, and the Plenitude of Narratives,” in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age*, ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 19.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹² Paul John Eakin, *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 3.

memoir until the late 1970s and by this time, his memories had already been stored in his mind for decades. These memories were most likely degraded and reformed numerous times prior to being written down on paper.

Davidson's childhood memories were shaped by his mother's memories, and he certainly was affected by the story of the stolen pearls. He felt this was the reason the family ended up in America and this story was important enough to be an overarching theme in his autobiography. The evil stepmother and stolen inheritance are tropes in literature and autobiography. The story of the stolen inheritance bringing the family to America can also be considered an "aphoristic memory." Robert E. McGlone describes an aphoristic memory as "a specific story illustrating what the rememberer deems a general truth about himself or about life."⁹³ The stolen pearls may not have directly caused the family's emigration, but Davidson believed this family story and wanted his children and grandchildren to understand that the reason they were American was because of a stolen inheritance. While many Jews left Russia because of discrimination, Davidson suggests his family emigrated because of a personal dispute. He purposefully chose to begin and end the autobiography with the pearls. The story was his mother's but later became his own. Davidson, perhaps, even late in life, still felt the anguish and indignation his mother experienced, but he also reasoned past this to see the stolen pearls as a fortunate occurrence. Because of the stolen inheritance, he was given a chance to leave Russia, and this was something he did not regret. Davidson wrote in the

⁹³ Robert E. McGlone, "Deciphering Memory: John Adams and the Authorship of the Declaration of Independence," *Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998), 424.

introduction, “Fate frequently has strange ways of playing on one’s life. What often seems like a misfortune turns out to be an advantage.”⁹⁴

Another theme of the memoir is the transition from outsider to insider. Davidson highlights his acceptance and assimilation into various cultures. This is particularly evident in the last portion of the memoir. Davidson writes of developing friendships with cadets at Clemson, becoming a trusted member of the Paris Mountain moonshining community, and being noticed as a southerner while traveling abroad. Davidson, consciously or subconsciously, emphasizes his assimilation. He suggests that the South was a welcoming place for a Russian Jew such as himself. Davidson wrote the memoir while living in the South and realized it would be read by a southern audience. This may have influenced the way he wrote of his life in the South, but it is clear that he desired to be accepted as an insider and despite his origins and ethnicity largely was.

Davidson’s memories of Russia stand juxtaposed to his memories of America. Perhaps his contentment in America shaped his memories of Russia and perhaps the turmoil of Russia shaped his memories of the United States. This is another example of how Davidson’s sense of self emerged through the passage of time.

Subjectivity may be considered a limitation, but it is also one of the memoir’s greatest strengths. Within the last few decades, historians have begun to embrace memoirs, once again, as essential primary sources. Historians such as Leigh Gilmore, Paul John Eakin, and Jennifer Jensen Wallach illustrate that with careful and sometimes skeptical analysis, autobiography can be historically useful. In *Closer to the Truth Than*

⁹⁴ Abram Wolfe Davidson, 1979, *The Power of Pearls*, Version D, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections, Preface.

Any Fact: Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow, Wallach argues, “The thoughts and feelings of historical agents are not responses to a preexisting social reality. Rather, they *are* reality. If we are to come to a deep understanding of a historical moment, we must endeavor to understand the individual experiences that constituted it.”⁹⁵ Davidson’s memoir represents his reality. Though it cannot be fully accepted as fact, it does offer truth insofar as it provides his perspective on his life and the events that shaped it.

Abe Wolfe Davidson lived an extraordinary life, residing in two countries, surviving a tumultuous time period in Russia, finding acceptance in the southern United States, and achieving moderate success as an artist. Davidson not only participated in southern cultural life as an artist, he also organized and enhanced artistic culture in South Carolina and Georgia. His memoir is a rare and valuable primary source on immigration to the American South and art in the same region.

⁹⁵ Jennifer Jensen Wallach, *Closer to the Truth Than Any Fact: Memoir, Memory, and Jim Crow* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), 5.

DAVIDSON'S PREFACE

My reason for writing "A Family Story": Over the years I have given talks to various groups and in doing this I found quite an interest was shown in my experience during the Russian Revolution years and my escape through the underground railroad fascinated my audience.

As my children got older they too began to question me about our background. As the story unfolds, they asked, "Daddy why don't you put it down or record it?" Many friends all over kept pressing me to do the same thing.

The difficulty Katherine found in establishing her birth of American parents made me realize how important it was for the family to know of their background, particularly when my only remaining brother Max was not able to tell me much of our ancestry

The questioned could be raised, why did I, the youngest know so much as to be able to tell it?

Fate frequently has strange ways of playing on one's life. What often seems like a misfortune turns out to be an advantage.

In 1914 we were to sail for America the second week in August and World War I broke out the week before this, leaving us stranded until 1922.

In sub-zero weather Mother and I sat on top of a Russian oven trying to keep warm, while she knitted mittens she reminisced of her childhood and all that happened to her.⁹⁶ Being inquisitive I queried her about many aspects of our family. I now realize that

⁹⁶ In small homes, seating was typically built in on top of the oven. Davidson's mother, Hasha Chasia Hillman Davidson, was born April 15, 1864 and died August 30, 1945. See

much is lost due to my lack of interest, however, new angles unfolded from time to time. Repeatedly hearing them time and over again, the stories were indelible engraved in my mind so vividly that I felt as though I were present. When occasionally she missed some detail in her story and I would correct her. “How do you know?” she paused, “you were not even born then.” We had a good laugh and she would go on as though it were a new episode.

“The Family Story” I dedicate to my beloved Katherine and my ever devoted daughters, Dorothy, and Edith and my precious Granddaughters, Jennifer, Jessica, Johana and Grandson Kevin, Nephews, Nieces and the many friends I made during my stay in America.⁹⁷

A.W.D. -1979-

“Beth Israel Cemetery,” in Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina online at jhssc.org/beth-israel-cemetery-2/.

⁹⁷ Davidson realized his “family story” would be read by a wide audience and carefully chose how to present himself and his history. Though his memoir was primarily meant for his family, it was also created to be published.

PART I: THE MEMORIES OF DAVIDON'S ANCESTORS

Prologue- 1907

Belytze, a village in White Russia was sixty miles from a railroad and some twenty miles from the county seat, Senno.⁹⁸ There wasn't anything unusual about this village, like many other villages it was the result of the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861.⁹⁹ Perhaps the only difference was that Belytze had two Jewish families instead of the customary one Jewish family who braved to live in an all-peasant environment.

All was calm on this early winter day of Nov. 1907 on the outside, a fresh snow had just covered the country-side, giving a calendar type scene. Chasia, the owner of the house and the store adjoining it, had some business at the Pan's that morning and her husband, Chaim Meyer, head of the family who was in the forestry business, was away from home most of the winter.¹⁰⁰ Berry, the oldest son who had just been discharged from the Imperial Army after serving the five years of conscription, was dressing the baby Abram.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ White Russia refers to Belarus. Belytze and Senno were located in the Vitebsk Province of the Tsarist Empire, now part of Belarus. The Vitebsk Province was within the Pale of Settlement, which was the "area within the borders of tsarist Russia in which the residence of Jews was legally permitted." See Antony Polonsky, "Glossary," in *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881 to 1914*, 413.

⁹⁹ The Emancipation Edict was issued February 19, 1861, legally freeing Russian serfs and later allowing former serfs to purchase allotments of land; however, "many of the restrictions on the peasants under serfdom continued." See David Moon, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930: The World the Peasants Made* (London: Longman, 1999), 110-111. For more information, see David Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia, 1762-1907* (Harlow: Longman, 2001).

¹⁰⁰ Pan is Polish for "lord, master, or noble." See Antony Polonsky, "Glossary," in *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881 to 1914*, 413.

¹⁰¹ Davidson is referring to himself in third person. Because Davidson was too young to remember these events, he is probably describing his mother's recollections.

A horse-drawn sled pulled up in front of the house. Berry was expecting it, and he ran outside to greet it and came back carrying what appeared to be a person all wrapped in a sheep-skin coat with a felt hood over his head. He carried him to the bedroom and carefully undressed him and laid him on the bed, as he was ceaselessly coughing. Motel, fifteen, coming in after attending to feeding the cow and the chickens, he soon got busy to provide a container for the expectorate of his brother, Aaron the Revolutionary, who had been exiled by the Tsarist Government to the Ural Mountains and systematically fed Tuberculosis germs, a method the Tsars used to execute those who opposed them.¹⁰² Tuberculosis, very contagious, had to be kept under highly sanitary conditions.

When Chasia returned from her business with the Pan it took her a long time to calm herself, she broke down so, she cried her heart out. Gaining her composure, with a forced smile she entered the bedroom where Aaron, seeing her, tried not to cough, but of course he could not control it. Knowing that kissing, as is customary for a mother to show affection to a son whom she has not seen for so long was out of the question, she reached out and squeezed his toes. She stood there longingly, looking at her flesh and blood lying there, pale and nothing but skin and bones. The strange sound with each breath he drew was agony for her to watch. Bravely looking at her, Aaron spoke in a weak voice: “Mother dear, I always managed to come back to you, when I was in the Gymnasium, in the University in Vilno, I came back, when in America I too came back, and now on my

¹⁰² I can find no evidence of this practice. Steven G. Marks writes, “By 1904, there were approximately 100,000 Jews in left-wing organizations across the empire, a small percentage of the Jewish population of 5 million, but a larger percentage of participation than for any other ethnic group.” See Steven G. Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World: From Art to Anti-Semitism, Ballet to Bolshevism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 142.

last trip, I came back to die here.”¹⁰³ These words were too much for Chasia. She fell on her knees and laid her head on his feet and sobbed uncontrollably. Berry and Motel led her out of the room.

Leaning on the counter in her little store she reflected on her past, on all that happened to her: the pearls, rightfully hers were snatched from her and given to her stepmother; her brother, Berry, who would not accept paternal discipline and was finally forced to go to a far-a-way land and later to get one of her children, who was then only fourteen years old, and now another one year older than the first to go was begging to go away. The long deliberation Chaim Meyer had undergone before consenting to give Aaron a university education, almost an unheard of thing in these parts. It was not an easy matter to be ostracized by the Jewish neighbors for not sending him to Yeshiva instead.¹⁰⁴

Her own son, Berry, who not wanting to take any kind of an education had insisted on going to the Tsar’s Army to serve his conscription time. The horrible experience of the Pogrom her father, who lived 500 yards away had gone through. And then the frightening night of her own Pogrom when they huddled together in fear for their lives and watched helplessly the looting in the store next to the house.¹⁰⁵ Aaron getting

¹⁰³ Vilna, also known as Vilnius or Wilno, was a province and city in the Russian Empire, and is now the capital of Lithuania. Aaron attended the Teachers’ Institute in Vilna, which was created in 1874. Antony Polonsky writes of Vilna, “Vilna became a major centre of socialist agitation.” Jewish admissions to secondary schools and universities were restricted to 10 percent in the Pale of Settlement in 1887. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881 to 1914*, 33, 15.

¹⁰⁴ Yeshiva is Rabbinic college. See Polonsky, “Glossary,” in *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881 to 1914*, 416.

¹⁰⁵ 650 pogroms occurred during 1905 and 1906. See Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World*, 144. On pogroms, see Klier and Lambroza, eds., *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern History*.

involved in the revolution in the University at Vilno and then coming here to agitate the peasants which led him to being arrested and cast in jail. The memory of how she and Motel had to steal Aaron out of jail and send him all the way to America, and then, without letting them know he came back only to be caught again by the police and exiled. Now, he was back home to die. She shrugged her shoulders, asking this question of herself: “How can one human being go through so much and remain sane? I guess this is the way of the Lord’s Miracles and we are not to question it.”

Chaim Meyer arrived home just in time to see Aaron still alive, the son on whom he placed so much hope, at great sacrifice, to give him an education few Jewish children in the area had.

At the unexpected visit of the “Gabai” (President of the Synagogue) in Senno, Zalmon’s recent residence, Chasia suspected bad news from her father.¹⁰⁶ Hesitatingly he told her that Zalmon’s health had faltered and that he asked for her to come to him. It was 1908.

Chaim Meyer was away. Motel was the oldest at home and at age sixteen he drove her to Senno. Hillel and sister Seneh Sarah was already there when she entered the house. Zalmon’s third wife, Sarah, who had alienated the family from Zalmon, had her

¹⁰⁶ Other spellings of gabai: gabbay or gabbai. Gabai means “synagogue trustee” or “synagogue manager.” See Zborowski and Herzog, *Life is with People*, 437.

relations, including a niece, Edith, who was married to a physician in the Tsar's service, unusual for a Jew.¹⁰⁷ He was assigned to a hospital in Siberia.

Zalmon, pale and weak from confinement in bed for a week, showed satisfaction as his eyes looked brightly at his daughter to whom he owed so much. He had some message to give her, but was inhibited by Sarah's presence. Hillel, his other daughter Seneh Sarah, and Chasia were at his bedside as he quietly passed away.¹⁰⁸

As custom had it, the elders in the community who were waiting in the other room, came in the bedroom and laid the corpse on the floor, awaiting the "Chevra Kadisha," [the holy congregation] the group to cleanse the corpse to get it ready for shrouds and burial.¹⁰⁹ All mirrors were covered, low stools were provided for the mourners, Zalmon's passing away completed an era of a pioneer who settled in a village away from his own people to act as a go-between for the Pan and the serfs.¹¹⁰

For an entire week of mourning, the community came to pay condolence to the family.¹¹¹

Later, at home in Belytze, Chasia related to her family how stepmother Sarah sneaked out all valuables through the back door, and that there was never any mention of

¹⁰⁷ The Tsarist government set limits on occupations for Jews. In 1882, the government "set a quota of 5 per cent on medical assistants and doctors." See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881-1914*, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Hillel and Seneh Sarah were Chasia's siblings.

¹⁰⁹ Chevra kadisha is the burial society. This group conducts the last ritual and prepares the body for the funeral and burial. See Zborowski and Herzog, *Life is with People*, 377-378.

¹¹⁰ Jews engaged in intense mourning for seven days. Jewish mourners superstitiously covered mirrors and opened windows. They also sat on the floor or close to the floor and refrained from cooking or excessive talking. See *ibid.*, 376, 379.

¹¹¹ Community members visited the mourners and brought food during the seven-day mourning period. See *ibid.*, 379.

any inheritance. When Chasia was saying goodbye to everyone, after the funeral with great pain she noticed the pearls on Edith's neck, the very pearls that rightfully belonged to her.

Edith and her doctor husband were assigned to Beresena in Siberia a relay point for political prisoners, to Tobolsk and other points.¹¹² This is the very place Leon Trotsky in his book "My Life" described when he, developed sciatica, and was put in the hospital to keep from being sent to Obdorsk 500 miles further North. The pearls ended here.

In his book "My Life" Trotsky tells of the periodical 'Nachalo' [Beginning], he published the very paper Aaron had with him in Belytze that Motel hid in the wood-pile.¹¹³

(The unanswered question is did Aaron assist Trotsky with editing the paper?)

¹¹² I cannot identify the location of Beresena.

¹¹³ Leon Trotsky was a Russian revolutionary and commander of the Red Army during the Russian Civil War. For more information on Trotsky, see Joshua Rubenstein, *Leon Trotsky: A Revolutionary's Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011). Trotsky wrote of Nachalo: "On November 13 (26) [1905], in alliance with the Mensheviks, we had started a big political organ, *Nachalo* (*The Beginning*). The paper's circulation was jumping by leaps and bounds." See Trotsky's autobiography, Leon Trotsky, *My Life: An Attempt at an Autobiography* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 177.

Chaim Meyer, the oldest of four children, had a thorough Rabbinical education, but declined to be a Rabbi because he was interested in mundane affairs and was determined to learn the Russian language. He taught himself to read, was an avid reader of Russian literature and generally kept up with world affairs as much as it was available to him. Aaron his second son showed promise of making a fine teacher and there was a need for Jewish teachers to teach Russian to Jewish children, as it was very difficult to attend Russian Schools.

A Gymnasia, equivalent to a High School, was in the city of Senno, but there was a quota to contend with: only ten percent of the enrollment was allowed for Jewish children. Discrimination at every level was intolerable. In addition, the attitude of the Jewish neighbors was not helpful, it took much fortitude for the Davidson family to follow their inclination.

Aaron's letters from Vilno Teachers Institute became more radical as time went on. It disturbed Chaim Meyer but his admonishment had very little effect upon Aaron. When the Revolution of 1905 took on a disturbing proportion, Aaron came to Belytze and, with a comrade, began to distribute literary brochures and copies of a hand-printed periodical "nachalo." Gendarmes surrounded the house in search of evidence against Aaron.¹¹⁴ Motel grabbed a handful of the Nachalo and hid it in the wood pile in the yard. In spite of lack of evidence, Aaron was arrested on the accusation by his colleague who

¹¹⁴ The Corps of Gendarmes in Imperial Russia was created to maintain state security and consisted of several thousand men. Gendarmes wore blue tunics and white gloves. They had the power "to search, arrest, interrogate, imprison, and exile persons either guilty of political activity or suspected of it." See Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974), 291, 311.

turned out to be a Tzarist stooge. In the middle of the night Aaron was carried off to prison in Senno, and treated like a criminal. When Chaim Meyer intervened in Aaron's behalf, the infamous "Nagaika" [a braided whip] (a spring the end loaded with lead) tied to a short stick was not spared on him as it was on his son.

The next morning Chasia, with a heavy heart, went to town (Senno) to see about her son. The prison, located on the edge of the city was painted white with a high wall around it and had a sentry booth at the gate, striped in diagonal lines, typical of all guard houses. A small building was on the outside of the wall for office workers and more gendarmes, a waiting room, wooden benches lined against the wall and a small window for visitors to state their business. The windows were very small, letting in a minimum of light, adding to the drabness of the whole atmosphere. Once permission was given, after a long wait, the visitor was harshly escorted into the prison yard and turned over to a guard with drawn bayonet, he in turn took the visitor to a guard house inside the yard and into the prison building. One had to go through a repetition of the same as outside the yard building and then wait for the name to be called. Chasia and her son Motel took their turn.

With a scowl the gendarme approached Chasia: "Zhidovka (a derogatory term for a Jew) who do you want to see?" When she gave Aaron's name "Oh, you want to see that damn young Jew?" He motioned for them to follow him. Down the long, what seemed endless, corridor where hardened criminals were kept, this harmless, pale, young student was confined to a small room with a bench for a bed, stench and filth everywhere. Proudly he came to the bars, reached out for his mother as she grabbed his hands,

pressing her wet cheeks against them. Whispering she assured him not to worry, she was already planning how to get him out of there.

Bribery was the way of life in the Tsarist system, and every advantage was taken to ease Aaron's hardship while he was in there. Food to be brought in was arranged, and other possible privileges, such as walking around the yard from time to time, were given. And every effort was made for the final escape.

Regularly he was brought in for questioning, to the office building outside the wall. On one of these trips it was arranged for the sentry to be negligent and Aaron ran to the next street where Kalmon, from a neighboring village of Meniutovo, waited for him with a change of clothes and a fine pair of horses to speed him away and by means of relays to take him to Polotzk where his aunt Chaim Meyer's sister lived and from there for the final arrangements to get a false passport and be on his way to America.¹¹⁵

False passports in Russia were not an uncommon practice but to obtain one, this was something else. Although one knew or suspected that so and so dealt in this kind of traffic, it was necessary to have real connections. Through many recommendations Chasia finally made contact with the proper agents. Invariably they were a ruthless bunch of people who took advantage of their clients. Their assumption was, and rightfully so, that anyone who resorted to a false passport was in dire need of it and nothing was spared to obtain it. Chasia's financial resources were limited and she was not about to be ruined by one of the despicable individuals who at first threatened her with exposing her intentions and then demanded an exorbitant sum for the service. She was not to be taken

¹¹⁵ I cannot identify the location of Meniutovo. Polotzk is a city in Vitebsk Province.

advantage of. After an exchange of wit, she plainly outbluffed him by turning the tables on him, saying that she will expose him and his whole operation if he does not act ethically about it. Her son will be saved whether he the agent will drown or not. Later she remarked it was not very nice of her to behave thusly but she said ethics were pitched out the window when it came to saving her son.

As it had been predicted in exile, Aaron lived one week. While the family attended the funeral in Senno, a neighbor came in to fumigate the house, to kill the Tuberculosis germs and burn all of Aaron's belongings. It must have been effective for none of us caught the germ. Mother's knowledge of taking precautions to boil dishes, linen and any contact Aaron had with anything was helpful. Life in Belytze was not the same after 1905 and after Aaron's death in 1907 plans were shaping for us to move to an all Jewish community, as it had been before Granddaddy Zalmon broke away and moved to an all Russian environment around 1863.

After Aaron's arrest as a Revolution in 1905 the Davidson life in the village of Belytze became very precarious. Although Chasia apparently was as popular as ever with the peasants, relations with the Pan somewhat cooled and this, the place of her birth, was not home any more.

Early one morning in 1906, Zalmon knocked at Chasia's door, he was quite shaken up by what happened to him during the night. The tavern was surrounded, the door broken down and under abusive language they were forced into a bedroom where they barricaded themselves against the mob who proceeded to loot and vandalize

everything in their reach. It was one of the so called Pogroms (an organized massacre and looting of Jewish people).¹¹⁶ The tavern was left in shambles. The looting and destruction was thorough, the Torah unraveled on the floor but fortunately not damaged.¹¹⁷ Zalmon Hillman's departure from Belytze was hastened by this act of the pogromschiks.¹¹⁸ Winding everything up he and his wife moved to Senno, never to return again. Nikita, the elder in the village, insisted that this was not the work of local people, that no one in Belytze had a hand in it, and assured Chasia not to fear that this will ever happen to her family.¹¹⁹

Zalmon Hillman, like many other Jews in White Russia, lived comfortably in Chashniki, an all Jewish community, he bartered in grain and other commodities grown in the area. After the Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861 by Tzar Alexander II, the large land owners, or the Pans, were made to sell to former serfs parcels of land to be paid out

¹¹⁶ John D. Klier writes of the word pogrom, "Its usage became inextricably linked to antisemitic violence after the outbreak of three great waves of anti-Jewish rioting in the Russian Empire in 1881-2, -6, and 1919-21." Klier also writes, "To be sure, numerous village taverns...were the targets of pogrom violence, but it invariably spread to the countryside from urban areas." See Klier, "The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian History," in *Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, 13-14.

¹¹⁷ The looting of Zalmon Hillman's store was part of the second wave of pogroms in Russia, which occurred from 1903-6. See Klier and Lambroza, eds., *Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, xv.

¹¹⁸ Pogromshchicks or pogromschiks.

¹¹⁹ John D. Klier writes that "peasants were frequently reported to have come to a town or city to participate in the looting that accompanied pogroms, and then carried the idea of an attack upon the Jews back to their village." See Klier, "The Pogrom Paradigm in Russian History," in *Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, 14-15. Ten pogroms occurred in Vitebsk Province between 1905-1906, resulting in the death of 36 Jews. See Shlomo Lambroza, "The Pogroms of 1903-1906," in *Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, 228.

over a period of years, guaranteed by the government. Land was sold on the periphery of the large estates, thus creating villages. These communities were settled about every few miles. Before the Emancipation everything was provided for the workers such as housing, food, and other necessities of life. Now they were left on their own, they had no knowledge how to obtain or dispose of any surplus if they had any, they simply were helpless to manage their own affairs. All they knew was how to work the land and this was always under some supervision. Zalmon approached the Pan on the idea of building a Tavern and let him operate it and he will act as a go-between for the peasant and his needs.

The Pan retained some land on the edge of the village and built a tavern, the building larger than any structures in the settlement which mostly were log cabins with thatched roofs. The tavern served as a rendezvous place for local people as well as outsiders. The large room in the front had a huge rectangular table with benches around it, there were two kerosene lamps hanging from the ceiling at each end of the table, a store room containing necessities such as herring, salt, sugar, dried fish, wheat flour, (referred to as white flour), kerosene and some notions. A counter separated the large room from the store.

At one end was a keg of beer, sold on draught by the mug, a samovar often had steaming hot water for tea when guests requested it. Zalmon's living quarters in the back had a living room, two bedrooms, a kitchen and a room for the Torah, placed in an Ark with a stand by it. The Tavern also had an oven that served to heat the place in winter and accommodate limited baking. A large yard had space to hitch horses to the wagons when

a traveler needed to remain overnight. Across the street from the Tavern a “Monopolika” (a liquor dispensary) was built and operated by the government, this completed it to accommodate a trading center.¹²⁰

The selling of the land to the peasants was about 12 desiatins to a family (a desiatina equivalent to 2.7 acres). All of the land was divided into three fields to rotate crops.¹²¹ All grain sowed in the fall, to stay in the ground under the snow during the Winter, was located together for every one. All spring plowing, such as potatoes, beets and other summer crops, was on another strip of land, then there was meadow land for hay. In this way everyone attended the same type of crop at the same time of the year, and no one interfered with his neighbor. It would be difficult to get your hay if other fields around were not mowed or, for that matter, to attend to your winter crop if you had to cross over someone else’s field that was not ready.

The seasons were rather rigorous, snow and frost prevailed from November until April. All major activity was limited. Domestic chores and everyday duties were shared by all members of the family, certain types of work were traditionally relegated to males,

¹²⁰ In 1894, the Russian government created the State Vodka Monopoly, which confined the “sale of alcoholic beverages to government-run stores.” The government attempted to regulate the sale of alcohol, but this measure actually increased bootlegging. See Patricia Herlihy, *The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6

¹²¹ Land in communes was divided into three fields, then divided into strips which were given to households. Each household was given strips in each field. David Moon describes crop rotation in communes: “one field was used for growing the winter crop, another was sown with the spring crop, and the third left fallow to allow the soil to recover its fertility. The crops were rotated the following year.” See Moon, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930*, 220, 123.

while others were accepted as the women's work.¹²² Feeding of the stock, repairing farm equipment, providing wood for the oven, cutting down trees and hauling lumber to the yard, cutting it to size, and stacking it to dry for next winter as well as mixing fodder and, at certain times, slaughtering and taking grain to the mill to have it ground into flour—all this was the responsibility of the man of the house. The woman attended to the milking, weaving, spinning, looking after the house and the children.

Winter days were short and activity began way before day-break. The housewife was busy preparing the morning meal while the men attended to their chores. A well at each end of the village provided the main source of water, a trough in front of the well was replenished by each stock owner as he drew it by the bucket. The horses pranced around in the snow when the gates opened and frequently waited their turn when the line was full. Obediently they walked back to their respective stables. The milk cows usually got a warm mixture of water with meal floating on top. The woman milked while the cow syphoned the preparation in the bucket. While all this was being done the oven in the house was blazing away and ready for the batter for pancakes was souring in a wooden keg specially built for this. When the fire made some headway, potatoes were rolled in front to bake. The stock attended to, the pancakes baked and stacked on the table covered with a white linen cloth, a pitcher of fresh milk, a crock of clabber, extra bowls placed and wooden spoons piled on each end of the table showed that every one was ready for the morning meal.

¹²² David Moon writes, "By custom, most tasks in the household and on the land were divided by gender." Men normally worked in the fields and women worked within the household, doing domestic chores and raising children. See Moon, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930*, 191-193.

In the hut, one large room, the table occupied the most revered corner where the Ikons (each person had an Ikon of a saint given at birth) hung on each wall beginning in the corner where the head of the family brought his Ikon when the home was established.¹²³ The family head bowed, repeated a prayer making the sign of the Cross over the chest, and they were ready to sit down at the table. There were no individual bowls—everyone dipped from the same bowl, closest to them. The children helped out as soon as they were big enough, the girls around the mother, the boys with their father.

Going to school was a rare privilege and not being very important, girls did not go at all. Many years passed before a school opened in the area. It was centrally built to accommodate several villages.¹²⁴ Winter weather was a great deterrent in attending school, snows often waist deep and the temperature 30 below zero was quite a discouraging factor. Zalmon settled in the Tavern and before long proved to be a great help to the peasants as well as the Pan himself, and as time went on his activities expanded from the tavern into other fields in dealing in grain, in forests and exporting timber.¹²⁵ His uncle, Aaron, who lived in Riga was a broker in exporting and Zalmon learned the trade working with him in his youth. This knowledge proved very useful to

¹²³ David Moon writes that peasants placed icons of saints and the Christian God in the corner of the home diagonal to the oven and prayed to them for “protection from misfortune.” See Moon, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930*, 183.

¹²⁴ David Moon writes, “Only towards the end of the nineteenth century did many peasant children receive some formal education, and then most who attended village schools did so for just two or three winters when their parents could spare them from their households and fields.” See *ibid.*, 193.

¹²⁵ Antony Polonsky writes, “Jewish over-representation in trade was the result of the lack of other opportunities.” See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881-1914*, 12.

him in Belytze. Pan Swiatsky depended on him in his forest transactions.¹²⁶ His older son, Hillel, settled near his hometown, Chashniki, operating a flour mill on a franchise deal, which was located about 10 miles from Chashniki. His daughter Sarah was married and operated a store in a village some thirty miles away. Chasia, approaching teen age, took an interest in all operations at home, and Berry, the youngest, was away in Cheder (Hebrew School) in Senno, the county seat. Rachel-Ella, Zalmon's first wife, died when Berry was quite young and the burden of running things fell on the young lass, Chasia, who was one of those gifted persons who managed it all very ably. Zalmon learned to depend on her for all of his operations around the Tavern. She grew into the job way above her age, she was beautiful, full of charm, energy and vigor and had a bubbling personality. A maid, Nastia, a peasant girl, helped with the household chores and the two seemed to have a wonderful time working together.

From a modest beginning in the Tavern Zalmon branched out into handling linseed, rye, flax and many commodities produced in the area. Another building was added to house linseed. The warehouse to store linseed had to be very tight as it would ooze out like a liquid once an opening or a crack occurred. Flax was another item very much in demand, hog bristle tied in bunches and sold by weight, dried mushrooms strung in hoops sold for export. Dealers regularly came to buy the various commodities.

On one of his trips Zalmon purchased a gift for Chasia's mother, Rachel-Ella, just before she died—five strings of genuine pearls. After her death Zalmon gave the pearls to Chasia as an inheritance from her mother. Typical of any teenager she often dressed up,

¹²⁶ The 1897 census determined that about 800,000 people within the Russian Empire were involved in forestry or fishing. See Moon, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930*, 15.

coquetted in front of the mirror with the pearls around her neck. This was the only reward she got for looking after the affairs of the Tavern. Zalmon was very proud of his young daughter and marveled at her ability.

The storm was strong on the outside that Winter morning. Zalmon was glad to be at home, business in the Tavern was at a stand-still which gave him a chance to go over business with Chasia without any interruption. Their warehouses had just been emptied by the dealers who came for the rye, flax and linseed. They were also thankful that the sacks of potatoes had been gotten earlier before the front set in.

Zalmon, with his long flowing white beard, looked more like a sage than the business man that he was. A twinkle in his eye forewarned of his good sense of humor. They were going over the needs in the store at the tavern and the whole operation in general. Around the edges of the frozen window panes they saw a pair of horses pull up in the front, on the side of the sled the driver was perched ready to jump off. Patiently waiting and wondering who would dare travel in such a storm they sat, their eyes on the door. They saw the driver unwrap the heavy snow covered blanket from the passenger and went over to attend to the horses while the passenger made his way down from the net of hay that was his seat. He was wrapped in furs with a hood over his head making it difficult to identify him. The snow on his hood and clothes, the sweat on the horses indicated a long journey. The driver unhitched the horses and tied them to the hay net to feed, he took special care to cover them to avoid cooling too quickly. The horses did not lose any time to munch on the hay.

Stamping their feet to shake off the snow from the felt boots and clothing, slowly they made their way, dragging the suitcase with them. Zalmon and Chasia wondered who could this be to travel in such forbidden weather, yet, there was something familiar about the traveler but they could not quite decide who this was. A cold breeze preceded him as he opened the door and pushed it with his back. Once inside he turned as he closed the door. Removing his hood and mittens he cleared his throat as he pushed aside the end of his fur collar thus revealing his identity.

“It’s Hillel,” cried Chasia as she ran to embrace her older brother. She was so glad to see him. Her father, being away so much, she needed someone close to her to talk to, she needed to share some of the responsibility. She was a lonely little girl growing up with all this weight on her shoulders. Her brother Berry was not much comfort to her, he had to be away at school and was still a baby to her. She soon made off to the kitchen to look after the samovar for tea and get started to prepare to have the table set for the guests.

Hillel lived in the next State [in Russian province], his family consisted of three daughters and one son, Wolfe, who lived in a small town on the banks of the Western Dvina, a navigable river in the summer some sixty miles from the city of Vitebsk. The Dvina River had passenger service from Vitebsk to Riga, the estuary in the Baltic Sea. Rachel, the oldest was married to Mendel, a forestry dealer; Dvosia, married to a dentist who practiced in Chashniki; and Mania, the youngest, married to the dentist’s brother who was an attorney, a profession denied Jewish people, but somehow he managed to get

it.¹²⁷ The dentist's name was Boris Suchotin, the attorney's name was Yerophim Suchotin, not typically Jewish names. Yerophim was later shot by the Bolsheviks in 1919 in Penza.¹²⁸

After the customary greetings, Hillel took off his fur coat and began to melt the icicles from his beard and mustache. Chasia went outside to supervise getting the horses under the shed and went quickly to dispense with her Tavern duties to give her ample time to visit with Hillel. She was relieved that not many people needed her services.

Like his father, Hillel acted as the intermediary between the Pan Komarovsky in Truchnovichi with the peasants, only he limited his activity to operating a flour mill on a franchise basis. It worked to his advantage since the land had to be owned by the Pan. He was also trained in the forestry field but preferred to concentrate on the operating of the mill.

It was a happy reunion for father and son, the samovar kept on steaming, Chasia poured tea and served bread and butter also strawberry jam. Berry came in, his cheeks red from playing in the snow. He happened to be home for a few days and was full of curiosity about his older brother whom he hardly knew. It wasn't long before neighbors began to drop in, some of Hillel's boyhood friends, all were interested in his well being. Women hardly took part in any serious conversations, Chasia was the exception, frequently she was questioned about the quality of the flax or the weight of the grain per measure or the uniformity of the hog bristles, the linseed and about the Tavern business

¹²⁷ In 1889, the tsarist government placed a "ban on new Jewish entrants to the profession," [law] which lasted 15 years. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881-1914*, 35.

¹²⁸ Penza is a city and the center of Penza Oblast Province in Russia.

in general. She was up on all of it. “What an Ayshes Chail” Hillel remarked (capable woman). They talked way into the night covering topics that concerned both of them. Zalmon did not fully approve Hillel giving up his interest in the forest business. Forestry was one type of business more prestigious than others a Jew could be engaged in with the outside world. It not only was big business but the type of people in it were of the highest caliber. But if this is what Hillel wanted to do that was his affairs.

The next morning Chasia proudly wore the pearls and she radiated all over while she was taking Hillel around, showing the progress that had been made since his last visit. There were new buildings to house the grain and the other farm products they brokered out, the newly born calf and she was especially proud of the hay barn which was packed to the rafters. This was her first business transaction with Pan Swiatsky, she contracted to mow in on halves, she furnished the labor to mow it and stack it and had her half hauled to store for the winter. Her share of the deal fared well.

Visiting a few days, Hillel and Zalmon left for Senno, taking Berry back to school with them. Zalmon was concerned about Chasia having so much responsibility but he hardly knew what to do about it, his involvement with his forest deals necessitated his being away. He hinted to Hillel that perhaps he should get married but felt this would not solve anything to relieve the situation.¹²⁹ He reasoned that Chasia will soon be of marriageable age and perhaps by the grace of the Almighty a capable young man will come along.

¹²⁹ This sentence lacks adequate explanation but it can be assumed that Zalmon was considering marrying again.

From Senno they paid a visit to Sarah and her husband, Abraham Wolfe, to spend a night and then came back to Belytze.¹³⁰ It was good to see his oldest son and to have a delightful visit with him.

The next day found Chasia busy at her daily routine. The large key ring dangled from her neck as she rushed from place to place to attend to all details and greet everyone as they lined up awaiting their turn. The peasants held on to the bridles to keep the horses from tearing into the sacks in the sleds in front of them. To keep warm they stamped their feet and flapped their arms against their bodies to keep up the circulation.

The price of grain was determined by the weight to a certain measure, the heavier the kernel the more flour it would yield per measure. A sampling gauge resembled a huge needle with a bulge in the center. It had a cavity to collect grain when inserted in the bag and pulled out, this way a true sample was obtained from the center of the sack. It was designed to spread the weave in the bag without tearing it. The measuring cup was of shiny brass with three fancy cords tied to three sides of the cup and to a ring to hang it on a scale. Various sizes of weights placed on the opposite side on a flat tray hung on the other end of the scale. All eyes were on Chasia as she lifted the scale by a ring and began placing the weights on the tray to get the arrow in the middle that indicated the correct balance.

Chasia felt very important when she performed the weighing of the grain. The peasants, not fully understanding what all this was about, marveled at her skill. They

¹³⁰ Davidson was named after this uncle-in-law.

shook their heads, looked at each other in dismay at how smart she was and did not quite take in how this contraption determined the price of their grain. To them the quality of the grain is a Providential Act and no man should judge it. However, Chasia's integrity was beyond question and whatever classification she put on it they humbly accepted with a bow.

Of the many items brought in, Chasia had a fair knowledge about all that was handled. Hog bristles were in bundles, to determine the quality a bristle was pulled out here and there at random to see if it was split. The carded flax, brought in sheaves, was carefully checked not to have discoloration in the center each sheaf was turned upside down over an arm, exposing the inside also for complete separation of the lint.

All the activity over a period of time gave the Tavern a musty atmosphere, the wood floors absorbed the melted snow and spilling of beer and other drippings such as kerosene when the lamps were filled, the odor from the lamps that hung over the large wooden tables, the store part behind the counter contributed its share.

The liquor dispensary across the street was where Vodka was purchased and brought to the tavern for an appetizer with a meal or just to socialize with friends. The windows, small and frozen over in the winter, let in a minimum of light, pipe smoking and the sheep-skin coats gave off a peculiar odor in damp weather, all of this was peculiar to the tavern atmosphere. It was strange, as if by a built-in signal, they would bring their surplus of whatever they had at the same time to sell, barter or exchange for things they needed. This was a festive occasion for all who came, they exchanged yarns, experiences and plain good story telling, after all it was not too long since the

Emancipation and many of the memories were still fresh. Some had difficulty getting adjusted to managing on their own, they would rather belong to someone who would provide everything for them.¹³¹ This native environment was different from any found anywhere. It had a tinge of humor, compassion and indifference.

Serfdom was not so many years back and the peasants enjoyed reminiscing about those times, painful as some of them were, still it was nice to speak of it in the past. Invariably after a few drinks, the gatherings ended up with tales that happened to some of them and their elders before the fateful year of 1861.

Nikita, the elder in the village, stocky with a ruddy complexion, banged his hand on the table to attract attention. Looking around at the people, he leaned back, looking wise as he stroked his beard and, with a chuckle, began telling his story: “It was fifteen years ago, ah, was it that long?”¹³² Scratching the back of his head he looked around, “yea, I guess it was, the Pan was on his way home from town, it was the coldest day of the year, yes it was, they were all wrapped in furs, they sure were.... The devil take it, suddenly it turned pitch dark, one could hardly see his own nose in front of him, I tell you fellows it was dark. On that day Uncle Frost’s teeth were sharper than ever and what do you suppose happened? Hee, hee, hee” went his squeaking voice. There was a shuffle on the benches as the audience closed in on him in a circle. He looked around and held back to keep them in suspense of what was next to come. Nikita felt his importance. “If you have ever been in a blizzard, I tell you, this was the daddy of them all, it raced against

¹³¹ This is a myth of educated Russians.

¹³² This would mean the year was 1876 at the time of this conversation.

itself, it came down in patches, it went up, it went down, it whirled and it shot straight across, all this time it accumulated in hills on the side of the road, in the middle of the road, it made mountains in matters of minutes, trees were hardly recognizable, it was awful.” He leaned forward, his face took on a grave expression getting ready to tell the most climactic experience in his next episode.

“You could hear the bells ringing, knowing that some important person is nearby, but you could not see a thing, then, out of nowhere an apparition appeared. It was so covered with snow it frightened you. It waddled over towards you, and who do you suppose it was? The Pan himself. I’ll tell you, things have changed. In the old days a footman would be out there battling the blizzard while he sat wrapped up comfortably in the sled. I remember when a whole village was forced to go ahead of him to sweep the road. Many ears, noses and toes were frozen off. We have with us now some of the victims of such blizzards. I tell you boys, those were the days. The Lord only knows the suffering we took. Flogging was not unusual if things did not go to suit them.” They shook their heads in awe. Some of them in the group were serfs under the old system who nodded their heads approvingly of what Nikita said.

Nikita further continued; “The Father Tsar could not stand our suffering any longer and freed us by issuing the Manifesto in 1861.¹³³ I well remember that day, oh, the things that happened on that day; the elders in the village rounded everyone up, as was the custom in the old days, he had something important to tell us. We are no longer

¹³³ Alexander II was Tsar at the time of emancipation. For more information, see Daniel Field, *The End of Serfdom: Nobility and Bureaucracy in Russia, 1855-1865* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

slaves, we can do as we please, go wherever we want to go, do not belong to the land any longer. The Tsar Father will see that we have enough land of our own to till, the official from the city will come over to give us instructions. Every one at the gathering was stunned at the news of being free. The land belongs to the Pan, will he let us stay here? Give us land? We did not understand, the question was raised where and how are we to get supplies who will take care of us, it seemed the ground had caved in under us. The elder assured us the Official will be here soon and not to worry. The Official came and announced that an organization called Zemstvo was established, it purchased land from the Pan and is selling it to the peasants on the installment plan for a period of 49 years.¹³⁴ The Pan washed his hands of us and it was tough for awhile but we survived.” They all shook their heads at Nikita’s knowledge of all the things he was telling them. This encouraged him the more. He straightened up, took a deep breath and with a twinkle in his eye he began: “Now let me tell you a heroic story of our peasants, you know the GORODISTCHE (mound about fifty feet tall built like layers of cake by Napoleon when he came through in the war of 1812) very little we know of the battles that took place here, but our poor old peg-legged Grandpa Ivan claimed he was a veteran of the Battle of

¹³⁴ Zemstvo is the “general name for the system of rural self-government introduced in 1864.” See Terence Emmons and Wayne S. Vucinich, eds., “Note on Terms, Abbreviations, Transliteration, and Dating,” in *The Zemstvo in Russia: An Experiment in Local Self-Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), xii. People of all social categories (gentry, townspeople, and peasants) could participate in the election of deputies. See Kermit E. McKenzie, “Zemstvo Organization and Role within the Administrative Structure,” in *The Zemstvo in Russia*, 31.

Borodino, this is near Moscow, I can still see him there sitting on the edge of the over, his peg leg sticking out in front of him as he was twisting hemp into plow lines.¹³⁵

“Grandpa Ivan was full of stories, but his prize story was when he lost his leg in the Borodino Battle. ‘It was in them trying days when the damn Frantsuzy (the French) under their leader, Napoleon, ran over our Mother Russia clear into Moscow, they drove our Tsar Father Alexander the First beyond the walls of our Holy city.’ Filled with emotion Nikita wiped the tears from his cheek with his sleeve and the others too had wet eyes and painful expressions, sharing the pain of Nikita and his Grandfather. He continued; “And Grandpa cleared his voice, gesturing with his hand ‘The Frantsuzy thought as soon as they conquered Moscow, that our Tsar Father would immediately surrender and ask for peace, aha, they found out different. He just did not know our Father Tsar. He moved his forces beyond the city leaving a skeleton army ordering us to burn it to the ground. I recall one day I was in a cellar piling up anything I could find into a pile to set fire to it when I heard that cussed talk, I knew it was the Frantsuzy tongue, I pulled an empty keg over me for cover and sat there, quiet as a mouse, until that cussed chattering faded away. I tell you I climbed out and completed the job like a true soldier. To tell you the truth it was not easy to burn up something that belonged to Mother Russia. But this was something I was ordered to do and so no questions were asked, I did it.’ Nikita paused, chuckled at the thought of his Grandpa. ‘Why I saw them Frantsuzy eat cats and dogs that were left behind, we had to hide whatever food we had and stretch it

¹³⁵ The Battle of Borodino took place on September 7, 1812 during Napoleon’s campaign in Russia. The battle resulted in heavy casualties for both the Russians and the French. See Dominic Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* (New York: Viking, 2010), 192-209.

out to last, we did not have any way to get food from the army stationed outside of Moscow, some trickled in by devious ways, but we managed.¹³⁶

“The enemy situation was pitiful, their clothing were no match for the loose clothing our soldiers wore. The populations harassed them wherever they found them, they were one pitiful lot. Many were found frozen in the hay stacks. To retreat was not so easy, there was no axle grease to allow the wheels to turn, the horses were starving for lack of fodder, retreating soldiers could be seen in every direction and our cavalry unmercifully probed at their flanks, the whole Farnzuskaya army was in disarray; Napoleon himself, it was said, was leaving his soldiers behind and getting out of there.

‘Later we learned that General Kutuzov and the Nobility were afraid that the peasants might side with the Frantsuzy so as to get their freedom.¹³⁷ Ho, little did they know that the peasants would never betray Mother Russia. We moved with the Russian Army, there were times when there were no horses, we ourselves pulled the vehicles until horses were found.¹³⁸ Those were the days—what do you young snippers know about anything?

Nikita relaxed a bit and then reminisced of the Emancipation days. “Early that morning, on horseback, officials from the city pulled in at the Elder’s home, he was away

¹³⁶ Napoleon’s retreating troops were not prepared for the Russian winter, lacking shelter and food. Dominic Lieven writes that, “dead and dying men littered the road in large numbers.” French soldiers were forced to eat their horses, sometimes raw. See Lieven, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 265.

¹³⁷ Mikhail Kutuzov became the commander-in-chief of the Russian army in August 1812 and led the army against Napoleon’s troops. See *ibid.*, *Russia Against Napoleon*, 188.

¹³⁸ The Russians actually had plenty of horses compared to the French. Dominic Lieven argues that, “The horse was a crucial- perhaps even the single most decisive- factor in Russia’s defeat of Napoleon.” See *ibid.*, 7.

at the time, attending to some chores in the barn. One of the youngsters was ordered to locate him and bring him back, to tell this was important. Of course any time an official from the city came was important to us. Before long their presence attracted attention. Serfs did not dare get close to officials and they gathered across the street wondering what all this was all about. The Elder came, holding his cap clutched in his hand against his chest, with head bowed anxiously, looking at the official as he was unsnapping his leather case. He picked up a paper with a shiny seal at the bottom. Looking very important he raised the paper and read aloud in the name of the Father Tsar the Proclamation that gave us our freedom. The Elder bowed low and asked in a low voice to please explain what it all meant. He ordered him to gather all the men in the community and to interpret what he had just told him. A copy was nailed to the side of the Elder's hut. Some of them were still not clear how the land they had was arrived at."

They were so engrossed in Nikita's story telling and comments made amongst themselves that they did not notice Pan Swiatsky enter the tavern and make his way to Zalmon's quarters. He stopped to listen to some of the remarks about his family. To call their attention to him he thumped his cane and gave a slight cough as he looked in their direction. It was like getting a lid over a boiling pot, it silenced them all. Clutching caps in their hands against the chest, heads lowered they quietly left not daring to look in his direction. Although they were no longer serfs and were free, their servility still hung over them, so ingrained in them that it was not so easy to cast it off.

"Good day, Pan Swiatsky", Chasia gaily greeted him. "Panienka [miss or young lady] Chasiaka, good day to you", the Pan warmly replied as his eyes followed the last

muzhik out of the tavern.¹³⁹ “Ugh, ungrateful pigs,” he exclaimed when the door closed. Turning to Chasia, “We lost much, when we forfeited the power of the whip, those wild dogs, mad dogs at that”. The Pan spoke agitatedly. “They were brave behind my back, you saw how cowardly they sneaked out when they saw me”. After making a few purchases at the counter, he asked to see Zalmon and left for the other part of the tavern.

The Pan seemed very disturbed over something. He had just returned from a trip to Paris, Berlin and other foreign cities where they spent most of their winters, and to return this early was unusual for him, Chasia sensed something out of the ordinary in his visit. Zalmon had a dealer negotiating for additional grain if the peasants would bring any in to sell. The peasants were very careful not to sell more than they needed for their own consumption and enough to set aside for seed. Toward the end of the Winter they could judge better how their supply would last. Because of the dealer, the Pan did not stay long and asked Zalmon to come to see him about some important business he had to talk to him about.

In spite of the excellent relations Zalmon had with the Pan there was always this inner anxiety most Jews felt: is there anything wrong? There was so much mistreatment that it became a way of life not to feel too optimistic about anything when it came to dealing with outsiders. When he returned from seeing the Pan, Zalmon quietly entered his quarter to immerse himself into a practice of the Germara (the second part of the

¹³⁹ Muzhik is the Russian word for male peasant. See Moon, “Glossary,” in *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930*, 379.

Talmud.)¹⁴⁰ So absorbed was he in it that he did not notice Chasia enter the room and stand by him, not daring to disturb him to ask if anything was wrong. Somehow she felt something was disturbing her father.

Raising his eyes he motioned her to sit down. He put his arm around her, drawing her closer to him. Stroking his beard with his hand he began: “My little bird, there is something I need to discuss with you” lowering his head toward her, “You saw the Pan here, evidently he lost large sums of money in Paris on his last trips, he made heavy financial demands on me to relieve his pressures which could easily bring ruin to this house. I am in a very delicate situation, should not be able to repay it, the consequences could be very serious for us. If I refuse to do it, retaliation will be ruinous, either way it is bad. Of all the Pans in the area Pan Swiatsky has been the best toward the Jew, some have been very ugly, they ridiculed and often humiliated them in making them entertain for parties. Swiatsky always acted very dignified toward me and I never heard anyone tell of him being mean to our fellow Jews. I have fared well in dealing with him over the years and as of now he mentioned a big forestry deal that will last many years.

“In other places the Jew is limited to just operating a Tavern, as you know I had all sorts of deals with him and I am grateful for it. Chasianka dear, if the worst should come, and one must never forget the possibility of the worst,” with a twinkle in his eye, “I am not completely without any resources, perhaps living close to a synagogue will be nice.” In a subtle way he was preparing Chasia to entertain the idea that soon she will be

¹⁴⁰ Gemara is “another name for the Talmud.” See, Polonsky, “Glossary,” in *The Jews in Poland and Russia*: Volume II, 411.

betrothed and have a home of her own and that he will see to it that she will have a good match.

Deep in thought Zalmon walked over to the window, looking over the fields. There was the flour mill, the roof stood above the other buildings, somewhere behind there the large vats of the distillery and far away were the forests to be worked before long. His hands folded behind him, he walked back and forth in his room and wound up in front of the ark housing the Torah, he leaned on the stand in front of it uttering a silent prayer as was his custom before any important decision.

Chasia with a heavy heart went about her business. She tried hard to understand the magnitude of the problem that faced her father, all she understood was that somehow her father would be able to handle it and she felt confident he would come out on top. She felt bad that that he had to be so disturbed about anything.

The flour mill was a busy enterprise this time of the year. The mill consisted of the ground floor where the grain was brought in, the second floor where the millstones were located, the third floor where the grain was taken and by gravity it came down to the grindstone and the final flour in to a chute on the first floor. The subfloor was where the wheels and belts, forced by water, turned the whole operation. The peasants brought their grain in sacks. It was weighed and a percentage taken by the miller for grinding, then the sacks were pulled to the third floor by means of a turning winch, made by inserting poles into the center pole manned by two people. As the rope wound around the vertical pole the sacks of grain slowly came up through trap doors on the second and third floor that

were lofted as the sacks of grain came up and dropped back after the sacks cleared them to close the opening in the floor. The grain was emptied into a hopper on the third floor allowing a trickle to fall on the millstone by a vibration device, feeding it between the stones to grind it into flour which emptied on the ground floor into an open, huge, shallow box. At the end was an opening to rake the flour into a sack and pack it with a wooden pestle the shape of a baseball bat. The odor of the flour coming out of the millstone, and still warm, it felt good to rake it. What a proud feeling it gave the peasant when he loaded the flour on the sled with the help of the next client in line. The whole procedure took on a communal spirit where one helped the next.

Frequently the line of peasants to have their grain milled was long and to keep down confusion numbers were issued as they arrived, the numbers placed on the piles of each one's grain. Sometimes it took several days to have your turn. A small hut was provided by the mill which had a large oven and wooden bunks, also a large table with benches.

The mill provided wood for the oven and kerosene for wick burners. The peasants often brought their own wood so as not to have to depend on the green wood supplied by the mill. To wait in the mill was not much of a hardship, it became more of a social gathering, experiences were exchanged and many yarns were told. They brought food along in case they had to stay over, it consisted of black bread, salo (fat-back) salt, sugar. Hot water was boiled in the iron kettle, tea was a luxury that was not necessary. Potatoes baked in front of the fire were a common food.

Zalmon walked over to the mill to see how things were going. Two millers were employed to operate it and from all appearances everything was doing well. Many thoughts passed through his mind as he walked to and from the mill. Swiatsky's financial dilemma tormented him most, there was so much at stake. Like other religious Jews, when anguish befell on them, they always thought of the departed souls to eternity: parents, close kin—in Zalmon's case it was his wife Rachel-Ella blessed be her memory—who were buried in Senno and Chashniki. He should visit their graves and ask for their intervening in his behalf with the Almighty above. The whole panorama of the plight of the Jew over the many, many years from the Babylonian Days to the Spanish Inquisition, from Bogdan Khmel'nitsky, the 17th Century tyrant who murdered two hundred thousand Jews in the Polish Ukrainian area, the Kishinev Pogrom of 1905 by the Tsars and the most recent tragedy that befell the Jews when Nicholas I organized a campaign to convert Jews to Christianity by inducting small Jewish boys into the Russian Army for twenty-five years, known as the Nicholas Soldiers.¹⁴¹ Many touching tales came down from parents who held on to the boys while the soldiers physically tore them away from the parent and the children kicking and screaming in the hands of the soldiers. There were many physical abuses on the distraught parents protecting their own flesh and blood. Like so many other dark annals of abuse on the Jew this was as horrible as any. Without warning a street was surrounded and the search began, like looking for wild

¹⁴¹ Davidson is probably referring to the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903. There was a rumor that "the Tsar had given permission to beat and rob Jews." See Shlomo Lambroza, "The Pogroms of 1903-1906," in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, 204. See also Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews: The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia, 1825-1855* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983).

animals no corner escaped the hooligans. Parents stuck the little fellows any place they thought might be overlooked. Forcefully they pulled the little boys as the mothers prostrated before them, clutching at their legs begging not to take their small children who were still in need of their mothers. With a scorn the mothers were kicked aside and their victims loaded into carriages, frequently some would break away only to be caught like wild game. The grief stricken house was left in shock, all the family could resort to in their misery was to the prayer book and to pour their hearts out to the Lord.

Four hundred years had passed since the Spanish Inquisition and the plight of the Jew is not much better.¹⁴² Remembering the words in the prayer book: “Next year in Jerusalem,” he looked up and asked himself, “isn’t it about time?” So deep in thought was he that he did not realize he had reached home and stood in front of the window looking out. He remembered the Covenant the Lord made to Abraham that the Israelites shall multiply like the Stars in Heaven and cover the Earth like the Sands in the Desert. His hands clenched so hard that the circulation slowed in them.

He hardly noticed Chasia standing near him looking beseechingly at his face. “Is anything wrong Father, can I help at all?” she asked in a low voice. Caressingly he put his arms around her shoulder as he guided her outside. The breeze caught his flowing white beard and he gave the appearance of the Patriarch he often resembled. As they slowly walked along, he broke the silence: “Chasianka, as long as my reputation is of being a wealthy man, the possibility of a fine match for you is very good. As it stands

¹⁴² On the Spanish Inquisition, see Joseph Pérez, *The Spanish Inquisition: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

now there is a very good possibility to select the nicest match for you, and I will provide a handsome dowry.”

Chasia blushed, wiped her tears, she was too choked for words. Silently they walked along. In a weak voice she spoke up: “Father I am terribly afraid, awfully frightened, Oh, my poor dear mother may she rest in peace.” Sobbing she pressed against him, not being able to say anything else. Compassionately Zalmon looked at his daughter, his own flesh and blood, so heart broken. “Little bird of mine,” he caressed her hair as he stroked it with the palm of his hand, “Afraid of what? Now, now, we will find an honorable young man worthy of you, perhaps a scholar.” He leaned toward her in a whisper told her that her dowry was well secured in town, known only to him, and no matter what happens, nothing will disturb this. “When we get home you will be the only other person who will know about it.”

“You are probably not aware that these days it is quite customary to have worthy scholars who are as poor as any one can be after studying in the yeshiva and fully deserve a good start. The young man I have in mind has all this and in addition I think he will take instruction to take over some of my business activity. A good mind can adjust to anything. I learned about him through Uncle Aaron in Riga where I got my forestry experience.”

There was no answer from Chasia, she followed good manners, women did not have any say in such matters.

Zalmon continued to press his point about matrimony, preparing her all along for the day of her betrothal.

Life in the Tavern went on as usual for sometime. Pan Swiatsky met his obligation as promised and Zalmon's relations with him were better than ever. A new forest contract was in the process of being negotiated which promised several years of business. Forest processing had to be done in the winter, due to many conditions, but this suited Zalmon just fine for it gave him a chance to be more around Belytze, his base of operation.

Chasia wondered why her father stayed away so long on this trip, perhaps this last business deal was so out of the ordinary that it had to take him longer than usual. She wondered since before long the Holy Days would be here and he always managed to be here, for he was the only Jew amongst the yeshuvniks (country Jews), as they were called, who had a Torah and he enjoyed performing before them.¹⁴³ After his wife died the neighboring women came and camped out in the Tavern during the Holy days to prepare all the meals and make the days festive. She was certain he would not let them down this time.

One afternoon Berry was home from school. It was getting close to the end of the term and he enjoyed helping Chasia, running errands for her. A wagon pulled up and it looked like Father, but there was a lady with him, this could not have been their father. Berry looked again, but it really was Zalmon, but who was the lady? He ran to Chasia, "Father is here and he has a lady with him." Like a heavy weight fell on her she could not

¹⁴³ Yishuv is the Hebrew word for settlement and refers to the Jews who lived in the land of Israel.

move, all kinds of thoughts flashed before her, she hardly knew how to handle this kind of a situation.

To delay meeting whom she suspected it was, she got busy firing the samovar, normally delegating it to someone else. Everything went wrong in firing the samovar, the kindling would not light, the paper she put in the bottom of the chimney to give it a boost, choked off the draft, the boot she used as a bellow was ineffective, she forgot to pinch one side of the leggen to give it a better draw. On a second try the flame exploded, throwing soot all over her, and she looked like something dragged out of the oven chimney. All this gave her an excuse to stay away from the living quarters that much longer. Berry, too, was stunned when he was told that this was his new mother, he was too young to understand it. He clung to Chasia more than ever.

At last the water in the samovar began to boil, Chasia managed to carry it and set it on the table. She did not lose any time to get out of there under the excuse of cleaning up. She never understood why all this secrecy. If he had only prepared her for it, the shock would not have been so great. She was not quite sure whether it was tears or water that helped clear all the soot from her face.

Rachel Sarah, the stepmother, was nice looking and tried very hard to be sweet to the children, but the more she tried to endear herself the more estranged they were, it was a very tense situation for some time. Chasia used all the tact at her command to make life pleasant for her father, she had long sympathized with him that life was very lonely and that he should get a mate, but if only he had not surprised them. Berry's problem was solved, he was sent back to Cheder (Hebrew School) in Senno.

Village life was quite different from what Rachel Sarah was accustomed to, living in the city, and being in a tavern complicated matters that much more. No matter how hard she tried to endear herself to Chasia and Berry, when he was home, her superficiality was not easy to conceal from them. The villagers too did not take to her, perhaps because of their loyalty to Chasia, or that they disliked city people. Her Russian was not the muzhik type spoken by all villagers, hers was more of a literary language, or citified. She dressed more dressy than they were accustomed to. Whenever she tried to help in the store, they waited for Chasia to get through to wait on them. They did not take to the high-faluting lady as they called her.

Rachel Sarah, besides not wholly accepted as a mother as she would have wished, found that life in general was a tremendous adjustment. The large oven in the kitchen, caring for a cow, and not being too handy in the kitchen, she felt in the way all the time she was there. Nastia's devotion to Chasia did not help. As winter set in, the responsibility of helping with the fires, looking after the chickens that were kept under the oven in the winter, did not appeal to her. When she married Zalmon she had the illusion of being married to the wealthy forest dealer who lived in the country and she would have servants to do her bidding. She found out this was quite a different life. The match-maker evidently portrayed a different life style or, as the custom had it, the match was made with her parents and she had very little say in it. Being a person of great charm and very clever, she no doubt set a course for herself to make the best of the situation. Chasia was approaching marriageable age and soon would be on her own and she would persuade Zalmon to retire to a city to live their lives in happiness.

Nastia, the peasant girl, was a great comfort to Chasia. Not only was she her helper over the whole place, she also was her companion, and her loyalty was beyond any question. Ever since her stepmother arrived Chasia had spent many restless nights. On one of these nights she recalled when she felt Nastia's pudgy, warm, face close to hers telling her in a low voice that she overheard that the newly arrived guests had a conversation about a match for the young man they had with them and Chasia. The conversation was still going on. To verify it Chasia and Nastia tiptoed and cracked the door open to hear and to have a look at the young man who sat between Zalmon and his father. She overheard enough to convince her that she was the main topic of the conversation. Quickly she ran and hid in the hay barn where she could not be found until the suitor left. Zalmon was not the kind of father to impose a marriage on his daughter when she adamantly protested. Normally, fathers decided and women had very little to say in such matters, but perhaps Zalmon, too, thought it best to wait. Then, she remembered how her little brother Berry, who was in a daze when his new mother appeared on the scene, with all of her caressing he drew away from her and was that much closer to his older sister. When he was asleep behind the screen that served as a partition, in her loneliest moments when she needed someone to get close to, Berry was the only one left and she would go and sit at the foot of his bunk watching him sleep. She felt his insecurity, while he was not very talkative he somehow seemed much closer to her than ever. How glad she was he was away at Cheder, to be away from all this. She

hoped that in his withdrawn moments he would not do anything to harm himself. These were turbulent times for her little brother.

When things looked darkest she would begin to rationalize to herself: not all stepmothers are all that mean; she heard of some who came into a home and acted like mothers to the step-children, perhaps this one by the Grace of God would be like this, after all her father would not marry someone who would be mean to his children. After all her mother died when she was so young, she hardly knew her, and again having a family of her own and who would be with her father in his old age? He deserved some happiness, and with this brighter outlook she fell asleep.

There is an old saying in Russia: the morning is much smarter than the evening.¹⁴⁴ Chasia got up with an entirely different outlook on things, whatever was difficult to do the day before, she tackled with new vigor, there was no time to speculate on what might happen or to dwell on things that had happened. Zalmon was up early and on his way to the forest to see about trees to be felled. He needed to check with the Forest Ranger to whom he delegated certain duties and together they had to go over which part of the forest to work on first, so many problems could arise if not carefully thought out.

Berry felt out of place more than anyone else. His visits home were not as cheerful as they used to be, although his stepmother tried very hard to be a mother to him. In the Tavern too she tried hard to learn the ropes, so to speak, to be of help and to be able to take it over some day. This was not as easy as she thought it would be, Chasia was not about to give up the reins.

¹⁴⁴ “The morning is wiser than the night” is a Russian proverb.

It was a busy morning, peasants purchased as well as brought things to sell. Chasia was especially busy trying to forget and also catching up on many neglected duties. A fine ring of baravicks (a hardy mushroom) dried and ready for market was brought in for Chasia to inspect and weigh.¹⁴⁵ Baravicks, when picked in the forest, are strung on a thread and dried in the sun just like apples or pears, a popular item for export. Inspecting several rings of baravicks draped around the out-stretched arms of a peasant, Chasia was checking for firmness, mold and size. She took off a loop at a time, placing it on the counter ready to be placed in the basket to be weighed. Out of the corner of her eye she caught Rachel-Sarah enter the store. Chasia froze in her tracks at what she saw: she turned pale, her lips quivering, she could hardly believe her eyes, she stood motionless, her eyes full of anguish, on the verge of bursting into tears, losing her grip on the mushroom loop she leaned against the counter to support herself. Everything seemed to have been cut from under her. There stood Rachel Sarah and adorning her neck were the same pearls Chasia had played with not too long ago. Those same pearls had belonged to Chasia's mother and were rightfully hers. Her father gave them to her. They were lost forever; she could never touch them again. This was too much for her, the whole store swirled around and around and she slowly sank to the floor on the pile of mushrooms fallen to the floor.

Nastia stood over her, wiping her face with a damp cloth, and Rachel Sarah on the other side showed concern for her sudden fainting spell. The pearls around her neck stood out more conspicuously than before. Chasia felt like snatching them and running with

¹⁴⁵ Boletus edulis or porcini mushroom

them as far as she could go, instead she covered her face with both hands and managed to control herself.

Self-pity was not in her make-up, there were things to do, and she must get hold of herself. She regained her composure and forced herself to go about the necessary duties required of her. Berry was not this easily reconciled to the injustice of the pearls deal meted out to his sister. He was openly antagonistic to his stepmother, no matter how Chasia tried to ease matters, insisting that it did not matter that much to her and begging him to please change his hostile attitude toward her. His argument to her: “The pearls belonged to our Mother and Father gave them to you, how could he steal them and give them to her.” Chasia warned him that this kind of talk would only get him in deep trouble, for Father would not tolerate impudence and she reminded him that paternal discipline was the strongest law of the land. She used the Fifth Commandment of Honoring Parents.¹⁴⁶ It seemed hopeless. The sooner she could get him back to Cheder the better off everyone would be. His visits home got less and less frequent as time went on.

The house was teeming with activity. Neighbors from nearby villages dropped in to meet the new Mrs. Hillman. Kalmon from Miniutivo with his whole family came; three sons and two daughters, one of the daughters later emigrated to America, quite a courageous venture for a girl and the first in the area. The villagers got up enough courage to come too, they came more from curiosity than friendship. Many never had any contact with city folks, she soon got to be known as the “City Lady”. Rachel Sarah was a

¹⁴⁶ Exodus 20:12.

most gracious hostess and very solicitous with praises for Chasia. Zalmon was pleased at the reaction of the neighbors. A time was set to invite other neighbors to come for a Sabbath weekend, which proved a very delightful occasion. Chasia too managed very well to conceal her true feelings. Berry chose not to come. As the years went on he got so bitter against her that he finally gave up schooling. Zalmon tried him in some of his enterprises, and as long as Berry was away from home things went smoothly, but when he had to be at home between seasons, things went from bad to worse.

It was not to Rachel Sarah's liking to have the children there, she would like somehow to marry Chasia off but Berry made life so miserable for her that she too became irritable. She began to find fault with the way Chasia ran things, no matter how hard she tried it seemed to no avail. There were many insignificant things that were picked on. The cookie jar—Berry, ever since he was a baby, had the privilege of dipping into it at will. To spite him she removed it, he in turn hid it so she could not find it, resulting in a quarrel. All of Chasia's tact and patience proved helpless to keep the peace between the two. Rachel Sarah's visits to the store became more obvious with every visit, it was not to help but to find fault. She had sly ways to show her disapproval of Chasia's managing: she would run her fingers over the counter and shelves to look for dust, she kept constantly rearranging, whether it was needed or not.

On one of these visits she was particularly solicitous of Chasia: flattery and praise were heavier than usual. Chasia, as ever suspicious of her motives, listened carefully of what was to come, she never missed an opportunity to drive some point home. Leaning against the counter Rachel Sarah began her speculation; of how lucky will be the man

who will marry her, and, of course, the sizeable dowry her father, being a wealthy man, must have set aside for her. The dowry was the part that bugged Rachel Sarah, Zalmon stood by his promise not to divulge anything about it. From time to time she picked Chasia about it, only to get a shrug of the shoulders and a change of the subject. It was quite a match of wits between the city woman and the country girl; Rachel Sarah cunningly kept on pressing, suggesting that anyone who worked as hard as she had done over the years and had so much responsibility and had so ably cared for her father's affairs, surely he would generously take care of her. With a shrug of the shoulders the country girl would invariably show curiosity about the city, what was it like? She lamented the fact that Senno was as far as she had ever been and that was only a few miles away. How tall were the buildings, how big the synagogues and what about the trains that gave such loud shrilling whistles? She heard that on the High Holy days on Synagogue had more people than the whole of Belytze.¹⁴⁷ What kind of rivers and bridges did they have? This annoyed the stepmother for she saw through the maneuver to avoid telling her anything, she was as persistent with her questions as the stepmother.

The tension was relieved when a customer came to make some purchases. Chasia engaged the customer in a side conversation to keep him in the store as long as possible, she was determined that under no circumstances would she discuss her dowry. If there was any way at all possible for her to cut in on her dowry, this sugar-coated poisonous woman was sure to do it. From here on whenever she came in the store Chasia found herself busy so as not give her a chance to press the issue again.

¹⁴⁷ High Holy Days are the Jewish holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Zalmon made a final effort to give Berry training in Hebrew language. He engaged a teacher who came for a day to give him a lesson and assign work for a week. There were other children in the neighboring villages who engaged the teacher to come one day, he was known as the itinerant teacher.

The kerosene lamp somehow flickered more this night as they sat there, Chasia doing needle work and Berry preparing his lesson for the teacher who was coming the next day. Exodus, the assigned lesson for the week fascinated Berry: the liberation of the Hebrews from bondage gave him hope that he too would soon be away from this untenable situation, he felt he is an entrapped victim and his stepmother was the counterpart of Pharaoh who held the Hebrews in bondage.¹⁴⁸ Not sure how he would be liberated, he only knew he was hopelessly entrapped and that something had to happen.

Engrossed in the table cloth she was stitching for her hope chest, something every girl prepared, it was so relaxing while she was doing it, that she forgot all of her troubles and did not notice Berry put his head on his arm on the table and fall sound asleep.

Breakfast was always the delightful part of the day, after a good night's rest everyone looked forward to a better day. The table was set by Nastia and everyone had certain assignments to do. Eggs were gathered in the chicken roost under the oven, and that was job for Berry when he was home, when he was away a boy next door crawled under the oven with a small lantern in one hand to locate the eggs, in winter the hens would lay wherever it was convenient. Chasia saw to it that butter and strawberry jam or

¹⁴⁸ Exodus 1-14.

raspberry jam were on the table, lump sugar placed in the sugar cutter for everyone to chop a piece of sugar to taste. Soft boiled eggs were prepared at the table by pouring boiling water from the samovar, two changes of water were enough to have a soft boiled egg. A pitcher of milk was there for anyone desiring that. The lady of the house poured the tea from the boiling samovar with a ceramic teapot where the tea leaves were placed and set on top to make it strong.

A small strainer hung from the nozzle of the teapot to catch the leaves. The amount of the tea poured in the glass depended on the strength desired, the less tea and more water reduced the strength. Sugar was placed in the mouth and the tea sipped through it, the lump-sugar was hard enough to last through a glass of tea. Sugar was sold in the store in cones weighing up to ten pounds. It was hard sugar. The sugar cutter looked like the old cracker-barrel cheese cutter, the table model was smaller and made fancier but as functional as the big one.

Rachel Sarah was very pleasant and attended to all the needs of everyone. Zalmon was pleased with this new addition. Whatever happened before was never mentioned at the table and as far as he knew things were running smoothly.¹⁴⁹

The influence of the lady of the house has no bounds. The young lady running everything around the place was a thorn in her side, but she did not know quite how to handle it. She saw through it that Chasia was determined that she would not let her in the main operation. To marry her off was the only solution to the problem and she launched a

¹⁴⁹ Davidson suggests that Zalmon was unaware of the conflict between Rachel Sarah and Chasia.

campaign using all kinds of tricks to get Zalmon to consent to it and start the ball rolling. It was not very clear what design she had after getting control of the establishment.

A letter was sent to a match-maker whom Zalmon had contacted earlier to start wheels turning in arranging a match with the young man they had discussed, or someone else he thought suitable and who would be acceptable to Zalmon.

The match-maker and Ari-Loeb arrived at the arranged time dressed in their finest.¹⁵⁰ The suitor's family background was quite different from Zalmon's; of very moderate circumstances, but very scholarly, the young man in question had had yeshiva training and was reputed to be a very brilliant young man.

As was customary, at this meeting material things were discussed first of all, then they would go into other matters such as family and what course they would pursue. Zalmon dressed in his black siurtuck (frock coat) and black yarmulke with his long flowing beard, sharp nose and piercing eyes, did not look the part of the big businessman he was reputed to be. His counterpart, dressed in his best, had a straggly beard and wore his black suit and stiff cap that he traveled in, but had the appearance of a man who was getting ready to go to a religious service. The match-maker, the typical type, always apologetic for anything his client said, tried to bring out best qualities of the main subject—that is, the suitor. Zalmon was too shrewd to pay attention to this character. He knew more about the young man than the man could ever tell him. To avoid discussing material things, not to embarrass Ari-Loeb who did not have any financial security,

¹⁵⁰ Ari-Loeb was the suitor's father.

Zalmon engaged to talk about the assassination of Alexander the Second that happened just two or three years earlier.¹⁵¹ Nihilism was not something that could be discussed openly, since it advocated the overthrowing of the present system and by terroristic methods.¹⁵² The match-maker was out of his element when such worldly topics were brought up. Very cleverly the value of high learning was brought into the conversation, and Zalmon did not fail to point out that that he was cognizant of the fact that the Jews, while they valued wealth up to a point, never lost the fact that it can very easily slip away. Character and learning were the most precious jewels anyone could possess.

Chaim Meyer was the oldest son, and this exempted him from military service. Jews felt no special loyalty to the Tzar and, besides, to observant Jews, Kosher food was important. The army cared little to accommodate observance of any religions.

Chaim Meyer had completed his Rabbinical studies and only lacked smichos (confirmation). The thought of having a scholar in the family flattered Zalmon: it outweighed any material contribution he could have made to the match. But the everlasting concern of making a living for a family had to be discussed. The suitor did not have a trade of any kind, and while scholarship had its attractions there was still the problem of economics that had to be solved.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Alexander II was assassinated by a terrorist bomb on March 1, 1881. Davidson inserted this in pencil later: *Russia Intelligentsia of 1860-1870*.

¹⁵² Nihilists were Russian revolutionaries who were opposed to the social order in Tsarist Russia but they were not terrorists. See Marks, *How Russia Shaped the Modern World*, 14-15.

¹⁵³ There were not enough rabbinic positions for yeshiva students during this time period. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881 to 1914*, 357.

Zalmon agreed to board the newlyweds until Chaim Meyer could learn the forestry business, which was lucrative and had a prestigious standing anywhere. It was a trade to appraise forests. It required a good mind and to be very good with figures and of course honesty and integrity were of paramount importance. Zalmon explained how it worked and what was required of the appraiser: A forest owner had large tracts of timber to sell. The market called for three types of timber. One was for railroad cross ties, the railroad was just developing and needed this type. Two, was for light poles, every city was putting in an Aladdin type light that was lowered from the pole every evening, lit and hoisted back up. Third, included logs to be sawed into boards for export. A purchaser, known as forest dealer, would approach the land owner to purchase the necessary timber, he in turn had to have someone who advised him of the value and the quantity a certain area would yield. This person was known as the appraiser. He also acted as the adviser to the purchaser as to the cost of felling trees and transporting them to the given place.

Ari-Loeb felt confident his son would be up to the task, he was also pleased that Zalmon did not expect him to follow the Rabbinical course, for Chaim Meyer, in spite of enthusiastically completing the study was far from showing any inclination to follow it as a livelihood. He was too worldly in his outlook and keenly felt that the Jew must broaden his intellect to break out of the groove of being characterized as a second class citizen.

The betrothal day was set to take place in the near future. All involved drank a l'chaim (a toast) shook hands and the mechutonim [in-laws] parted ways. Chaim Meyer

was to be twenty-one and Chasia approached her eighteenth year.¹⁵⁴ Rachel Sarah was beside herself with joy that at last her wish was coming true. What she did not know was the arrangement that the newlyweds would board with them until he learned a trade, this could be a long time.

Chasia was treated differently from this day on. She was a “Kaale” (bride): her emotions were mixed, this was a crucial step in her life, she did not even know what the groom looked like, she had no choice in the matter. This was the way it was being done and she must trust the Lord everything would work out alright.

She was told her suitor was very scholarly in the Talmud: would he just stay home and study and she would have to earn the livelihood, like so many good women had to do?¹⁵⁵ It is true she had a sizeable dowry but they could not just live on that the rest of their lives. He was a city person and she knew so little about city folks. How would he fit into village life? This was the only life she ever knew. It puzzled her that her father told her so little about it. Were they to remain in Belytze or would they move to where his parents lived. There was Berry, poor boy, he needed her more now than ever, maybe this was a scheme of Rachel Sarah to get rid of both by establishing her in a city and letting Berry stay with her. Again she prayed to her deceased mother for help, she had hoped perhaps she would appear in a dream and clarify all this. Oh, what should have been a joyous occasion turned out to be a heavy burden, if she only had mother to lean

¹⁵⁴ In 1885, 47 percent of Jewish women in Tsarist Russia married at the age of 20 or younger. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881 to 1914*, 359.

¹⁵⁵ Antony Polonsky writes that yeshiva students “often relied on their wives to support their meagre incomes.” See *ibid.*, 357.

on, how much simpler life would have been for her. But this is the way it was meant to be; all one can do is turn to the Lord again and pray for the best.

According to custom, girls began accumulating for their hope chest from early childhood, Chasia was no exception. It consisted mostly of homemade woven items such as: tablecloths, woven materials of all kinds, embroidered scarves, bolts of linen cloth and frequently some items of silver and exotic glassware bought from peddler who came with their wares on their backs. Chinese vendors had beautiful assortments of silk and often gorgeous ceramic pieces. It was unbelievable to watch how the Chinese, who are so short by comparison with the average Russian peasant, could carry so much on their backs. Over the years Chasia accumulated many items for her hope chest.

One day when Chasia was alone in the store, Zalmon caressingly told her about the young man and the agreement reached between him and Ari-Loeb his father. “Remember, my dear child, it is easier to plant on cultivated than on barren ground. He not only has learning but is willing to expand his knowledge, I will teach him the trade of forest appraisal and I will keep both of you here until I feel that he has mastered the trade. It is my wish for you to remain in Belytze and I have made arrangements for a piece of ground to build a house and a store nearby. When he will be away on the forest business you can operate the store. The dowry, as you know, will take care of all your needs. It is just a matter of time and I have to reduce my activity on the outside as well as here. You will be the beneficiary of all the hard work you put in over the years, for the business will follow you.” It was clear to her that her father was making plans to move back to the city to wind up his last years. In the meantime he conducted his affairs as usual.

Getting all of her things together, Chasia took some of the silver that belonged to her and put it in the chest. Rachel Sarah got very upset because she was taking some of the nicest pieces that were in the house and complained to Zalmon that she was stripping the house of all valuables. "These are her inherited articles from her mother and she has a right to them. Besides, after the wedding, they will live with us until Chaim Meyer learns the forestry business." Rachel Sarah did not expect for them to live with them and it was quite a shock to her, but she skillfully covered it up and pretended that it would be wonderful to have them live there and not move away. She was further in for a surprise when he informed her that as soon as they got ready to move, a house would be built some 500 yards away and they would establish a business there. Graciously and tactfully he explained to her his ultimate plans.

The betrothal party was shaping up. It was not too long after the agreement about the match took place. The tavern took on a festive look, the samovars were polished where one could see his image in it, as well as silverware and crystal, (some had to be borrowed from neighbors who gladly brought it over). Windows, tables, floors got a scouring, the kerosene lamps too were given a going over, new glass chimneys replaced the cloudy smoked ones that could not be cleaned to satisfaction. The kitchen, too, received special attention, for this was the place where most of the activity would originate and women could be very critical. The tavern suspended operations for a couple of days. The guests began to arrive: Ari-Loeb brought his three sons: Chaim Meyer, the groom and the oldest; next were Mendel and Berry Itzhak; and two daughters, Sarah, and Edith, of elementary grade age.

Hillel, Zalmon's oldest son came, and his son, Wolfe, and three daughters: Rachel and her husband Mendel, Dvosia and Mania who were not married. Dvosia was a gifted violinist and contributed much to the festivities. Also coming was Chaim's oldest sister, Seneh Sarah, who lived not too far away with her husband, Abram Wolfe Mizell, also quite a scholar and exemplary in his piousness.

Rachel Sarah was in her element, a marvelous hostess, she efficiently looked after all details in the kitchen and saw that everything went off without any problems.

Women from neighboring villages came to assist in whatever ways they could. A caterer from Senno was brought in to take charge of the major things. The caterer instructed the women in preparing the various delicacies: ginger in diamond shape, honey cakes, strudel, teiglich (rolled dough, dipped in honey, woven and then baked, when it came out of the oven it was cut in squares). There was an abundance of everything in the food line, beverages of all descriptions were plentiful.

White tablecloths were spread on the long table in the main room of the Tavern. There were twisted loaves of white bread covered with white cloths, candles in shiny candle-sticks placed in the center of the table, the best china-ware placed around the table, silver goblets for the men, the silver highly polished placed around each plate. The aroma of cooked food, tantalizing, permeated throughout.

While this preparation was made the men were in the room where the Torah was kept. The honor to perform the service was given the groom who was quite a cantor. He took advantage of the opportunity to give a sample of his ability and he canted a few

passages to the delight of everyone. They were overjoyed at the prospect of having among them someone who could do more than just perform a service.

Chaim Meyer was the center of attraction after the service, they all wanted to get better acquainted with him. They were surprised to find him not only versed in the Talmud but up on worldly affairs, more so than any in the vicinity. The assassination of Alexander the Second put fears into them, it was not so long ago that this happened. The Jew had always gotten the blame for any insurrection, and although the blame was placed elsewhere, they still feared for their destiny.¹⁵⁶ To some Chaim Meyer even sounded somewhat dangerous, but how could they doubt any one so frum (religious)? Gradually they made their way to the table.

Zalmon was at the head of the table, Ari-Loeb at the other end and the guests at each side. After the blessing of the bread and wine, the first course was gefilte fish with horseradish in crystal containers in different places so that they could help themselves. Steaming noodle soup and boiled chicken were served. The table was then cleared, the sweet goodies brought in and the merriment began. Toasts were made to the bride and groom by all the guests. Chaim Meyer and Chasia sat facing each other, this was the first time she had laid eyes on him or he on her, occasionally they stole a glance at each other. Chasia, the usually vivacious lass, was subdued as good manners called for. Chaim Meyer, too, had very little to say. Rachel Sarah really turned on her charm, she did not neglect anyone and handled the whole affair with the greatest of ease, to the astonishment of everyone.

¹⁵⁶ See John Doyle Klier, *Russians, Jews, and the Pogroms of 1881-1882* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

The document was prepared and signed by all concerned parties, another round of wine and a “Mazol Tov” broke out in unison, followed by song and a few ventured out to dance some of the typical dances for this occasion. Every one drank to each other and the couple. The party lasted into the late hours of the night.

The villagers gathered on the outside, pressing their cheeks against the window panes to catch a glimpse of the couple and watch the merriment. The wedding was set for thirty days later, the usual time after betrothal.

As soon as everyone left and things settled to normalcy, planning for the wedding began. The betrothal could not compare with what the wedding would entail. It would need more than just a couple of days. Guests had to be housed for at least a week, there was the problem of rehearsing, the musicians, the Rabbi to perform the ceremony. The tavern was not the most ideal place to have a wedding of this magnitude. Rachel Sarah was most anxious to convince everyone that she was accepted as the mother and did not leave a stone unturned to make sure that his was going to be her big show, and she would not spare anything for it to be successful. She even managed to get some cooperation from Berry, quite an achievement.

According to tradition the groom and his party stayed in a different area. Since Belytze lacked a suitable place, they were invited to stay with friends in the next village, Miniutivo. Ari-Loeb with his three sons: the groom, Chaim Meyer, Mendel, and Berry Itzhak, stayed there, while the women folks, including the two daughters, Sarah and

Edith, helped out in Belytze. The manager of the Whiskey Dispensary, across the street from the tavern, accommodated the fiddlers.

The hustle and bustle increased as the time drew closer, The Rabbi was concerned about the canopy, where to place it, where the groom was to stay and where the bucket of water, filled to the brim, was to be placed as an omen of a full life, the glass to be crushed by the groom's foot under the canopy. The Ktuba (marriage certificate) had to be gone over to see if all was in order. The ten men to make up the minyan (quorum necessary for any religious ceremony) had to be named.¹⁵⁷

The fiddlers, one tall lean man, one shorter person and one quite young, almost a teenager arrived. As soon as they unloaded their instruments and got half settled they began to tune their instruments. This attracted many children who climbed on the fence and were everywhere. All of the musicians played the violin. The younger members seemed more eager to show off before the children. The tallest was the leader of the group. The practice added much to the atmosphere of the event.¹⁵⁸

As befitting a leader, the tall fiddler wore a black long coat and the other fiddlers wore casual clothing. The younger member rolled his cigarettes to give an older appearance.

During rehearsals and tuning the string, a tune could be heard, it would be picked up by the next violinist and the third would join in with gusto. The excitement in the

¹⁵⁷ Minyan is a Hebrew word for "a quorum of ten adult Jewish men, aged 13 years and over, needed for certain public prayers and other religious ceremonies." See, Polonsky, "Glossary," in *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III, 1914 to 2008*, 842.

¹⁵⁸ Davidson may be referring to Klezmer music, which was common among the Ashkenazi Jews of Eastern Europe.

village mounted as the strings gave their sounds, the children were joined by other villagers.

The canopy, a special table cloth Zalmon bought for this occasion, had long fringes with a circular design in the center giving added charm. It was fastened to four poles stuck in the ground, where the ceremony would take place. The villagers who came to see a Jewish wedding for the first time did not know what to expect next.

The Rabbi, holding a gilt-edged prayer book, entered under the canopy. He was followed by the witnesses to sign the Ksuba marriage certificate. The fiddlers struck up the traditional merry tunes and some of their own improvisations, behind the fiddler followed Chaim Meyer's brothers, Mendel and Itzach Berry. The fiddlers outdid themselves when they led the bride and Zalmon followed by her brothers, Hillel and Berry, and brother-in-law Abram Wolfe. Veiled, she shook, indicating she was crying softly. She had much to be concerned about. All she had seen of her husband-to-be was for a brief time during the betrothal. Of course she was not different from other maidens. This was the way it was. In her case she had no one to confide in, her mother died when she was very young and the shock of bringing a stepmother without telling her and then losing the pearls to her was something she could not get over so soon.

Any time a parent of the bride is deceased, it creates an emotional atmosphere when the Rabbi chants the traditional wedlock chant. Many eyes are wet and filled with tears by relatives and guests on both sides, and this time was no exception. The groom repeated after the Rabbi and the bride did the same, she with more difficulty stumbled through it, choked with emotion. Her veil was lifted, both had a sip of the wine and the

glass was promptly placed under his foot, Chaim crushed it befitting the man of the house. Mazel Tov (congratulations) sounded all around. The fiddlers took over again to lead the couple to the Tavern. The peasant with the buckets full of water met them and the groom dropped in a gold coin, signifying a full life of health and prosperity. Again Mazel Tov reverberated in the crowd. Every one was impressed to see the Pan and his wife come to the wedding. His troika (three horses) and driver parked a short distance away so as not to detract from the wedding. Chasia was especially pleased to see them, she had learned to speak Polish fluently, the Pan enjoyed speaking to her in his native tongue. Zalmon made a special effort to invite Pan Swiatsky to partake in some of the delicacies they prepared for the wedding. Everyone stepped aside to make way for the Pan to come in. It made an impression on everyone that he walked straight over to Chasia to chat with her in Polish. He turned to Chaim Meyer and spoke in Russian wishing him the best of everything and inviting him to come to see him once he got settled. Chaim Meyer used the Russian language very well, something rare for Talmudic scholars, however he learned it on his own.¹⁵⁹

The villagers had never had a chance to see a Jewish wedding and were full of curiosity. After a couple of days of merrymaking things went back to normal. Chaim Meyer ventured out to get acquainted with some of the neighbors and to learn about village life.

¹⁵⁹ Very few Jews in the tsarist empire were Russian speakers. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881-1914*, 182.

Settling down to a new life, they had adjustments to make: there were many gifts to put away. The room the couple occupied now had to be their living quarters as well as a storage area. Hillel presented them with a fine samovar, Sister Seneh Sarah presented them with a silver set, not to mention individual pieces given them by friends in the neighboring villages. Chaim Meyer received a beautiful set of books from his side of the family. Chasia's friends in the village were not going to be left out, in showing their love for her, and came up with such gifts as skeins of linen and bundles of carded wool, a woven and hand embroidered tablecloth with the fringes woven by a group of girl friends. Some brought embroidered towels and aprons. A calf from the elder of the village was an unusual gift for a Jewish girl but this was the custom of the villagers. Much affection was shown toward Chasia.

She had mixed feelings of emotion, quite touched by the display of love for her by the village girls and everyone else around her.¹⁶⁰ Chaim Meyer, a kind person, with a quick temper but well controlled, was awkward at household duties. Chasia soon recognized this and encouraged him not to get involved and tactfully directed him to his studies. Zalmon was in no hurry to start training him in the appraisal business. He enjoyed coming around to engage Chaim Meyer in some Talmudic discussion. Although no match for him, he knew enough to hold his own. They developed a very nice relationship and respect for each other.

The first Sabbath after the wedding the neighbors came to the service and Zalmon, who always performed at the altar, let his son-in-law read from the Torah and

¹⁶⁰ This could be true or could be a fantasy as it is from Chasia's perspective.

lead the second part of the Service, (Musaf). The yeshuvniks (Jewish villagers) were pleased to have an opportunity to attend the services performed by someone who knew the meaning of the word. Yiddish, a conglomerate language, was used daily, but this was Hebrew and it had many meanings as written by the Sages. Kosher-meat was brought in from the city, or sometimes a Shohet made the rounds to the villages to kill fowl or animals according to the ritual.¹⁶¹ Some suggested that Chaim Meyer should serve in this capacity, since they felt he had the knowledge and could do it with very little training. He vehemently objected to any such suggestions. He emphasized that he was not ordained and had no ambition to be a Rabbi.

Life too on the usual pattern. Berry went back to school to the delight of everyone, because he was becoming more of a problem as he was getting older. Chasia operated the business and was more tolerant to Sarah Rachel, letting her take a more active part around the place. Chasia was becoming aware that it was a matter of time before Sarah Rachel would have to take charge of it.

Zalmon completed negotiations for forest timber and began to take Chaim Meyer with him into the forest, explaining what his duties would be. It took much walking to cover a tract of timber, it was not like walking on a graded road, but it was up and down and they had to climb over fallen trees. He ached all over when he got home, it was not like sitting in the yeshiva behind a book. As time went on he grew accustomed to the

¹⁶¹ A shohet is the Hebrew word for a butcher who performs shehitah, ritual slaughter. See Polonsky, "Glossary," in *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III, 1914 to 2008*, 845.

forest and like it very much. The challenge to master a new occupation, particularly one that required the use of one's brain, intrigued him. Zalmon explained the art of appraisal, of how to divide an area and actually count the number of trees of each size. The forest was maiden forest, no one had ever cut any timber in this area before. Most trees yielded more than one log. After arriving at the quantity, the cost of felling and getting it out of the forest had to be considered. This particular timber was to be rafted to Riga by various rivers, and this necessitated dragging the logs to the banks of the nearest river to float them down. The appraising was done in summer most of the time, it would run into early fall occasionally. The actual felling took place after the hard freeze set in. Roads were not needed, the land was so frozen and covered with snow that the sled would glide easily over any field. A careful study had to be made of the extent of the inundation, if it had spread too much in any particular spot, much of the timber could not be retrieved, therefore a spot had to be selected somewhat higher than the surrounding area. A careful study of the river revealed if it had any tricky hairpin curves to interfere with the flow. Persons had to be deployed on those curves, to keep any timber from creating a block. Curved hooks on poles were used to direct the timber to the center of the river. All of these considerations were part of the bid. An appraiser had a tremendous responsibility to know the answers to all of these matters. The logs themselves had to be graded, to be able to produce the necessary types, such as logs for board, logs for light poles, logs for cross ties and some to be sold for local construction of cabins, and firewood.

Once Zalmon was called in to do the appraising, it was tantamount to an option. A hand shake in those days equaled a written agreement today: he had inherited his

reputation from his Uncle Aaron in Riga, a large merchant who dealt with the Gentry. It was a huge undertaking for a Rabbinical student to measure up to such a complicated business.

His survey completed, he reported it to Zalmon, carefully they checked the estimate and spot checked the forest to make sure the appraisal was correct. The next step was to report to Pan Swiatsky the findings of the appraisal.

The Pan was impressed with Chaim Meyer's command of the Russian language, a rarity among Jewish people who live in the city. The Emancipation was still fresh on the Pan's mind, because it had not been too long ago that he was made to give up the Serfs and some of the land, like many of his friends who were Poles had owned the huge estates. He was delighted to have someone to talk to about the unrest that swept Russia during that time. The Nihilists were a disturbing element for the ruling class. Chaim Meyer was well informed on political events and he carried on quite a discussion with the Pan, much to Zalmon's displeasure. At the same time, it gave him an inner pride of his son-in-law's worldliness.

There was always the possibility that Swiatsky could have easily branded him as one of the trouble makers and not dealt with him at all, even not wanted him to reside in this area. To Zalmon's relief the Pan complimented Zalmon for having such a brilliant addition to the family, and warmly welcomed him to the area.

The business transaction took its natural course, and the agreement was reached, all shook hands to close the deal, and Zalmon was on his way to make preparations to arrange the necessary steps to stage the forest operation.

Zalmon had hidden reservations about all the knowledge Chaim Meyer showed at Swiatsky's. He hardly knew how to approach him about his concern for Chaim Meyer's outspokenness. After much deliberation he finally asked him to give an explanation, how could a Rabbinical student knew so much about secular matters. Most Yeshiva he came in contact with could hardly speak any Russian at all, and here he spoke fluently. How did he come to know so much about all the disturbing matters?

Chaim Meyer's explanation: "Any course of study should not discourage anyone from broadening into other fields. To grow simply means to acquire more knowledge and we, as Jews in particular, should not limit our knowledge to one channel. I feel that living in Russia, it is important that I know what goes on around me and I hope when we have a family we will be able to broaden their knowledge. Through knowledge is the only way to better the lot of the Jew and gain security." He took advantage of the opportunity to explain why he chose not to follow the Rabbinate, he felt that once he exposed himself to secular studies he was not fit to follow in the Holy steps. "Material things can easily be lost, but the knowledge one accumulates is a permanent asset. Over the centuries Jews have experienced this when they had to abandon all of their material wealth and flee to save their lives." Zalmon just sat there reflecting on all that was said. How true it was, he thought to himself. Didn't he reason the same thoughts some time ago?

The first snow began to fall, covering the luscious green winter crops, swirling and moving up and down before it fell to the ground. It was building up gradually, before long it was deep enough for sleds to glide over it and the ground would not be seen again until the last part of March. The days went by and soon turned into weeks before activity

would begin in the forest. Chaim Meyer was anxious to get started. New in the area he did not know any of the contacts to get labor. It was important to get a go-between to inform the peasants in the area that workers would be needed. Nikita, the Elder in the village who knew almost everyone in the vicinity, undertook the job to solicit workers.¹⁶²

First, all the farm chores had to be completed, such as storing implements and other important tasks, checking potato mounds to see that they were properly sealed against the severe frosts, the hog killing, grain threshing, storing sheaves of rye straw and the preparing of fodder mixture, a combination of oat straw mixed with hay.

Teams from the various villages worked together, close to their homes. They worked in pairs, assisting each other when help was needed. It was all piece work, so much per tree. Often a group worked in a team and shared alike.

Once a tree fell, it was trimmed and cut to a specified length. Since most of them could not read, a measure was made as a guide. Chaim Meyer carried a small hatchet, with his initials as a brand, and stamped each log at the end. Anyone caught with a log that did not have the brand was suspected of stealing and was severely punished. The logs were hewed on four sides and arranged for an easy pick up when the sled came around. One log at a time was all the horses could manage.

It was quite a transformation for Chaim Meyer—from city life and a yeshiva to a woodsman. To dress for the rigors of winter he wore felt boots, two or three pairs of trousers, a sheep-skin mackinaw call a kozookh, woolen mittens and a hooded appendage (bashlik) thrown over his head. A temporary log cabin or hut, just thrown together,

¹⁶² David Moon writes that “Russian village communes were dominated by members of the older generation.” Moon, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930*, 231.

served as an office and living quarters during the winter. During the summer work was suspended for lack of help, everyone went back to the farm and besides it was difficult to manipulate fallen trees, it was not so easy to glide them around as it was on the snow.

The forest was located not too far away from Belytze. Chaim Meyer could not manage a horse, he had a driver who attended to the horse and drove him around, as well as acting as a part-time servant.

The first winter the logs remained in the forest, but the following winter as soon as the ground froze hard enough and was covered with snow, hauling of the logs to the river's bank began. New snow roads had to be started every so often as the sleds soon wore the snow down to the ground. Snows fell frequently so that was not too much of a problem, but it had to be anticipated to keep the traffic going. Once reaching the river bank the logs were laid in rows so when the water rose it would pick them up in groups, forming a barge. Being new at it Chaim Meyer worked hard to oversee every detail with the help of Nikita, who was a veteran at this.

In spite of Chasia's trying to get along with her step-mother, it seemed Rachel Sarah was not at all happy at the idea of the couple living with them, especially since she was left out of the arrangement between father and daughter. Her jealousy reached an intolerable state, she constantly looked for faults and was of a nagging nature, whether in the house or in the store. It was obvious that she did not want them there and was determined that they move. She did not dare to come out openly to Zalmon about it but her complaints aggravated the situation to a point that Zalmon became aware that things

were not right. He was torn between the two, his loyalty to his daughter and the unhappiness of his wife. There was the practical side to it. Should Chasia move now? Who would look after the affairs? He was convinced Rachel Sarah could not do it. He had curtailed much of his activity around the Tavern, but there was still enough to keep someone busy. Again there was his fatherly love, so strongly ingrained in the Jewish tradition. He had to act. A decision had to be made.

At the first opportunity, in a heart-to-heart talk with Chasia, he revealed his plans for the future. Now, with Chaim Meyer learning the forestry business and adapting himself well to it, he felt that under the circumstances, it was time for him to curtail his activities and for her to begin to establish her own home and business.

The small plot of land owned by Nikita, not far from the Tavern, was big enough to build a house, to have a yard and a stable for a cow and a hay barn, also a store adjoining the house that she could easily operate. This area was in need of it, his business could easily be diverted to her. Jews could not own land in Russia, but this could easily be arranged with the Pan.¹⁶³ Rachel Sarah was not in on this deal.

At the usual afternoon family tea, relaxing time, the samovar was boiling. The family was busily filling the glasses with the brewed tea from the tea-pot on top of the samovar, the amount desired according to the strength of the tea—the more water, the weaker the tea. Rachel Sarah had something up her sleeve, she was too solicitous and acted anxious. There was a strange feeling in the air at this gathering. There was forced conversation, and long silent spells. Chasia was most uncomfortable and was about to

¹⁶³ In 1881, only 1.4 percent of Jews in the Pale owned land. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*: Volume II, 1881-1914, 11.

leave, when Rachel Sarah spoke up: “There is an opening in a village some distance away for a Jewish family to settle,” suggesting that Chasia look into this. Silence descended, like heavy cloud it enveloped the family. Chasia was at a loss for words, she did not want to betray her father’s confidence, but was thankful that this blow had not come before Zalmon had told her of his plan.

Zalmon broke the silence, declaring that plans were underway with someone to build a house and a store adjoining it, and that he was ready to finance the entire undertaking. Chasia confidently spoke up that the land in question would be about 500 yards away or so, and that as soon as the Pan and Nikita could work it out they would begin to build.

The true color of the stepmother came to surface at this announcement. It was unbearable for her to have them this close, she feared Chasia would always interfere with whatever designs she had on Zalmon’s wealth. “To open another business this close will surely hurt our business,” she contended. “Children should move away and leave older people to themselves.” She was full of fire.

Zalmon was embarrassed and hurt. “This was not done by her or at her instigation,” he countered. “This is my idea. I intend to slow down and I am planning to slowly pull back from all activities, and Belytze and the area is in need of such a facility. I worked hard to build it and would hate for it not to continue. I made the arrangement but just failed to tell you,” he calmly announced. This kind of practice was usual, men never took their wives into their confidence. With great tact he eased the situation by reiterating his stand of not wanting his hard work to go to some stranger, stressing his

need to retire before too long. In the meantime Chasia could make the transition move smoothly.

Preparations for Spring Holidays and Fall Holidays of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur brought Berry home from school.¹⁶⁴ These were busy days and there was no time for grievances, everyone seemed to have been getting along well with each other. The preparation took much effort on everyone's part. Somehow Berry sensed that all was not well between his stepmother (or Aunt Rachel as he called her) and Chasia, with each visit he had felt the gap widening.

Berry developed an antipathy to Aunt Rachel and he was not one to hide his feelings about anyone. He was guilty of doing things to annoy her, she in turn complained to Zalmon. The more punishment he received the more spiteful he became. She dreaded his coming home. Berry was not to live with them when he completed his schooling and she would have liked for him to stay on in school, but he had different ideas about it.

All was going well in the forest. There were some frost bites, and a couple of horses had their hind legs broken when a sled with logs overturned and rolled on them. For the first time, peasants were protected against accidents, Chaim Meyer had a special fund set aside for it. This of course was not too publicized, so that accidents would not happen purposely. Last winter the hauling of logs almost did not reach its destination, the

¹⁶⁴ Rosh Hashanah is the Jewish New Year and Yom Kippur is the Jewish Day of Atonement. See Polonsky, "Glossary," in *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III, 1914 to 2008*, 844, 847.

snow melted too fast, not a very frequent occurrence. The snow took on a dull look for this time of the year, ground began to show in spots, roads got sloshy during the day, but a light frost at night firmed the snow to give it a crispy sound when walked on. It was not too long after that one could hear the sound of water in the creeks as they wound their way to some lake or river. Daily the streams got fuller and the thick ice on the river began to show cracks in it here and there.

Before long the rivers rose from their banks, inundating miles of flat land. This lasted about two weeks. When the rivers began to recede into their banks, this was a busy time for Chaim Meyer and his workers, to keep the logs from being stranded on the bank and at the same time to have them float into the river bed.

The logs were tied together in rafts, straw tents were built on some of the rafts for the workers who stayed with the logs all the way to Riga. This was quite an operation, as every river had several flour mills on it and bridges with locks to hold the water back. When the lumber approached the mill a deal had to be consummated to allow the logs to float through the gates. They were reassembled into rafts below the gates and floated down to the next bridge until they reached a large navigable river, such as the Western Dvina where there was plenty room for all kinds of navigation, especially in the spring. The workers made their way back on foot from Riga. This was the first venture for Chaim Meyer, and it proved very successful, with no complications of any kind.

In Belytze they were anxious to hear from him. An undertaking of this kind had many possibilities of obstacles in the way, dealing with bridge owners, hidden coveys to entrap logs. The rushing waters, when the gates were opened, had such tremendous force,

a log jam could easily sweep away a bridge if they were not skillfully guided. Injuries to the workers, who had to live on the barges and walk on them, were frequent and there was illness due to lack of sanitation. Loneliness frequently drove many to drinking. None of these hazards happened and Chaim Meyer, himself constantly exposed to many dangers, weathered the first experience like a veteran.

Zalmon, of all people involved, was highly pleased. After all, if anything went wrong, it was his responsibility. Now he felt assured that his forestry interests would be in good hands, and he could fully trust him with the future handling of any deal.

The approval from the Pan for Chasia to build the house came as expected. It consisted of a large kitchen with the normal sized oven. The entrance was part of a hall and entrance to the kitchen, a door to the living room took half of the rectangular room, a small oven (grupka) was designed just to heat this part of the house and to accommodate sitting space on top, in extremely cold weather. The other half was divided into two bedrooms. The store was built next to it with an entrance from the kitchen. There were small garden spot, stable and hay barn. It was all fenced in with a large wooden gate in front. Chasia went to town to stock the store with needed merchandise. Everything looked so clean; the sugar cones wrapped in blue paper on the top shelves, barrels of herring, nets of dried fish (tarany), sacks of salt, barrels of flour (white flour). A scale hung from the ceiling: a tray to hold the weight suspended on three chains on one side; a tin scoop, balanced with the flat tray on the other side, suspended on three chains; the arrow pivoting in the center slot to indicate balance. One corner was reserved for

kerosene. Because of the odor, it had to be kept away from items such as sugar and salt for they would absorb it and then could not be used.

Chaim Meyer was like a square peg in a round hole in a store, he was eager to help but was only in the way. Whenever he flubbed at anything, laughingly he shook his hands and retreated to the house.

When Berry came home he stayed with Chasia as much as possible. His underlying cause for hatred of Rachel Sarah stemmed from the injustice of the pearls. He never forgave her for appropriating them, the pearls rightfully belonged to Chasia and she had no right to have them. He did not care how she got possession of them, whether his father gave them to her or she just took them. The injustice became an obsession with him. He vowed that he would throw a curse on her as long as she lived. Even after Chasia settled in her home and started a family, he did very ugly things in the Tavern to spite her and then came to Chasia. Zalmon decreed paternal discipline on her not to harbor Berry in any way. It was a long lasting struggle and made it very difficult for Chasia.

When Berry dropped out of school, Zalmon tried to make him change his mind and go back to school. No amount of persuasion had any effect on him. Chaim Meyer and Chasia, being aware of the difficulty they were having, offered to take Berry into a partnership to get him off Zalmon's back. Zalmon rejected the idea saying that a partnership could only be successful with a wife, but warned them never to enter into any partnership with anyone else.

Forcing Berry to school was like rain on a rocky field. The ground has to be ready to get the most out of rain or else it runs off. Berry just sat there when Zalmon tried to plead with him and point out the advantages he had, if he would only take advantage of them. He begged him just to let him know what his wishes were and he would grant them, but he must let him know. Zalmon felt helpless.

After one of the feuds with Rachel Sarah, Zalmon punished him severely. There was only one solution to the problem and that was to marry him off. A matchmaker found a suitable bride in the big city of Vitebsk and Zalmon was willing to set him up there in anything he wished. Passively Berry went through the whole arrangement, only to announce later that he was not going to consummate the marriage and to demand a divorce. She refused to divorce him, for this would cast a bad image on her, a divorcee did not have much chance to remarry.

Why he insisted on coming back to Belytze was difficult to understand. Zalmon was at the end of his wits, he must have ordered him to get out, since now his son was a married man and he was not responsible for him. To get even with Zalmon, Berry took all the spigots out of the samovars. Not to be able to have any tea was probably the worst punishment anyone could impose on a person like Zalmon, who operated a Tavern and had tea three times a day. After all persuasion failed, Zalmon imposed paternal discipline and cast Berry in jail. In Russia in those days, all a parent had to do was request to have his child incarcerated, and it was carried out, and he was released only at his request. Jail confinement did not daunt Berry any, it only made him more adamant. Hillel, the older brother, was called over to see what he could do with the incorrigible brother to make

him give back the spigots and generally find out what he is after. There must be some common ground somewhere.

Hillel had more influence with him than anyone else. After many consultations Berry agreed to give up the spigots, the paternal ban on Chasia was lifted so that he could move in with her. Hillel remained to have talks with him and tried to find some solution to the problem. The marriage was hopeless, he did not want to be married, it was against his will.

A guest arrived to spend the night at the Tavern and to conduct some business with Zalmon. The pair of horses, tied to the wagon in front of a net of hay, were watered and ready for the night.

The next morning, the horses with the wagon were gone, apparently stolen, something that had never happened at the Tavern before. When Chasia got up, there was no sign of Berry anywhere. They could not imagine he would do such a thing as stealing a horse, but everything pointed to him. A peasant saw him before daybreak walking toward the Tavern and he seemed to have been in a great hurry. The news of the horse stealing spread fast. By the end of the day, word came that Berry was detained in the adjoining county, in possession of the horses. He rode over there and rode in front of the police station, back and forth, until he was held on suspicion, then news of the theft came and of course, there he was. He did not contest or deny his identity.

When Zalmon and Hillel came to get him, he smiled and said: "I guess she will not want to be married to a horse thief now?"

On the way back, Zalmon was speechless, Hillel was the spokesman. “Berry!” Enough is enough, what do you really want from poor Daddy? You have darkened every step of his way, this has to stop.” They drove the rest of the way in silence, it seemed an endless ride. The next day Berry wrote Hillel a note: “I want to go to America.”

Berry’s decision was received with great relief and much emotion. As a parent, Zalmon was deeply hurt, where had he failed with his son tormented him more than the heartache he had gone through. Zalmon, Hillel, Chaim Meyer, and Chasia met at her house for tea, and they all had a discussion about the long journey in question.

Zalmon could not dismiss why he had done this to him. Hillel was frank to state Berry’s side: if he was a man, why did his father have to pick a wife for him? These were not the days of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he felt he could pick his own wife if he wanted to get married. Zalmon’s argument was to make a go of the marriage because no other woman would ever trust him, and besides he never gave her a chance to prove herself. Berry had claimed that he did voice his objection, to no avail.

Berry came in and was invited to have tea with them.” I know you are puzzled as to why I want to go to America. Let’s face it: how much chance does a Jew have in Russia? I hear that in America it does not matter who you are or what your nationality is or your religion.”

His argument showed strong determination and they decided to finance his trip and to hope that all would be well.¹⁶⁵ In respect to their father, the incident of the pearls, the main cause that triggered the whole problem, was never mentioned to him.

¹⁶⁵ Berry would become the link to America for the Davidson family.

Every two years a boy was born to Chasia. The first one was Berry, next came Joshua, who died in infancy from diphtheria, then Aaron, Samuel, Modecai, Leotka, David, and then, seven years later, Abram.¹⁶⁶ When the boys reached school age, a Hebrew teacher came to live with them to tutor the boys, a tailor came every so often to clothe them, a shoemaker also moved in until boots were made for the entire family. When the tailor and shoemaker completed their work for the Davidson family, they often found work in the village to clothe the peasants in sheepskin coats and boots. They still resided with the Davidsons because they could not get kosher food at the peasant's homes.

The Davidsons could not afford a Russian education for all the boys in addition to a Hebrew education. Berry, the oldest, was inclined more to a village life, he liked to plow and till the soil. Learning and books did not interest him too much, Sam was very helpful in the store and around the house, he was more of a "mamma's boy." Aaron showed the most promise when it came to learning, and was the most studious of the lot. A school for Russian children was organized by the Tsarist government in a central village accommodating five villages, some five miles away. The school was next to an Orthodox Greek Church and the Priest was the only teacher. It was an Elementary School, (and very elementary). After finishing the local grades, Aaron was ready to go to

¹⁶⁶ Mordecai, later known as Max, was born September 27, 1892 and died December 12, 1978. Leotka, later known as Louis, was born September 13, 1894 and died September 6, 1962. Samuel died March 11, 1950. Abram was born August 20, 1903. They are buried at Graceland Cemetery on Whitehorse Road in Greenville, SC. See "Beth Israel Cemetery," in Jewish Historical Society of South Carolina online at jhssc.org/beth-israel-cemetery-2/.

the Gymnasium (equivalent to High School) in the city of Senno, some twelve miles away. Classes were also attended on Saturday, a day on which Jews do not carry anything or write. It took much bribing to find a Russian boy who would stop by on a Saturday to carry Aaron's books and write down for him the assignments. It was not easy to get into an all-Russian School, there was a quota of ten percent for Jewish children who wanted a Russian education. Aaron always managed to be among the ten percent.

After graduating from the Gymnasium, Aaron brought home a fancy gold-edged document with the Imperial Eagle Emblem superimposed. It was a proud achievement for mother and father and even for all the area. Chaim Meyer was criticized for sending this brilliant boy to a Russian School instead of to the Yeshiva. Aaron was the first Jewish boy to have the fortitude and perseverance to withstand the rigors required to accomplish this. He had many obstacles to overcome and a generally hostile attitude. His books and the mechanical drawings were viewed by the villagers with awe. It was miraculous for someone they knew to be so smart, to be able to achieve all this. Aaron obligingly showed and explained his drawings and instruments, illustrations in the books and answered all the questions they asked. There was something about Aaron to them that was different, he was not like his brothers or the boys in the village his age who tilled the soil, roamed the woods, picked berries and mushrooms. He had a delicate, emaciated look about him. To them, knowledge was written all over him, it was beyond their imagination for anyone to read all those books.

The only profession available to a Jewish intellectual was to be a teacher in a small school where Russian is taught for Jewish children. Vilno, in Lithuania, had a

Teacher's Institute on a University level where such training could be obtained. Vilno was also the hub for Jewish publications, this attracted many intellectuals. Aaron enrolled in the Vilno Institute for Teacher-Training.

His letters home were cheerful, he seemed to have found himself and was getting along well, and was very happy with his environment. Occasionally, in his letters, Chaim Meyer detected a note of rebellion against the present system of government. As time went on the protests took on a more aggressive tone which disturbed Chaim Meyer.

He cautioned Aaron to be more discreet in his letters and warned him not to get involved with the revolutionary movement. The Jews still had hope that their God would deliver them from the Tsar as he had from the Pharaohs in Egypt. Little did the family know that Aaron was heavily involved with the Vanguard of the Russian Revolution and that he knew Bronstein (Trotsky) and many others who eventually would take over Russia.¹⁶⁷

An underground paper, published in Zurich, was distributed clandestinely by the so-called Revolutionary group wherever possible. Secretly they met to discuss the Manifesto, issued by Friedrich Engels, and the French Revolution.¹⁶⁸

When the uprising in Petersburg in January 1905 was crushed, Aaron came home to do his part in the Revolution by distributing the underground newspaper.¹⁶⁹ He talked to whomever would listen to him. He freely discussed the injustices meted out by the

¹⁶⁷ Leon Trotsky's birth name was Lev Davidovich Bronstein.

¹⁶⁸ Friedrich Engels wrote *The Communist Manifesto* with Karl Marx in 1848.

¹⁶⁹ Davidson is probably referring to the event known as Bloody Sunday. Protestors led by Father Gapon were fired upon by imperial troops, resulting in the death of about 200 on January 9, 1905 in St. Petersburg. See Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 24-25.

privileged few to the populace. With the help of Kushinsky, manager of the liquor dispensary, they organized meetings, and advocated division of the land, once they got rid of the parasites, the large landowners. He became quite a speaker and was very convincing. The peasants, still loyal to the old order, were aghast at what the young Jew was telling them. To be without the Little God Father the Tsar was unthinkable. Silently they listened, taking off their caps, making the sign of the Cross over their chests. They were simply dismayed at all that was said.

In the night there were knocks on the door, the house was surrounded by gendarmes. Chasia cracked the door open to see who was there. Six burly gendarmes forced their way in, arrested Aaron, a frail, typical student who gave no resistance, yet in spite of that he was roughed up. Her pleas not to harm him were ignored.

Having seven boys to raise and educate was not an easy task, and to have, at the University in Vilno, one son taxed all the resources the Davidsons had. Times were rather difficult for them.

Berry, Chasia's brother, was settled successfully in the Southern part of the United States. He had always felt very close to his sister and wanted to help, besides, he got lonesome for some family. He began to ask for one of the boys to come over. Berry was getting of military age, a common problem for Jewish people. No Jew felt any particular allegiance to the Tsar, and there was the problem of Kosher food. Yet to send one of her boys to America, as her brother Berry suggested, was like taking off a finger and not missing it because you have ten fingers. She would not hear of it. In spite of the

beautiful life he described in the new land, to her this was something she refused to discuss. Berry insisted that he would serve in the Army, Aaron of course had his life all cut out to go into teaching Russian somewhere in a small town. Samuel, only fourteen who never saw a train, was ruled out as the one to go...Samuel...was the obvious one to go.

Samuel got hold of one of the letters and secretly wrote to Uncle Berry Hillman, that if he would send him a steamship ticket, that he would come. The mail to the Davidsons came to the Manor's so if a letter came from his Uncle he would get it before his mother. She might never give it to him. On one of these trips a fat packet came in the mail addressed to him. Grabbing the letter he ran home stopping long enough to read the contents. Inside was the desired piece of paper. It was an impressive looking document with a picture of a steam boat on it, and a money order from Uncle for other expenses. He did not know how to break the news to his mother, father was away at the time. The excitement kept him awake all night. The next morning at breakfast he announced that he was going to Uncle Berry in America. Chasia was beside herself—only fourteen—he had never seen a train or been away from home any further than twelve miles to Senno. He was never away from home, how could she possibly consent to let him go away so far. Samuel was determined and threatened he would run away, after all he had the ticket and enough money to make the trip.

Chaim Meyer felt differently about it. He reasoned if it did not work out he could always come home. Chaim Meyer was more aware of the opportunities in the new land and why not give his sons an opportunity to a better life? Reluctantly Chasia consented

and plans were begun to locate an agent to see him across the border and put him on the ship.

Many tears Chasia shed at his bed while he was asleep, hating to see him go so far away at such a tender age and at the same time holding out her hopes for a better future. At last the departure time came and Samuel, a little boy of fourteen, was leaving the protection of parents to go out into a cold world, so far away. A home-made suitcase was packed with bare necessities in clothing, so as not to make it too heavy for him to handle. Some delicacies Chasia baked for the journey were in a separate cloth bag. Chaim Meyer hired a driver and on a cold November day, after endless embracing and kissing, Chasia turned loose of him and they drove to the nearest railroad station, a full day's drive to catch the train in Tolotchin.¹⁷⁰ The agent awaited them to take charge of the young passenger. He too was taken aback when he saw the little boy whom he was to see across the border. At it turned out, Samuel rode to Riga and from there he was to go to Libau to embark on the boat. The agent was very sympathetic to his little passenger and made arrangements for one of the passengers to look after him until Riga.

With an identification tag on his chest and the final address he was like any other shipment. Later he told us that when Father took him inside the passenger car and settled him, Samuel was afraid to move, he thought this was his seat until he arrived. He was a scared little boy. The passenger who was to look after him befriended him and bought a bar of chocolate for him and showed him where the bathroom was. From here on everything was unbelievable to him, the noise of the train, the hard whistle blow, the

¹⁷⁰ Tolotchin is now known as Talachyn and is a city in Belarus. At the time Tolotchin was part of Vitebsk province of the Russian empire.

hustle and bustle that usually takes place in a railroad. The agent in Riga located him after looking all over the place. He, too, was taken aback at the size of his passenger. Fellow passengers on the boat took charge of him and watched over him, never letting him out of sight. It took four weeks for the boat to cross the ocean, arriving at Ellis Island in New York in late December, a few days before Christmas.¹⁷¹

Uncle Berry Hillman could not leave his business during the Christmas season to come to New York to meet his nephew. A friend of Uncle's was asked to meet Samuel, to attend to all his needs with the Immigration authorities, and to see him to the train to come to Anderson, South Carolina.

Samuel recalled his wait at Ellis Island: he had to wait until Uncle made arrangements for his friend to get him. Many well wishers came to welcome immigrants, some had relatives, some were people who just came to bring gifts before Christmas. Packages were thrown over the wire partition. Samuel, being so small and not accustomed to catch, missed the gifts thrown over. One visitor spotted him and motioned for him to come to the fence and held the package for him to get it. He was not used to this kindness from strangers. Accepting the package he thanked the donor as best he could. No wonder his Uncle Hillman had such praise for this land.

Chasia's belief that "The Lord sends the Medicine before the Plague" was demonstrated again when Berry came to America and insisted on her small boy coming to him. It proved a providential hand in making a place for Aaron when he was stolen out

¹⁷¹ I could not find Samuel or Shmuel Davidson in the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island Foundation Passenger Database. Between 1900 to 1910, an average of 82,223 Jews emigrated to the United States each year. See, Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881-1914*, 21.

of jail to come to America to get away from the Tsar's clutches. Aaron's departure was quite a contrast to Samuel's departure, instead of an anxiety this was a relief. Now he was safe in America.¹⁷²

In Belytze the gendarmes swarmed around the house for two weeks, hoping to arrest Aaron. Chasia and the rest of the Davidson family were subjected to interrogations about Aaron's whereabouts. Not until a letter from him with the American postmark did they let up on them. The letter was written in Yiddish and when it arrived the jubilation in the Davidson home was indescribable. The chief of police seemed to have been satisfied at the proof that he was in America. He ordered them out of the office with the insult of "dirty Zhidovka."

Although Aaron was safe in America, it was a traumatic experience they all had gone through: Aaron becoming a revolutionary, his arrest and time in jail, making his escape possible and what awaited them now. They were well aware of the wrath of the Tzar that knew no bounds, all of this they could not dismiss from their minds. Chaim Meyer was thankful he was not arrested in Vilno. The dreadful Yetap (a system of transportation used in transporting prisoners, a means of relays from town to town) frail as Aaron was he was certain to die if ever subjected to that, and would have been buried without letting anyone know. A political prisoner and a Jew would have never had a chance.

¹⁷² Aaron Davidson arrived in the United States on March 4, 1906 at the age of 24. See "Passenger Record," in The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island Foundation online at www.libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger-details/czoxMjoiMTAyMTg0MTAwMDA4Ijs=/czo5OiJwYXNzZW5nZXIiOw==.

Up to now they had commanded the respect of everyone around there, but now, they are on the black list and at the mercy of anyone. Chaim Meyer felt sure his forestry business would be affected and he still had a couple of years to go.

No matter how dark the situation was, there was a bright side to look at. Aaron was safe in America, the reports from Samuel were that he was doing well in his studies and learning fast the new language. Berry, still in the service of the Tsar's army, was seemingly content with the army routine. The other boys: Mordecai, Leotka David and baby Abram all were doing well. Chaim Meyer was away in his forest deals but was expected home for Passover Holidays.

Stock in the store needed replenishing for the Easter season. Leotka, although very young, was capable of going to Tolotchin to buy the necessary supplies for the store.

Engaging six sleds and sewing the money in an improvised belt, close to his body, he made off to load the sleds with merchandise: kegs of white flour used in baking cakes and white bread (white flour had to be brought in from the Ukraine, this area's flour mills were not equipped to grind wheat, they only ground rye for the famous Russian black bread), kegs of herring, tarani (a dried fish used during Lent) packed in huge bags, cones of hard sugar, boxes of hard candy, and a supply of dyes used in the spring to dye yarn. When he returned from the buying trip, three days later, everyone was busy arranging the store. Some of the goods had to be isolated, such as kerosene. Sugar and flour were very susceptible to the odor, making them unusable.

Such activity always attracted much curiosity and many onlookers were on hand, some marveled at Chasia's ability to do so well, while others envied her. At the end of the day Chasia smothered the ember-pot she kept to warm her fingers. She made woolen gloves with half of the fingers uncovered to be able to handle merchandise and make change, the ember-pot kept the exposed finger tips warm.

While she was closing the store for the day, Chaim Meyer tried to help in the living quarters part. A fire was made in the small oven to keep the place warm, potatoes were rolled in front of the fire to bake to a hard crisp core and he proceeded to get the samovar going. Not being the handiest at such chores he made quite a mess of it. He failed to clean the ashes from the chimney part of the samovar, thus clogging the draft, and when he put on the starter kindling and paper soaked in kerosene, he did not give it a chance to get going. He piled the charcoal too soon, choking the flame into billows of smoke. The normal procedure in a case of this kind is a boot legging placed over the chimney, pumped up and down, making a fine bellows. It did not work for Chaim Meyer, he failed to pinch one side of the legging, not giving it the full suction it normally made. Mordecai came to the rescue to take over the operation "Samovar Making." Chaim Meyer was pleased not to have to do it.

The potatoes baked to a crisp on one side, a bowl of clabber, a round dish of butter, a jar of preserves and the steaming samovar made up the typical meal. Chasia remarked: it was strange that the peasants stayed away that evening, but then, she thought that perhaps Chaim Meyer being home kept them away. Following the blessing, praising the Lord for extracting the bread from the soil, the meal progressed.

Leotka told of an incident that took place when they were coming home from Tolotchin with the merchandise he brought for the store on his last trip. Three other sleds joined them, they were loaded with kegs of beer; one of the drivers had the bright idea of siphoning some of the beer by drilling a small hole in the stopper and inserting a straw to suck the contents. All went well until one drank too much of the beer. No doubt he would have frozen to death if it had not been for the need to water the horses. The drivers lined up their horses in front of the trough and began to draw water from the well when they realized that one of the drivers in the three sleds who joined them did not come to draw water for his horse. He was found in his sled, too drunk to attend to his horse.

Mordecai told: when he was busy mixing fodder in the hay barn with a pitch fork—oat straw with hay—(this happened shortly after Blackie's calf was taken from her) Blackie was running around restlessly in the yard. The baby Abram came out, wearing an old mackinaw much too large for him. Blackie made a dive for him, and luckily, she picked him up between her horns and started shaking her head while he screamed, and threw him over the small fence into the garden. Mordecai rushed over to drive Blackie away, who was pawing the snow trying to get into the garden. In all probability she would have gored the baby if she had gotten to him.

Leotka told of another incident, when the sled loaded with merchandise turned over, snow piled high on one side of the road making the road unpredictable. It took all of the crew to turn it right side up, nothing happened. It was not unusual for an unpredictable storm to obliterate the road and the right course. Leotka proudly recalled of

the encounter with a dishonest merchant who tried to short change and short weigh him, but he stood his ground in spite of his youth and would not let him take advantage of him.

Mordecai excelled in other things, now the eldest at home he took over the care of the cow, the chickens, the fetching of the two buckets of water from the well for daily use, he was also handy in making things. When he needed skates, a block of wood was shaped triangularly and turned at one end, a recess to accommodate the heel, and holes were burned through for rope to pull through (the holes were burned at the black-smith shop). A flat shaped piece lined the bottom of the V-shaped block and was ground to a sharp edge to grab the ice. Sleds were another ingenious homemade item Mordecai became quite an expert in making. Hazelwood was used for the runners, for its straight poles could be easily gotten. One end was trimmed to almost half of the thickness and then bent slowly to the desired curve and fastened with rope to let it dry. It remained in this shape, once dried, to make excellent runners.

Summers, he loved to roam the woods, picking berries, mushrooms, nuts, wild apples and he was quite familiar with all areas of the forest.

Chasia's wonder at no one from the village visiting them that day or evening was soon explainable: In the night they were startled at the deafening blows in the store. The house had an unusual darkness, even the reflection of the snow could not be seen. They found the window shutters tied on the outside. Cracking the door open they saw people milling around outside. He shut the door in the nick of time as two peasants rushed toward the door, banging on it, ordering him to open it.

The door to the store was made of heavy oak boards reinforced with iron hinges covering the entire width of the door and extra duty locks. All of this precaution could not withstand the ramming with a huge log at the hand of several peasants. When Chasia braved to crack open the door from the kitchen to the store she recognized many of the culprits, calling out to them by name, only to be rebuked to draw “her Zhidovskaya head in” before they knocked it off.

The Davidsons realized they were the victims of a pogrom (an organized massacre of or attack on the Jews, as in Tsarist Russia), they bolted the side door and pulled everything available to barricade themselves inside.¹⁷³ Helpless, they huddled in the front room awaiting their fate. They could hear the boards of the door to the store give way to the pounding and later they could hear dragging on the floor and scraping through the door opening. Something fell now and then, it must have been the cones of sugar falling from the top shelves. There was general pandemonium as the agitation grew louder and louder. Resignedly huddled together, they hoped for the best. Leotka made his way to the attic and through an opening he yelled for help, his little voice could not have carried too far.

It was only a few weeks earlier that her father, Zalmon, had gone through the same experience, which wrecked his place and made his final retirement to the city much earlier than planned. This looting lasted all through the night. Chasia knew the robbers

¹⁷³ This pogrom may have occurred in January or February 1906. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881-1914*, 57. 10 pogroms occurred in Vitebsk between 1905 and 1906. See Shlomo Lambroza, “The Pogroms of 1903-1906,” in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, 228.

and through the crack in the door she pleaded at every chance she had, only to be cussed at and abusedly reminded that she had better keep her “Zhidovskaya Morda” in or lose it.

When day came, after a sleepless night, and all was quieted down they saw what had happened to their well organized store, in readiness for the Easter Season. The heavy oak door was shattered, but the lock and heavy hinges held. Through the shattered boards one could see where the kegs of flour gave way to the splintered oak board, spilling much to the floor, also some of the other objects such as dried fish. The jute still hung on the boards, showing the sacks torn and some of the fish spilled along the way. Objects that remained in the store were thrown on the floor. Neighbors in Muniutovo were informed, they in turn notified the police. They arrived and jeeringly followed clues and made token notes of what had taken place.

It was late afternoon when the police arrived to investigate what had taken place. It was a mockery from the very beginning. Following the tracks of the spilled flour and other scattered objects along the way the pogromschiks had dropped, it was not difficult to follow where the evidence was still there. For some unknown reason they had not removed all the loot, it was all piled in a barn that belonged to one of the looters. The peasants stood humbly by, not owning up to anything. Names that Chasia gave them were dismissed, as though she did not know what she was talking about. A few were arrested and taken to town only to be released the next day. The goods found in the barn, they claimed they did not know how it got there, or were not sure it belonged to Chasia.

The Jewish neighbors in the next village were alerted the night before the pogrom, but it was too late to gather help, and to appeal to the authorities was to no avail. In

desperation they gathered on the outside of the village and heard Leotka's cry for help, but dared not intervene. The agitation by the pogromschiks was so fierce that their lives would have been at stake unless there were enough of them to have a confrontation. Two villages away the pogrom did not stop at looting, a whole family was wiped out.¹⁷⁴

After the token investigation, the job of reorganizing and repairing the damage inside and outside began, but they hardly had their hearts in it. So much sweat and toil had gone into the store to get it going, and they felt that they were fulfilling a need for the people, and here, like a puff of wind, it was all gone. Much deliberation took place as to what course they should follow, whether to remain here and try again or just move away and forget about it. Pogroms were so common in Tsarist Russia that a Jew was not safe anywhere. Chaim Meyer still had some time to do in his forest deal, and of course this was away from home, but what about the rest of the family?

Gradually they got adjusted to the situation. Zalmon helped re-stock the store and Chasia tried to carry on as usual.

The peasants felt uncomfortable for a long time, at meeting Chasia. They sent their children to purchase supplies and avoided any contact with the Davidson family for a long time. Easter was soon upon them. Credit that Chasia extended to some of the peasants during this time, they did not dare to ask for now. Most of the peasants depended on getting extra items for Easter, and then pay in the fall when their crops came in. They did not have anything to market to provide them with ready cash and it would

¹⁷⁴ 36 Jews died in Vitebsk during the pogroms of 1905-1906. See Lambroza, "The Pogroms of 1903-1906," in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, 228.

have created a hardship on them if Chasia did not make it available to them. In a most tactful way she extended credit to them as though nothing happened. Gradually their relations improved, but there was still a veil that hung over them. It was hard to have complete trust in the people she grew up with, for then they were the only people she knew. Outwardly she went about her business as usual, but inwardly she had different feelings.

In her prayers she thanked the Lord for Aaron's safety in America and for Samuel being there too.

Berry was discharged from the Army and managed to secure a plot of land and began farming, his first love. Berry insisted that had he been home the pogrom never would have taken place, he would have dived into them no matter how many there were and broken it up like his friend in the village of Miniutovo, Sholom Elia, a six footer and a perfect human specimen who had four sons to serve in the cavalry, unusual for a Jew. When a group of looters gather and surrounded their home, Sholom Elia and his sons dived into them with clubs and beat the tar out of them and broke up the pogrom. They all fled. Those cowards would not stand up against anyone who would resist them.

As the saying goes, Time is a healer and life in Belytze was no exception. Chaim Meyer had another successful year in his forest undertaking, everything went well in floating the timber to Riga. The relations with the peasants and the Pan, although still tense were slowly getting adjusted. The trial in Senno was more harassment for the Davidsons than the accused, every so often Chasia had to appear for a hearing, which was more to humiliate her than to get the facts. It would have been less painful to just forget

about it than to constantly have to repeat the same testimony over and over. The Davidsons would have like to move away. Chasia had to appear for the trial.

The Easter season was behind them, and Passover escorted out. All the dishes used during Passover were packed carefully away for the next year, the house was still fresh from the spring cleaning.¹⁷⁵ Buds on the trees began to swell, the peasants were hauling stable manure to the fields, piling it in hills to dry it and then scatter it on the fields, farm implements were taken down from winter storage and readied for use before too long. Bolts of linen cloth, spun and woven during the winter months, were taken to the river banks to soak, spread out on the meadows to bleach in the sun, and beaten on the rocks to soften. This duty belonged to the women, one could hear the echo of the wooden paddles splashing as they hit the folded cloth. This was also the time of the year to empty the straw in the bedding to replace it with fresh straw for the summer, to be repeated again in the fall when fresh straw came in.

A light knock on the door awakened the Davidsons in the night. It was unlike the hard knock of the gendarmes who almost tore the door down pounding on it and insisting that they open it. This was a gentle, timid sound, as though someone was lost in the night.

Chasia could hardly believe her eyes when she realized who was there. With a heavy heart she opened the door to let the slim figure into the house. There was no driver, evidently he had dismissed whoever had brought him. All he had was a small package any local person might carry with him.

¹⁷⁵ Jews use special dishes during Passover that have not had any contact with leaven. See Zborowski and Herzog, *Life is with People*, 383.

Hurriedly she bolted the door and fell on his shoulders, weeping softly. She was not able to speak for a long time. The rest of the family, awakened by the commotion, rushed in to see what it was all about. They too were stunned and stood despondently, watching mother and son in a locked embrace. They all were aware what their brother's coming back from America meant: imprisonment, perhaps exile to Siberia or it could even mean death.

Quietly she fixed something to eat and put him to bed, for he must have been exhausted from his long journey.

How does a mother reconcile to a mixed feeling about seeing her son joyfully and agonizing over it at the same time? Aaron's coming home had this double sentiment. How could he do this to them—to leave security and deliberately make a target of himself to the tyrannical order of the Tsar? They did not have the resources to keep him from the fate that was shared by all who were exiled. It tormented them, the thought of him rotting somewhere in that Siberian wasteland. Their first reaction was to take him to task, to explain why he had done it. Surely he was not an ungrateful person who would do such a thing without considering them at all.

They just could not speak to him about it. It was too depressing.

Aaron fully realized the danger he was exposing himself to, and the anxiety his return brought to his parents. He was at a loss to make them see that he was committed to far greater things than his personal safety. The Revolutionary cause, to bring about liberty to the oppressed masses, by far outweighed anything else. He was committed to the Revolution, and nothing else mattered.

In America, like any other immigrant, he was furnished a pack of goods and told to go out and peddle it wherever he could. This was the way of all immigrants. Aaron abhorred the idea of being a peddler or a merchant of any kind. As soon as he accumulated enough funds, he went to New York to join Revolutionary friends who financed him to go back to Russia to carry on the Revolution. He arrived in Belytze unnoticed, under an assumed name, and if he had gone some other place, he probably could have avoided the police, but he wanted to come home to see his family.

During the summer the family managed to hide him from outsiders, he and Mordecai practically lived in the woods, but when winter came, it was impossible to keep him away from the villagers. Someone reported him and in the night the gendarmes surrounded the house and took the person they had been anxious to arrest. This time they had him for good.

Chasia knew the inevitable that would befall her son: exile. She sat on the edge of the bed, numbed by what had taken place, placed her head in her hands, her thoughts speedily passing by. She just could not understand how a lovable, kind child, who seemed so appreciative of all the sacrifices made by the family for him, and surely aware that it was at the expense of others, how he could so callously discard all that and now come back, knowing well that this would bring ruin to the family and himself. Exhausted she fell on the bed and dozed off.

Chaim Meyer was proud of his son's high ideals, but he did not expect him to carry the ideal this far. When the two met, they sat silently without saying anything to each other for a long time. Aaron had a Newspaper "Nachalo" (beginning) and he handed

his father a copy to read.¹⁷⁶ It was a four page tabloid, mostly hand printed. It was full of condemnation of the Tsarist Regime and of appeals to the common masses to rise, to overthrow the parasites who had been feeding on the sweat and blood of the workers and peasants. It pictured the good life, when the land and all that was derived from it would belong to those who till instead of those who live in palaces and oppress the unfortunates. In it were stories of how the French Revolutionaries shook their manacles off.¹⁷⁷

Aaron watched his father as he read this forbidden piece of writing and waited for a reaction from him. Chaim Meyer was at a loss for words. Basically, he agreed with all of it, but he did not expect for his son to be involved at the detriment of the entire family. Chaim Meyer was resigned to the fate for the Davidson family that this adventure would bring. He begged Aaron to reconsider the escape while there was still time. Aaron laid out his plans of activity in the Revolutionary movement and said that he would be here for only a short time, that he would move on in a few days under an assumed name.

There was an unusual commotion outside. Chasia pressed her face against the window pane but it was too dark to make out what was going on. All she could make out was that there was much activity for this time of the night. Hard knocks on the door were followed by the familiar, abusive language used against Jews, demanding that they open the door. Chaim Meyer asked for identification—all in hopes this was not another pogrom—a barrage of abusive language, even stronger than the first: “In the name of the

¹⁷⁶ As stated earlier, Nachalo was a Menshevik newspaper, started in 1905. See Trotsky, *My Life*, 177.

¹⁷⁷ Antony Polonsky writes, “socialist ideology had a strong appeal to Jews, both the growing Jewish artisan class and the smaller proletariat, and also the more radical sections of the Jewish intelligentsia.” See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881 to 1914*, 31.

Tzar, our Little Father, do not attempt to hide our enemy, we have the house surrounded, open the door or we will be forced to break it down. We know you have our enemy in there.” By then they realized that Aaron was the coveted quarry. When the door was unbolted, the gendarmes forced themselves inside and knew exactly where Aaron was. It was clear someone reported his being here.

In a desperate effort Chasia blocked the way, only to be pushed aside so violently that she almost fell to the floor. They yanked the pale, thin, young man out of bed, giving him the customary rough treatment with their nagaika, ready to strike him, Chaim Meyer jumped between them to divert the blow.¹⁷⁸ Aaron was whisked away in the night. This time he was treated as an escapee and there was no need for even a mock trial.

Chasia’s attempt to find out where they had taken him or what sentence he would receive was to no avail. He was committed to exile somewhere in the Ural Mountains and all they knew was that he was exposed to tubercular germs—a system frequently used by the Tsarist Government to eliminate Revolutionaries. They were very successful in infesting prisoners with pernicious germs, had developed it to a science. According to their calculations he had a certain time to live and, two weeks before his death, he was given the option of dying there or coming home to die. He chose to come home, and died a week later.

Not long after Aaron’s incarceration, Samuel sent a letter asking for Leotka to come to America. With much logic, he argued that the family entertain the idea to

¹⁷⁸ A nagaika is a short, thick braided whip.

emigrate from the place where one is not wanted! “As Jews have we not suffered enough? Come to a country where one is welcome and above all where it does not make any difference who you are, or what religion you practice.” He further argued that the boys, as they got older, could easily provide for their support and they would not have to worry in their old age. They would not have to listen to all the abusive language constantly directed at them.

Leotka was fifteen years old, not quite as young as Samuel, and had been exposed to purchasing merchandise, was very adaptable to new situations. Besides, the pogrom against her father and recently against them, softened Chasia a great deal and she did not object to Leotka’s going away as much as she had when Samuel first approached her about it. For the whole family to go, that was quite another matter.

Many were the reasons for a family like the Davidsons, in spite of all the hardships, humiliations and hopelessness, why it was not an easy matter to pick up and go to another country. There were so many factors to be taken into consideration: Zalmon, her father who lived in the next town, whom she might never see again if she moved away; her other immediate relatives; the cemetery, a very important part of the Jewish way. During the High Holidays it was customary to visit the graves of the forefathers and mothers, to ask forgiveness and that they intervene on their behalf with the Lord.

Chaim Meyer, though interested in worldly affairs, was reluctant to break his ties with the Hasidish movement so dear to him.¹⁷⁹ America, to him, was a godless country, where secularism predominated over the Ecclesiastes, or spiritual. He was concerned about desecrating the Sabbath, and not being able to go to the Synagogue for morning and evening prayers, or not being able to have Kosher meat. There was the problem of communicating in a new language. To depend entirely on support of the children also was not to his liking. As he put it: “It is a place for the young generation.” He preferred to live out his life where there was a Synagogue, a Rabbi—even though he did not have any of these things in Belytze, he knew that just a few miles away he could indulge in the discussion of the Talmud, or visit his forefathers in the cemetery, and as for Kosher food, this was no problem here. He further rationalized: “There were always tyrants and they somehow passed, and the Jew remained, all we need to do is pray and repent and the Lord will hear our prayers. Besides, don’t we always end our prayer with the hope of: ‘Bring Us To Jerusalem Next Year’?”

For the time being the idea of emigrating to America was laid to rest. Chasia blessed the Friday evening candles to welcome the Sabbath with more emotion than usual. Chaim Meyer, with the four remaining sons at home, got dressed to usher in the Sabbath. The table was covered with the linen tablecloth Chasia wove on her loom, that she had in the anteroom, with a special herringbone design all her own. The twists she

¹⁷⁹ Hasidism is “a mystically inclined movement of religious revival consisting of distinct groups with charismatic leadership which arose in the borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the second half of the eighteenth century” which “soon spread rapidly and became particularly strong in Ukraine, southern Poland and central Poland.” See Polonsky, “Glossary,” in *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881-1914*, 411.

baked rose more than usual and browned to a shiny color. She placed them between the candlesticks and covered them with a white cloth. The whole setting had a spiritual aura.

The next morning when the seal to the oven was opened and the chicory that brewed all night in the earthen crock set on the table, a Saturday morning tradition, and all the other breakfast food set on the table, the parents patiently waited for the boys to wash their faces and hands from the bucket of water in the kitchen. Not to have to cook on Saturday, the cooking was all done on Friday and put in the oven opposite the banked coals to keep it hot for the next day's meal.

Everyone was talkative but Leotka. He had something on his mind but did not know how to break it. Finally he mustered enough courage to announce that he had asked Samuel to send him a steamship ticket to go to America.

The announcement came as a shock to the family, but not as great as the shock when Samuel declared, four years earlier, of his intentions. The distance to this far away land had gotten somewhat closer, and besides, Leotka was considered as more capable of taking care of himself than the rest of them. Chasia recalled that when he was only thirteen years old, he overheard a grain dealer who had a carload of oats to sell. He got all the information about the deal and went straight to the Pan, offering to sell him a carload of oats. The Pan was very intrigued at the child offering to sell him a carload of oats, he walked over to him, affectionately pinched his cheek, "You have a carload of oats to sell?" He invited Leotka into his office and treated him like a grown person. He was telling later that he was amazed at the facts this child had about the deal. He purchased the oats and Leotka acted as the broker. This was a classic story in the Davidson family.

Paradoxically, while Chaim Meyer objected to emigrating to America himself, he had no objection to Leotka's leaving.

Activity in the village increased with spring approaching, the peasants got their farm implements out to get in shape, horses needed reshodding, to change from winter horseshoes to summer cleatless shoes. Wagons were pulled out into the yard to get a going over, some wheels got new iron bands at the black-smith shop. The women put extra effort on their looms, placed in the houses in their meager quarters. The chickens were glad to get out from underneath the oven where they had to be protected from the harsh winter cold. They were glad to scratch once again in the yard and around the stable.

A meeting was called to inform the peasants that their pasture this summer was threatened by the neighboring village, Burbino. It seemed that they were trying to outbid them for the pasture land. If this happened their cows would be forced to use a different pasture land, much further away, thus creating a hardship on their cows and making it more difficult to hire a herder. At the meeting it was decided that they needed someone who had influence with the Pan to rule in their favor. Chasia was the only one they knew who had more clout with the Pan than anyone else in their midst. But after the pogrom would Chasia be willing to appeal in their behalf?

Three peasants got up enough courage to come to Chasia to ask her to intervene in behalf of Belytze to ask Pan Swiatsky to rent the pasture land that they had used every summer. Of course Chasia, too, had an interest in the pasture, she too had a cow. She agreed that she would go with them to plead with the Pan.

Waiting in the anteroom to be called before the Pan, they humbly sat, clutching their caps against their chests, and not daring to meet Chasia's eyes. Much had transpired in their minds at the injustice meted out to Chasia, with the pogrom and later with reporting on Aaron, and now they had to come to her to save them with the pasture. There were many other favors she gladly did for them too. The Pan did not care to have anything to do with the hooligans (hoodlums) as he referred to them.

Chasia was called in the office, leaving them sitting there with their caps clutched to their chests. Their meeting lasted a long time. He wanted to know about Aaron's involvement in the Revolutionary movement. He admitted that he was shocked when he heard that one of his tenants harbored such ideas. For awhile relations were strained with the Davidsons, but he knew that Chasia was certainly not instrumental in it, and what can a parent do when a young one gets mixed up with a wrong element? He also had heard about Leotka wanting to go to America. He related the oats deal again to Chasia.

To the peasants her visit seemed endless, as they sat there agonizingly, wondering if she had any luck. At last Chasia came out with the good news that the pasture land would remain as it was for the last few years. Son, Berry was home from the Army and while Chasia was in the Pan's office she negotiated for a piece of cultivating land.

The distance from the Manor to Belytze was about three miles. They walked the entire distance in silence, while business in the store picked up, and the peasants tried to make up to her, it was difficult to forget the abusive language and the damage they caused by the pogrom. Inwardly she knew that it was just a matter of a very few years that she would move away from here.

Mordecai, handy at making things, started on a traveling case, for Leotka mainly to send something for him to have along on the long journey and to give the rest to Samuel. Mordecai, the woodsman in the family, collected bags of hazelnuts every fall and that year there was a very good crop.

Leotka met the postman every time to see if his expected packet had come with the steamship ticket and all the brochures of the steamship line.

Encouraged by the friendly reception Chasia got at the Pan's when she went on behalf of the pasture land for the village, she was now in need of additional hay for her own farming operation. Berry, home now and attending to the farm work himself found it was simpler for him to take care of a horse if he had enough hay to feed it over the winter.

The Pan's palace was a tan stucco building at the end of a long driveway, lined with buckeye trees and surrounded by flower gardens as well as orchards of all kind of fruit. A pack of vicious dogs guarded the place. Approaching the palace she was greeted with a gruff sound of the large dog, picked up by the squealing sound of the smaller canines. One did not dare get out of the wagon until a servant came to see the nature of her business. Vassily, the handyman with a large mustache, recognized Chasia, and invited her in. The Pan was home, he had just returned from a trip abroad, as it was his custom to go there frequently.

Pan Swiatsky came out to greet her and they took a leisurely walk in the flower garden and then strolled around the orchards. Spring was a most desirable season of the

year, as everything was taking on new life. The air was fresh, and here and there buds were bursting into bloom, emanating a fragrance. Referring to a certain meadow, she proposed to work it with him on halves: she would be responsible for cutting the hay, raking it, and stacking it in equal piles. His supervisor would have a choice of which pile to select, and this would relieve him of all responsibility.

Berry being at home gave them a sense of security. The peasants had much respect for a soldier, to them there was some mysterious power in anyone who served in the Army. Besides, Berry was respected for his physical prowess, no one in the village could beat him wrestling. He insisted, had he been home, the pogrom would have never happened.

Berry was a good story teller and every chance the younger crowd had they came to hear tales of the Army. Many of his experiences he told many times, like the one about the soldier who made a practice of pulling gold teeth from cadavers. Berry was asked if he ever saw the Little Father, the Tsar. Feeling important with his captive audience, he took on a look of great importance and would begin: "An order came from high up to the whole regiment to look their best. Boots began to shine, rifles were taken apart and given a thorough cleaning, the ground was swept so clean you hardly saw any dust anywhere. The uniforms were brushed so hard they were almost worn out. All the soldiers were lined up at attention. An order was given to turn heads to the right. On horseback the commander led a contingent of cavalry. In the center, surrounded by other dignitaries was the Tsar himself in braided uniform, his chest bedecked with metals. He had a kind expression on his face and was holding his right hand up as though saluting us. The order

of attention was relayed from officer to officer until he passed.” The peasants were really impressed that one of their villagers, even though a Jew, had seen the Little Father, the Tsar. To be anywhere in the presence of the Tsar, to them, was the greatest thing that could happen to anyone.

Chasia told the story of a trip to Senno with Mordecai and Leotka. It seemed everyone in the village was too busy to drive them to the city, the only animal available was a lazy old horse. Before the trip Mordecai and Leotka argued about who would drive the horse and the argument was settled when Chasia tactfully suggested that the oldest, Mordecai, have the reins going to Senno and Leotka would drive back. The horse was not a highly spirited animal, it would not trot, no matter what means they tried, it just kept on walking along. In disgust he offered the reins to Leotka who did not have any better luck. Chasia took over the reins and stopped along a wooded area, she cut down a long, straight twig and tied a rag loosely to the end of it. When they started again, she reached out with the twig to tickle the horse where the saddle pad support held up the shafts. This made him step livelier, even an occasional trot. Laughing heartily at the boys, she stopped all arguments.

Another incident she recalled: Yanka was digging a well and as she passed by, to be friendly, she asked him what he was digging. “A hole to bury all the Jews” was his smart reply. Chasia admonished him not to dig a hole to bury anyone, “this may be your own burying hole.” She hardly walked out of sight when a cave-in killed him on the spot. There were other people who heard the conversation.

When she had a good crop working on halves with the Pan, some remarked that never again would they let her negotiate such a deal. Her answer to them was: "Who knows what will happen next year, why plan what to do to obstruct someone else? It is better to plan for yourself." During the year the most vociferous objector died.

Superstitious, the peasants felt Chasia was endowed with some kind of supernatural spirit. She always managed to overcome any difficulty.

Berry's popularity in the village with the young folks gave Chasia some concern, he was not too discriminating about whether the food was Kosher or not, probably a carryover from the Army days. His interest in the girls was also disturbing to her, there was always the possibility of his marrying one.

He took his farming seriously and this of course threw him that much closer to the peasants. He always had young people help him, whether it was to haul manure in the field or pile it in small heaps and then scatter it over the area, usually work for women and he never lacked girls volunteering to help him. When the field was plowed and harrowed and ready to lay potatoes in rows there was no problem for Berry getting help. Chasia would have liked to do it, but she had a store to take care of and the other boys had their duties around the house.

Winter crops, planted in the fall of the year such as rye, Berry did not plant. When crop gathering time came, all available workers had to attend to their own, and time was of utmost importance. All winter crops were in the same locality and had to be harvested with all the others. Oats was about the only grain Berry dared to plant. This he could cut

down with a scythe to mix with hay for fodder. The garden spot around the house Chasia managed to attend between her other duties, and she had the boys to help her.

When the crops were in, Chaim Meyer took Berry with him to help work in the forest and mostly to take him away from the village environment. Berry adjusted well to any undertaking and soon got to be a very good help to his father. To be outdoors suited him fine. He was on hand at the river bank when the logs were hauled over there to see that they were lined up properly.

There was jubilation in the village at the news that the pogrom trial was over and that they were exonerated of all charges. Chasia wished so that Berry and Chaim Meyer were home, she bolted all doors and hoped for the best. They did not dare set a foot outside. After four years of the mockery trial, she did not expect anything to come of it that would be favorable to them, but she hoped the whole thing would somehow go away. Now the peasants felt they could do anything they wanted to the Jew and nothing would happen to them. This was their interpretation—approval by the Tsar.

It was the beginning of a series of harassments to the Davidsons. One morning they found the locks stuffed with potatoes, at one time straw was stuffed in the chimney. It was a mystery how they managed to get on the roof without being noticed.

The herder gathered the cows every morning with the sound of his long pipe made of birch bark which had a sound and tune all its own. If the cow was not milked when the sound was heard, there was no need to try to milk her, she was ready to go out to the central place where all the cows gathered. The herder watched over the cow and knew if

it was mated, to advise the owner, and if the cow was with calf he watched over it very carefully.

Blackie, Chasia's cow, was with her first calf and was due any day. She did not come home one evening, and of course, due to the harassment it was suspected that some foul play had taken place. The herder recalled seeing Blackie at a certain location and realized he had not seen her after that. With the herder leading the way, Chasia and a group of peasants went to investigate. They found a beautiful calf, not completely cleaned off, but no sign of Blackie. The ground showed sign of a struggle, following the foot-steps of Blackie, which were heavily marked in the ground. About two miles away from the spot where the calf was found, Blackie was found killed by wolves. It was evident that she had led the wolves away from the calf, at the sacrifice of her life. (Four years later we visited Belytze and saw the calf that had grown into a beautiful cow.)

Life became too difficult in Belytze after the termination of the trial. America became more inviting to Chasia, but not to Chaim Meyer who still had some forest deals to complete. However, he was glad to entertain a move to an all Jewish city where Abram would be enrolled in a Jewish School, a Cheder. Mordecai was approaching military age and had no desire to serve in the Tsar's Army. David had a slight speech impediment and wanted to learn watchmaking. Berry met a young lady in the village where Chaim Meyer had his forest business going. Chasia was not too pleased at the match, she thought her to be too ordinary and detected a mean streak in her nature, but she did not interfere and

planned a wedding before the move to Tolotchin. Berry also made plans to go to America shortly after the wedding and to send for his wife once he got established.

Tolotchin was decided on for their move. Senno was closer and they knew many people, but there was the memory of Chasia going there to see Aaron in prison and Zalmon was buried there. She wanted a complete break with the immediate past.

Chashniki seemed the more logical place, it was a very short distance from her brother Hillel and Chaim Meyer's sister, Edith, lived there. She wanted to start all over in a place where no one knew anything of her past. The other places were far away from a railroad which could cause mail delivery to be delayed, while Tolotchin was near a railroad. She began to look towards America.

To find a home in Tolotchin proved to be quite a problem. There were no vacant houses. In an all Jewish community like Tolotchin everyone owned whatever they lived in. The only possibility was for someone to share part of a house and this would create a problem of sharing the kitchen between two families, not a very satisfactory arrangement. Chaim Meyer and Mordecai lucked into a house that was big enough to rent the front part consisting of a living room and two smaller rooms that were made into bedrooms, but the kitchen had to be shared with the landlady. There was even a stable for the cow. Isaac, the landlord, operated a butcher shop on the market square, he was a mild person, easygoing and very accommodating. Besides three daughters there was a small boy a year younger than Abram, which made it nice for him to have someone to play with.

Chasia had mixed emotions about leaving Belytze, the only place she had even known. This was the place of her childhood, the place where she, with other women,

would go in the woods to pick berries. She recalled the time when, with a group of women, they ventured too far into the woods when picking wild cranberries. They heard what sounded like falling trees, she remarked that it was unusual for this time of the year to cut down trees. Her companions had nothing to say, just kept picking berries, they happened to be very heavily loaded bushes. The felling was getting closer and closer, until one of the older women Tatiana, spoke up: “We’d better not pick any more and get out of here while getting out is good.” Chasia had no idea what this meant but when they were on the outside of the forest, they told her that it was not trees falling, but that there was a bear, and this was his way of objecting to anyone intruding on his territory, by breaking small trees. If they insisted on staying on, he would surely attack.

She remembered the excitement of watching the house going up where the family lived almost thirty years and now they were leaving it never to see it again. All of her eight sons were born under this straw thatched roof, the buildings in the back to accommodate the animals and the hay and even the Sukkah [booth] (used during Tabernacle Holidays) built on the side of the house to enable to pass warm food through the window.¹⁸⁰ She had no ill feeling for the maidens in the village who came very humbly to tell her goodbye and wish her the best of everything. The heifer that was saved from the wolves was sold with the house, it was impractical to take it to the city. One cow was enough. The house, with the merchandise in the store, was sold to a neighbor in the next village. The amount was not more than the equivalent of a steamship ticket to America.

¹⁸⁰ Sukkoth is the “Feast of Booths, Feast of Tabernacles, Fall harvest holiday.” See Zborowski and Herzog, “Glossary,” in *Life is With People*, 446.

All of their belongings were loaded on three sleds. Mordecai took charge of the loading while Chasia took a last walk through the village, stopping to chat with some of her favorite friends. There were some who disapproved of this action because of the questionable characters in the village.

One sled was reserved for Chasia and her two younger sons: David, 14, and Abram, 7, Mordecai led the cow, who minded him, and they were off on that cold December day to the city where she would have to get adjusted to an entirely new way of life.¹⁸¹ Of course she considered this move temporary, she had her sights on joining the sons in America before too long in spite of Chaim Meyer's objections. She felt that with time she would prevail. Cuddled in the sled with heavy wraps, the snow that began to fall did not bother them much. She had many things to think about. How was she going to spend her time? Would she be able to get along with the city women? After all she had never been around too many Jewish women.

They arrived at their new home late at night. The house was located near a river, after crossing a tall bridge. Isaac, the landlord, expected his new tenants by putting a lamp on the window sill. It was the only house that had a lamp on the sill, making sure this was the house. The large room had a small over in the corner, exposing a wall in each room. The cold furniture, and keeping the door open a good deal of the time, cooled the rooms. A fire in the small over helped some but too much heat escaped. Mordecai did not come with the cow until morning. He and the cow were glad to settle down. Isaac had hay stacked for them.

¹⁸¹ The year was probably 1910.

PART II: DAVIDSON'S MEMORIES OF RUSSIA

To live in the city was a tremendous adjustment for Chasia. In Belytze she circulated around her home, the barns, the store. Here it was quite different, she had to make trips to the Market Square to buy the necessities for the kitchen. The long walk required different clothing. Ordinary shoes could not be used in the snow, it was necessary to get felt boots. In the spring she had to wade through the mud and high top rubber shoes were the only satisfactory thing to wear.¹⁸² To share the kitchen daily was not so bad, but on Friday to prepare for the Sabbath created quite a hardship, and especially when bread baking time came. Bread was baked every two weeks and it took up the whole oven on this day, much to the annoyance of the landlady. From the very beginning Chasia realized that this arrangement would not work, she would have to find another house, apartment or anything.

Abram was enrolled in Cheder (Hebrew School), David was accepted in a watchmaker's shop for apprenticeship, after paying his fee a year in advance.¹⁸³ Mordecai, an avid reader, joined the library and did much copying work of various objects: frames, tables and much bric a brac. Chaim Meyer, away on his forest work, planned to be home for Passover and the High Holidays. He came a few days before the Holidays, he was not very handy at helping. Not the most practical person in the world, he did some funny things. Chasia asked him to bring some chicken, turkey or eggs from the country where he could get them much cheaper than in the city. Chaim Meyer had a

¹⁸² This region lacked and still lacks paved roads.

¹⁸³ Heder is Jewish elementary school. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*: Volume II, 1881-1914, 164.

horse and a driver at his service, because he could not manage a horse. When he came for Passover, he brought a keg of one thousand eggs, three turkeys, several chickens. Chasia nearly went out of her mind over what to do with so much in rented quarters. After this experience she was glad to see him come without bringing anything.

Abram, too, had difficulty getting adjusted. Not being able to speak Yiddish, the children treated him like an oddity, they could not understand a Jewish boy not being able to speak Yiddish.¹⁸⁴ The teacher was very understanding and soon made the transition go smoothly. When the teacher, on the first lesson told him to repeat after him the word “Aleph” meaning –A-, Abram responded: “Tchto takoe Aleph?” (what is aleph). Entering the middle of the year he had to catch up. There were 16 students and one teacher, the beginners group had 5 pupils in it, the second group was age 8, and the rest were in the advanced group. While one group was instructed, the others did their written assignments. There was a recess in mid-morning, time out for lunch and another recess in mid-afternoon. School lasted all day. Spring holidays began two weeks before Passover and started again two weeks after Passover. In the Fall it was two weeks before Rosh Hashanah and one week after Succoth.

Winter days being short it was necessary to carry a lantern. It was very intriguing to get the first lantern, shiny red, one side raised to place the candle. Children could hardly wait for the time to go home, to have the lantern, light to help find the way. The lantern was also used to good advantage during skating time on the river, when an area was swept clean of snow, holes drilled in the ice and poles places with water poured

¹⁸⁴ Davidson suggests his family spoke Russian at home.

around to freeze them in position. The lantern hung on the poles, placed every so often, made a very festive mood. Youngsters turned out in mass to skate on the river.

The Cheder or School was usually located in the Synagogue square. In Tolotchin there were three Synagogues: the largest was the oldest, dating back from pre-Napoleonic days; a Chasidic Synagogue was the newest, Chaim Meyer belonged to this Synagogue; then there was one Synagogue where women had a balcony.¹⁸⁵ There is a legend about the old Synagogue: when Napoleon came through during Lamentation and saw the worshipers lamenting and praying about the destruction of the Temple, he inquired why they were mourning so.¹⁸⁶ When told what the prayers were all about, his reply was: “Why don’t you get guns and avenge for the destruction, instead of uselessly sitting here and mourning.”

Two kinds of skates were used, one known as street skates, which had the front turned up in a curve, while ice skates had a sharp, pointed front. There was not much traffic, if any, at night. It gave the youngsters an option, when the moon was out, after a light snow, before it got beaten by horses hoofs but packed down by sled runners, it made a wonderful skating outing.

The different Cheders had their teams to wage snow ball fights on Fridays, right after school. During recess they built walls of snow with torrents in them and stock piled them with snow balls and on Fridays each group would dart out from behind the wall to

¹⁸⁵ Women sat in a separate section called *ezras noshim*, which was a “separate upstairs room, with windows through which they can hear the service and see a little of it.” See Zborowski and Herzog, *Life is with People*, 52.

¹⁸⁶ Davidson is referring to Tisha B’Av, an annual fast day.

wage battle and retreat behind the wall. Sometimes one group would storm the other and take over the wall declaring themselves victors.

A communal bath-house was a big event. It was located near the river, a huge wooden tank high off the ground forced water into the bath-house by gravity. The tank was filled annually. Besides the entrance fee, one had to buy hot water by the bucket. The most intriguing part of the bath-house was the “rain” room—by turning a handle a shower would come out from the wall. It was cold water, but the novelty of it compensated for the discomfort of the cold water. The bath-house was closed during the winter, reopened for the Passover Holidays and stayed open until the Fall for Rosh Hashanah.

All business was located on the square, as in all small towns. The store buildings all belonged to the Pan who lived some three versts away.¹⁸⁷ Four main streets emanated from the square, intersected by small alleys as it spread away from the center. Being predominately Jewish [i.e. the town], the Russians lived on the outskirts of the city. One street, laid out in cobble stones, went all the way to the Railroad Station, four versts away. The other streets were just packed-down dirt. In the center of the Square was a “Kolontchai,” a fire tower, six or seven stories high with a covered room on top and a bell to ring when a fire or any other alarm was needed. The Fire Department was voluntary, and when they had a fire drill, usually towards evening, it was quite an event for the kids. Their uniforms, black with red trimming and brass helmets, with a small pick ax hanging from the belt, made them very impressive as they climbed on the fire engine,

¹⁸⁷ 3 versts is equivalent to 1.98 miles.

ringing the bell and then stopping in front of some house, pumping water and sprinkling on the roof and climbing to show their agility. Often they passed buckets of water from one fireman to the other.

The engines were kept in a building where the Synagogues were located. In the center was a slick pole. All firemen practiced to scale the pole. Not many could make it to the top. During Firemen Day a gold watch would be placed on top as a prize for scaling it. The pole had to be watched, for too many kids scaled it without any difficulty. This was our favorite, to show off our prowess and strength.¹⁸⁸

One Saturday, when the weather was good, after lunch, it seemed the whole town took a stroll to the depot to see the trains. The first time Abram heard the train whistle, it scared him senseless, and always later he closed his ears when the train approached. The engineer was delighted to accommodate the young fry by giving a long whistle when he neared them.

Sunday was market day for the peasants in the surrounding villages, they came to town to buy whatever they needed and in turn brought farm products to sell; such as chickens eggs and frequently some handiwork such as woven baskets, embroidered aprons and produce.¹⁸⁹ Housewives turned out in the square, sometimes overtaking them in the street. Price haggling was common to all, Chasia was not accustomed to it and often paid more than the neighbors did for similar products.

¹⁸⁸ Davidson refers to himself in first person in this sentence, but switches back to third person until he describes his arrival in America.

¹⁸⁹ David Moon writes that "In the late nineteenth century, as the rural economy became more commercialized, increasing numbers of peasants relied more heavily on food they had bought rather than produced for themselves." See Moon, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930*, 288.

The peasants unhitched their animals to tie them to the net of hay, to feed while they attended to their business.

Friday was fish market day. The fisherman caught the fish during the night to bring it fresh to market early in the morning. To get the choice selection, the housewives were at the market early. Chasia was not used to going from wagon to wagon and poking her finger in the fish to feel the firmness, and raising the gill to see if it was fresh. But this was the way to shop and she had to learn. Chickens, Abram took to the “Shochet,” an authorized person, to slaughter according to the Kosher observance laws. As always, Friday was the day to prepare for the Sabbath.

To share the oven with the landlady proved very unsatisfactory. Frequently, whether by chance or on purpose, Chasia’s cooking was set away from the hot area and was undercooked. Besides, she was a stepmother and was jealous of Chasia being popular with Isaac’s children, which did not help their relations.¹⁹⁰

After a long search, Chasia and Mordecai located the only available apartment in town, at the end of a street, with a Russian family. It was not as big a space as the other but it had a separate oven. The house was divided into two living areas. The front area was occupied by the owner, Stephan, and his wife, Polonea. They did not have any children. An unfinished area, separating the front from the rear, the rear area occupied by Chasia. There was also a place in the stable for the cow. It was rather unusual for a Jew to move in with a non-Jew but this did not bother Chasia, she felt very comfortable with her new neighbors, she was accustomed to living amongst Russian people. They soon

¹⁹⁰ Davidson uses the theme of the evil stepmother again in his story.

became very close friends and got along well. She was at last master of her own quarters, with a kitchen to herself, and she did not have to share the abuses the stepmother dealt to Isaac's children. She did not care to be reminded of her past experiences. Polonea was very friendly and was kind to help out with the cow when Chasia did not feel well. Not being too much of the visiting kind, she did not miss being away from the other Jewish women.

Whenever someone skipped conscription, the parents were subject to having their property confiscated and sold at auction, to pay a fine for not serving the Tsar's Army, and the conscriptee was declared a deserter and subject to arrest and punishment. Aaron, according to their records, escaped to America, and in spite of paying his debt by imprisonment and no longer alive, his parents were still responsible and were subject to be fined. Chasia was tipped off that the Uradnik, Chief of Police, was looking for her with his Strazhniks Gendarmes and was ready to confiscate her belongings. Stephan was a sympathetic person who, liked the Davidsons, offered his help in whatever way he could. Living with a Russian family proved very helpful. Stephan assumed ownership of the most valuable items, such as the samovar, furniture and silverware. Abram spotted the Uradnik with the Strazhniks on their way to the house. A sack of oats was deposited under the seat of the Uradnik's surrey. These visits came periodically for many years. Samuel's time came and then shortly afterward Leotka was of military age. Stephan stayed with Chasia all through the listings of her personal belongings. Stephan's and

Polonea's presence eased matters much. There was not any abuse as in Senno by the officials.

Chasia became a master at bribing the Uradnik. A date for the auction was set and someone bid a ridiculous sum and Chasia got possession of her belongings. Of course there was always anxiety at someone bidding it up.

The weather was grey on the outside for some time and the threatened snow came down in sheets for the last three days. The streets were impassable, all paths were 18 inches deep from packed-down walking. Water had to be carried from the central pump, provided for by the government, from the town square a good two versts away. One needed water to use in the house and water the cow.

The aroma of the Sabbath cooking permeated the entire house, but there was no gefilte fish. The snow was so deep the fishermen could not get to town or just did not catch anything this weekend. Chaim Meyer and the boys could not go to the Synagogue to participate in the Friday evening service, he had just got involved in a book, with the Samovar steaming away, while Mordecai was engrossed in a book he was reading. David and Abram pattered around Chasia in the kitchen. A happy family awaited the Sabbath.

David woke up in the night with a terrific stomach ache. By morning he vomited incessantly. Mordecai trudged in the deep snow to the Feldsher, medic, or doctor's assistant, the only one for the entire area. There was a MD who came to see the patient when the Feldsher was at a loss what to prescribe. Dr. Jacon Shoor came back with Mordecai and, after carefully examining him, he felt that Dr. Stobolsky should give his

opinion. All the symptoms pointed to a case of appendicitis, which would require an operation immediately. Minsk was the nearest city where this could be performed and Dr. Stobolsky's recommendation for admission was necessary.

Chaim Meyer got dispensation from the Rabbi to allow travel on the Sabbath, luckily a train schedule enabled them to get off the same day. Chasia placed three times Chai [life], Kopek eighteen, meaning "life" in Hebrew, in the charity box for a safe journey. Frequently when a crisis arose she pledged or deposited the fifty-four cents kopeks to charity, for the crisis to pass.

David was operated on as soon as he got to the hospital. Everyone was numb at David's departure, an operation was an alarming event and in a strange city it was difficult to bear for the folks back home. As soon as they left the house, all three sat down to recite the psalms of David as was customary in any difficult situation that befell a Jewish family. Communication was slow and days seemed endless, anxiously awaiting news from Minsk, surely by Wednesday they would hear something and they prayed the news would be good.¹⁹¹

Wednesday morning Chasia attended to her daily chores, Mordecai and Abram were still asleep. Polonea dropped in to see them, an unusual hour for her to come by. Her conversation with Chasia was inaudible, the most difficult she ever attempted. As soon as Chasia had to step outside she rushed over to Mordecai and whispered something to him. He immediately got dressed and went outside. This was unusual for Mordecai, he read late into the night and slept late. Playing on her intuition Chasia felt things were not

¹⁹¹ Minsk was the center of Minsk Province within the Russia Empire and is now the capital of Belarus. Minsk is to the west of Tolotchin.

right, there was something wrong. Despondently she sat trying to probe into it. By then Abram got up and began to question, where was Mordecai? He too noticed that it was not like him to get up before Abram.

Before long Mordecai opened the door and behind him was Chaim Meyer, without David. The ensuing scene can easily be imagined. David died from a case of peritonitis.¹⁹² Shiva, seven days of mourning followed with Jews from town coming for the necessary Minyan, quorum of ten men. The deep snow, and living in a Gentile neighborhood, was some obstacle in getting the Minyan, but after the first day there was no problem.

The adjustment to accept David's death was very difficult for Chasia, everywhere she moved she felt his absence. Chaim Meyer had gone to his forestry, Abram was in Cheder, Mordecai was the only one left. He stayed busy doing things around the house, attending the cow and studying most of the time. He was reaching military age next fall and plans were on the way for him to join the other brothers in America. Berry's wife, Feiga, left two years earlier and gave birth to a girl at sea. Her daughter, Celia, was born on a Swedish liner, making her a Swedish subject and giving her free passage with this company the rest of her life.

Chasia was determined more than ever that America is where the Davidsons should plan to go, to join the rest of the boys. As soon as Chaim Meyer fulfilled his obligations in the forestry deals, he should begin to think of leaving Russia.

¹⁹² Peritonitis is inflammation of the abdomen's lining.

Yielding to pressure from the family to have a photograph taken of the remaining Davidson family, he made arrangements to go to the Pan's photographer three versts away. Dressed in their finest, Chaim Meyer in the frock coat and Chasia dressed in her Sabbath dress, Mordecai sprouting a thin mustache and Abram in a specially made outfit by Chasia for the occasion, all walked to the photographer. Mordecai was made to put his arm on Abram's shoulder, which he did not like, and it showed in the photo. This was the first step toward bidding goodbye to relatives, by leaving them photographs.

Mordecai's departure was not as dramatic as the previous departures. His was looked on as the closest link in joining the others. Before he left, he located two rooms near the square, with an elderly widow who was glad to have someone share the house with her. Although the kitchen had to be shared, it did not present any complications. The cow was sold, alleviating this responsibility, and being close to the Square, they could take a little stroll and be right in the middle of everything.

Chaim Meyer came for Passover as usual, there was a stable to keep the fine horse that the driver left while he walked back home and would come back to drive Chaim Meyer back to the job.

It was a beautiful gray horse with light splotches on it. Abram and Chasia attended to it, feeding it and buying an extra two buckets of water from the water vendor who had a large wooden keg mounted on a wagon, a plug in the back of the keg serving as a faucet. The vendor stopped at every house and people came with their buckets and paid him so much a bucket.

The Jews in the neighborhood were of a merchant class, who did not need any horses. Only those who were engaged in draying to and from the railroad station had work horses, but a horse like Chaim Meyer had was somewhat of a prestige. Chasia wanted to show him off. Chaim Meyer came from the stable infuriated at the idea of harnessing the horse just to take a ride. Chasia sensed that something was wrong, she and Abram found a ludicrous scene: the horse, head raised, with the collar partly on his head. Not having any experience of harnessing, he started the collar with the narrow part on the top and of course the horse's head is wider at the top, which makes it necessary to start the wide part on top and then turn it over once it gets to the neck. As the horse raised his head, it was out of his reach to pull it down. Getting on a stool she and Abram made the adjustment harnessed the horse and took a ride to the railroad station. When Mordecai bid goodbye, his last words, etched in the parents' minds were: "With God's will, you will soon join us in America."

The Tsarist Government had a provision: after paying a fine, one could get an exit passport and an agreement was signed, in the form of a document, never to return to Russia.

To leave legally, the idea appealed to him, but never to be able to visit the graves of his ancestors and his sons' graves added to his inner struggle about signing such a document. There were relatives he felt he would abandon. Before sending off for the

necessary document, he felt that he must see the Lubavitcher Rabbi.¹⁹³ He got the desired blessing and the assurance that joining the family far outweighed his troubled mind.

Chaim Meyer had to wind up some of his forestry business which would take another year. He was also advised that it took months to get the passports, but he also would have a limited time to remain in Russia once the approval and passports were issued. Next year was time enough to start proceedings to secure the needed documents, in the meantime his affairs would be wound up to ease the transition.

To live near the Square had many advantages: time was much easier to pass and if and when the Uradnik came by to list belongings for confiscation, it did not attract too much attention, they were seen often on the Square. The landlady was alerted about what to expect and she gracefully offered her cooperation.

It was not too long after they moved in. The Uradnik, with the usual accompaniment of the Strazhniks, knocked on the door asking for Mordecai, he did not appear for conscription during the October month.¹⁹⁴ It was their duty in the name ofto confiscate all belongings and auction them off to reward the Tsar, as required when someone did not fulfill his duty.¹⁹⁵ “Where are your belongings?” he demanded. Chasia humbly informed him that she did not own anything but just lived here. “Where do you sleep?” he insisted. “I only have a dark room.” He insisted on seeing it, lighting a candle they noticed a wooden box under the bed. When they pulled it out it contained all of the silverware of the landlady. As luck would have it, the Strazhnicks were outside.

¹⁹³ Lubavitcher Rebbe is the “title of a Hasidic leader.” See Mark Zborowski nad Elizabeth Herzog, “Glossary,” in *Life is With People*, 444.

¹⁹⁴ The year was probably 1913.

¹⁹⁵ Davidson left this portion blank.

This gave Chasia time to head off what would have been a catastrophe. Bribery, of course, was a way of life with all the Russian officials and Chasia had enough experience at it. She told him she would visit him at his home later and make it worth his while. Somehow she managed to change the listing, and the silver was never entered. This fix was considerably more than the usual sack of oats. There were other calls for Samuel and Leotka. Chaim Meyer was never home when one of these encounters came.

A needle was found in the gizzard when Chasia was dressing a hen for the Sabbath. The Kosher question arose. This was a decision for the Rabbi to make. The whole chicken had to be taken, carefully wrapped in a white cloth in a basket. Abram took it to the Hasidish Rabbi where the Davidsons were members.

Pulling on the handle of the bell at the front door, which connected to a wire inside of the porch that ran alongside the house, he could hear it ring every time he tugged at the handle. The Rabbi's wife, a stately lady, came along the long porch to open the door. "I have a Shayle, an opinion, for the Rabbi to pass on," Abram told the Rabbi's wife. She invited him inside and sat him on a chair to wait for the Rabbi to get through with what he was engaged in.

The Rabbi's study was in the second room, Abram could see him bent over a large book, deeply engrossed in some interpretation. His white flowing beard touched the page as he was moving his head from right to left. Sitting there with a basket of chicken in his lap he thought: what if the Rabbi pronounced the chicken treffe, not kosher? They would not have anything for the Sabbath.

This was quite an experience for a little boy, to appear before the most revered person in town, especially in the eyes of one so young. He was nervous, awkward and frightened. When the lady announced that he was ready to go in and see the Rabbi, he almost dropped the basket. Hesitatingly he stumbled in and stood speechless, he was asked the nature of his visit. Words just would not come out, he just handed the basket over and pointed to the gizzard. The Rabbi carefully unfolded the cloth and poked around the chicken with his index finger. He picked up the gizzard, with the needle still in it, turning it this way and that way, smelling it and reaching out for a book on the shelf. While he followed his index finger over the lines in the book, Abram knew that this Sabbath would be without any chicken. Raising up from his book, he covered the chicken, leaving the gizzard. He put the basket aside and began to question Abram on how big the family was, were there other chickens at home and where was his father? He handed the basket back to Abram and he suddenly took on an entirely different role: he did not act like the Rabbi of awhile ago, but just another fatherly Jew in the community. “Tell your mother to throw the gizzard away and cook the chicken and enjoy the Sabbath.”

The news of their decision to emigrate to America was happily received. Letters from America came more frequently, assuring security and encouraging them not to neglect any channels to speed the process of securing the proper credentials. Any legal matter pertaining to a Jew dragged out forever. Bribing was the only solution.

The forestry business wound up, there was nothing to do but wait for the legal passport to arrive. The Synagogue welcomed the frequent visitor who spent much time with the elders at the tractate table, interpreting studies of the old sages. Before, Chaim Meyer didn't stay long enough when he came home to delve into the depth of the various passages. Now he was in his element.

Neighbors were interested in buying some of their belongings. There was a personal attachment to all of their belonging and there were mixed feelings about what should go to whom. Polonea, the previous landlady, wanted the mate to the chest of drawers made of aspen wood that Chasia had paid the Hebrew teacher for Abram's tuition. Everything of any value was spoken for, when they left it would be picked up, with the agreement of the landlady.

Larger wicker baskets, with lids and ways to lock them, were stored one on top of the other, ready for packing when the time arrived. Abram was not enrolled in Cheder that summer, which made him something special amongst the other children. The family planned a trip to bid farewell to relatives in nearby towns and to visit cemeteries.

The Uradnik stopped in front of the house. "Oh, not another confiscation" was their first thought, when they saw him alight from his surrey and made his way to the house. He had a fancy packet in his hands and called for Chaim Meyer to sign for receiving it. Abram ran to the Synagogue to fetch his father while the Uradnik sat on the front porch, talking to Chasia. Evidently he did not know what was in the packet that came from the Governor's office in Mogilev, the state capitol.¹⁹⁶ Chasia suspected what

¹⁹⁶ Mogilev was the centre of Mogilev Province and is now a city in Belarus.

was in it, but did not give him the satisfaction of letting him know, she played the housewife who did not mix in men's affairs. He delivered his packet and left, not knowing its contents.

Printed with the Imperial seal of the double-headed Eagle was the order from the Governor informing Chaim Meyer that his request to leave Mother Russia had been granted and that he must sign it in front of a government employee stating: after his Passport is received, he and the persons listed on it must leave Mother Russia within six months; that he further agreed never to step foot on Russian soil again. "This may be Mother Russia for them," Chaim Meyer remarked, but not for the Davidson family. The Passport would arrive within ninety days.

They sat in silence a long time. Not for a moment did he waiver about signing the document, it was just the traumatic experience of pulling up roots where, for generations, one's progenitors had lived and to commit never to set foot again on this soil. There was no need to rationalize further, the die was cast, they must move on. And besides, didn't they always end up in their prayers "Next year in Jerusalem." The nearest official in Tolotchin was the Postmaster, who witnessed their signatures and insured the mail to go off to the Governor's office.

Not losing any time, letters were sent to America to confirm the good news. The Davidson family rose in stature in the community, and more neighbors began to drop in, and they were generally treated with more respect. After all, not everybody who went to America had the luxury of leaving legally and had nothing to hide. Chasia wondered—were all those well wishers glad or were they envious? She reasoned to herself, as far as

she was concerned nothing had changed, she just shrugged her shoulders and went about her daily routine as usual.

The postman delivered an imposing looking package that required Chaim Meyer's signature. It was covered with wax seals at every opening. Nervously they gathered around the table, anxiously awaiting the breaking of the seals to see what was in it. They had their hopes set high that this contained the awaited passports. It was an imposing looking document: bordered by an intricate design, the double-headed Eagle, the Imperial Eagle, was superimposed with the words "Passport." The corner had a golden sunburst with the pressed stamp of the Governor of Mogileff Guberny, or Province. It also had the names of the bearer and the conditions under which it was issued. They had six months to wind up their affairs.

Moshe operated a livery stable and consented to take time off in the summer to personally drive the Davidsons to visit relatives in various places. He was engaged for six weeks.

Loaded in what was known as a cart and a half wagon filled with hay and the finest pair of horses in the stable hitched to the wagon, on an early June morning after the customary pledge of Chai kopeks to the charity box, Chaim Meyer sat silently saying his prayer before departing. They climbed into the wagon and were off to visit the living relatives of the family and the dead in the cemeteries. Tolotchin seemed different that morning as they bumped over the cobblestones, leaving the city. This was one more final step in getting closer to their journey.

Belytze was their first stop. As Chasia got near the village, she was anxious to see it and she was afraid to see what changes had taken place in the last four years. The old home place showed no change at all. Jacob, the new owner, operated the store with the help of his two daughters who were past marriageable age. His son, Baruch, had proved handy at working on the farm and they seemed to have managed well.

The first of the peasants to come to Chasia was Nikita, the old faithful, so choked with emotion he could hardly talk. He stood in front of her, his cap clutched with both hands against his chest, and finally Chasia spoke him to inquire about his being, and how his family was. With endearing terms he apologized for the cruel treatment meted out to her, referring to the pogrom. He tried to convince her how much she was missed, and blamed all the wrong doings on the lawless element like Dimitri, who was killed when digging the well and a cave-in buried him alive. Chasia remembered it too well. Many bad things had happened to them and they had no one to turn to for help. He felt sure that if Chasia had been among them, Nastasia's baby would not have died from a sore throat. He reminded her of the time when she saved a baby from dying by wiping the throat with a towel, to wipe away all the mucous to enable the baby to breathe. The Pan was not cooperative with them the way he was when she appealed in their behalf. Even firewood, they had to haul a greater distance, the best part was sold to other villagers. With a smile she listened to Nikita. Vengeance was not in her makeup. She had compassion for those she knew so well. She grew up with these people, played with them in the sand and mud, skated and built snowmen. The incident of the bear in the woods when they were picking berries passed before her, and many other memories as she sat there listening to Nikita.

Abram ran all over the place and was particularly interested to see the calf that was rescued from the wolves at the sacrifice of the mother cow in the pasture. Of course she was a fine cow now and Chasia too was pleased to see her.

Abram ran over to see the Horodische, the mound that Napoleon built when he came through. This was the place where he and his little friends dug into the side of it, coming up with strange artifacts, not knowing what they were. In the summer, after a day of work in the field, the horses were taken to graze for the night. Abram was a good bareback rider, they did not have any saddles. He remembered the wonderful time they had around the bonfire. The younger boys were made to keep the fire going until the others fell asleep, then they too got their chance. The Horodische, overgrown with brush and small trees, had an abundance of hazelnut trees. This was the place he got straight runners for his sleds. Word got around that the Davidsons were back and many of Abram's little friends came to reminisce about the good times they had when hay packing time came. They remembered the time they scared his little horse when he was coming around a growth of bushes, and made him fall off. "Yes, I remember when Mother came running and screaming, that scared me worse than the fall, I never have been able to ride horseback since." They all laughed.

Senno was the next stop. Chasia never turned back to look at the place she was leaving behind forever. In many ways she gave a sigh of relief when the log cabins, the laid out fields, the forest in the distance and the horodische that stood out taller than any man-made structure were out of sight. She truly felt the old Hebrew saying, "Meshane Mokem Meshane Mazel," a change of place, a change of luck.

Senno, too, did not offer any glorious memories: prison, arranged escape, the cemetery where her parents rested, her son Aaron and many relatives she didn't even know. Senno, to her, was the final place she must visit. The other places were optional, but Senno was different. It drew her like a magnet. She was disturbed at the prospect of visiting Senno.

It was a moving scene to watch the three, as they alighted from Moshe's wagon at the cemetery gate. The keeper of the cemetery met them and escorted them to Chasia's mother's grave. Quietly she began to cry as soon as she entered the gate and by the time she reached her mother's grave the weeping was uncontrollable. Prostrating herself at the foot of the grave, she begged her mother's forgiveness for any transgression she may have committed and prayed that she forgive her for leaving and never be able to visit the grave again. At her father's grave it was more intimate, for she did not remember her mother, however. Zalmon died within this decade. She was out of tears when she reached Aaron's grave, she just stood there, motionless, her hands folded and just let her thoughts wander. During all this, Chaim Meyer quietly recited the Psalms of David while Abram, frightened, took it all in.

Moshe lashed the horses as soon as they got into the wagon, to get away from this town as soon as possible. They sat, exhausted, until the next destination, the village of Ulianova where Seneh Sarah, with her daughter, Gele, operated a small store.¹⁹⁷ The head of the family, Abraham Wolfe Mizell, for whom Abram was named, had died earlier. He was the pious member of the family. A son, Nathan, approaching military age, and his

¹⁹⁷ Seneh Sarah was Chasia's sister.

younger sister, Golda, had just made plans to emigrate to America to Uncle Berry Hillman.¹⁹⁸ They were visiting Uncle Hillel in Truchnovichi, the next stop for the Davidsons. The Ulianovitz visit was uneventful. Seneh Sarah, too, had hopes for her children to get established in the new land and perhaps send for her.

By the time they reached Truchnovichi, several days later, they had all gained their composure and they were ready for a good rest. Hillel operated a flour mill, located away from any settlement, it had a unique setting: Hillel's house was built on a hill overlooking meadows for miles around.¹⁹⁹ It was a spacious house befitting a well to do mill owner. Below the hill was the Milner's house, divided into two living areas to accommodate the head Milner and a helper. The living quarters were connected with a vacant room which served as a kind of foyer. The mill itself was on the river bank. Like all flour mills, it had the customer cabin nearby and the bridge and gates to control the flow of water. The wheels in the mill were turned by the flow of gravity which was directed through one of the gates. The head Milner, Anthon, had a son Nekiifer, who was Abram's age and they hit it off from the start. This gave Chaim Meyer and Chasia time to have a real visit with her brother. He was married the second time and this wife was a town lady from Vitebsk, her family owned the Steamship Company that traveled from Sebezh, above Vitebsk, to Riga. She was one of those sophisticated ladies who could not quite get adjusted to country life, but Truchnovichi was not exactly country life, it was more like a year-round resort. She had much charm and was a good companion for Hillel.

¹⁹⁸ Berry Hillman was Chasia's younger brother who had emigrated to America years before.

¹⁹⁹ Hillel was Chasia's older brother.

Nathan Mizell and Golda were still there when the Davidsons arrived. They were to sail the last week in July. Nathan wanted to change his sailing time so that he could sail with the Davidsons. Chaim Meyer advised him to go on while going was good. "Who knows what later time will bring on," he told him. "Son, don't change plans that have been already set. God knows what can happen, don't wait."

The Milner's cow and Hillel's cow were kept with the Pan's herd during the summer. The women had to go to the Manor to milk them and bring the milk back. In the winter they had their own stables and hay barns.

Hillel had three daughters: Rachel, married to Mendel, in the forestry business, she was childless; Dvosia, a gifted violinist, married to a dentist who practiced in Chashniki twelve versts away; the younger Mania, married to Dvosia's husband's brother, Erophiim, an attorney, lived in Vitebsk. He later moved to Siberian Russia to practice law. How, being a Jew, he got a law degree mystified everyone, but he was such a brilliant young man, once you knew him, you did not doubt anything he could accomplish. (He was later executed by the Bolsheviks.)

Hillel had a great affection for his younger sister and was delighted with their visit before departing for America. As the saying has it; blood is thicker than water, he was glad for Chasia to be near his brother Berry. Hillel subscribed to a Yiddish newspaper and this gave Chaim Meyer a chance to catch up on current events, while Chasia and Hillel reminisced about days in Belytze, he was especially interested to hear about father Zalmon's last years, she was closer to him than the rest.

Chashniki was the last stop of their itinerary. Chaim Meyer's younger sister, Edith, lived here, she had married a widower who had four children and they had three children of their own. Chashniki was a very special place for them, this was the place where their birth records were registered for the entire family. When the time came to get a passport for Abram, they discovered that he was not registered at all. The Metrica Book, birth certificate, that was kept in the record office was loosely guarded and anyone could tamper with it. The official in charge compensated for his effort, entered Abram to the list of the other seven sons, but when Chaim Meyer went to check on it, he found out that Abram was entered as three years younger than he was. It was simpler to let it stand than to go through all the agony of having it changed. As it turned out he derived many benefits from this error in the years to come. He avoided military draft for the Bolshevik Army, his steamship ticket was less. During rationing time, his age got him privileges on a children's card.

Edith's husband Hirshel traded with the peasants, he had a soft drink bottling plant, also a wood tar used to grease axles, he also contracted with the government to supply huge metal containers with boiled water during epidemic time which occurred in late summer. Cholera was the most prevalent disease.

Peasants were always short of ready cash in the summer and this was when they needed axle grease and other necessities. Hirshel supplied it to them and collected in grain or whatever they had to spare. His bottling business was operated by his sons when he was away. He had a stand at the square where seltzer was sold by the glass. With a

little syrup added, it made a sort of Coca Cola type drink. In the winter, when most weddings took place, he supplied bi-carbonated drink in large copper containers, with the syrup sold separately, so that they could make it to suit their taste. He was located across the street from a church, it had a big lot in the back for peasants to park their horses and gear when they came to worship or brought some of their produce to sell. It became a sort of mini-market of its own.

Edith was a warm, kind, person overflowing with hospitality. To help support the large family she operated a store in the square compound. To be of help, the stepchildren were big enough to take over some of the responsibility. Edith, before her marriage, visited her brother, Mendel, who lived in England. Whatever the reason, she came back and enjoyed visiting Belytze and had very good relations with the family.

She recalled on one of her visits: a caravan of gypsies set up camp outside of Belytze, they attracted much attention with their way of living, telling fortunes to those who brought them a chicken or some grain.²⁰⁰ They were a happy lot, playing an accordion and different string instruments. A ring was formed, and old and young danced to the music, while others clapped their hands to the tune.

Everyone for miles around were more careful with their small farm stocks. The gypsies had a bad reputation of appropriating anything within their reach; a covered wagon was parked outside Chasia's store and Edith came in the nick of time to save Mordecai, who was of kindergarten age, from being led by the hand into the wagon. She sounded an alarm and snatched the child away from the gypsy, who would have

²⁰⁰ For more information on Russian gypsies, see David M. Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994).

kidnapped him if Edith had not happened to see it. The villagers were roused and the gypsies hurriedly razed camp and were gone. “And now he is in America. My, my, how time passes,” she shrugged her shoulders.

Chasia told another gypsy story; she laughed at herself when she was telling it. Another time the gypsies came when Chaim Meyer was home. This gypsy woman talked her into letting her tell a fortune about her children in America. While she was laying out her cards, suddenly she said she needed a coin to insert into a piece of bread, would Chasia get the coin and then get the bread. As though bewitched, she opened a compartment in the cabinet where loose change was being kept to get the coin, (of course this was what the gypsy wanted, for her to go to the place where the money was kept). By this time Chaim Meyer walked in, and when he saw what was taking place, his temper flared up as he ran over to the gypsy, grabbed her and dragged her out of the house, against he screaming and kicking. Chasia blushed, even now, after so many years, at how she was duped into doing such a stupid act.

The gypsies descending on a community was a most paradoxical event. People looked forward to their coming, and were frightened at their being there. It probably was due to the break in monotony that lasted so long.

The Lubavitcher Synagogue was especially attractive to Chaim Meyer. It was here where he was first exposed to real learning. Zalmon Hillman retained ownership to the second seat from the Ark, the first was reserved for the Rabbi, it was behind the Cantor’s stand. On the other side of the Ark, Hillel owned the coveted seat. Seats at the eastern wall were considered real property and were inherited from heir to heir. This was

truly a Chasidishe Shule, it did not have a women's gallery.²⁰¹ Chasia frequently ridiculed it because she had to attend service in the Misnagdishe [opponents] Shule.²⁰²

There were still old timers who gathered after morning prayers to discuss passages in the Gemara (Aramaic gemara, completion), the second and supplementary part of the Talmud, providing a commentary on the first part (The Mishna) or general observations. Abram had a good time playing with his cousins who were about his age.

The arduous task of bidding goodbye to the living as well as the dead completed, they returned to Tolotchin to face the last task of packing, to dispose of whatever they had. They had only about three weeks to complete their arrangements before sailing from the Port of Libau sometime in the middle of August.²⁰³ Trachoma was the most dreaded disease for any immigrant, one could not enter America if there was any sign of it.²⁰⁴ Their reports came back negative. The steamship tickets were impressive, with pictures of the boats on them and they had plenty of cloth tags to attach to their luggage. They notified all the neighbors, who had bought certain objects, to come and place their names on them, so when they left, all they would have to do was to come by and pick it up. Chaim Meyer would not accept any money until the last day of departure. He wanted to make sure of it.

²⁰¹ Shul is the Yiddish word for synagogue. See Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*: Volume II, 1881 to 1914, 415.

²⁰² Mitnagdim

²⁰³ Libau, or Liepāja, was part of the Russian Empire and is now a city in Latvia. The Davidsons were scheduled to leave for America in August, 1914.

²⁰⁴ Trachoma is a bacterial infection.

Unusual excitement greeted Chasia that August morning when she went shopping for produce. Spinach was spread out on tablecloths on the ground, there were baskets of huckleberries, cucumbers freshly picked that morning, onions picked the night before and watered in the night to keep fresh. Huckleberries were sold by the measure, spinach by the double handful, onions and cucumbers in bunches of tens. Housewives got to the Square to get the pick of the crop.

The vendors had their produce displayed in front of them, but the buyers were attracted to an announcement nailed early that morning to the only light pole on the square. Anxiously they edged closer to the pole. Those who read the announcement had a dazed look, they could not believe what they had read. Some would read it aloud and then get off in a group on the side, trying to explain what this all meant. As the morning progressed, more people came to the square to discuss the Proclamation: “Russia Declared War on Germany.”²⁰⁵ The Russo-Japanese War was not so long ago, it was still fresh in the minds of some of those in the crowd.²⁰⁶ People were stunned, Chasia amongst them.

Everyone seemed to be going to the Square to hear for themselves or to see the Proclamation. Aimlessly people gathered in small clusters, their arms dropped resignedly

²⁰⁵ Germany declared war on Russia August 1, 1914, which was July 18 in Russia, as they were still using Julian Calendar. Germany declared war in response to Russia’s mobilization. Russia then declared war on Germany the day after. For more information, see Dominic Lieven, *Russia and the Origins of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983).

²⁰⁶ The Russo-Japanese War occurred from early 1904 to late 1905 and was considered a failure militarily for Russia. Richard Pipes writes, “In every engagement, Japan displayed superior quality of command as well as better intelligence.” See Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 14.

to their sides. Housewives slowly filled their tote bags with produce, the fisherman illiterate had to depend on someone to explain to him the meaning of this. His only remark was: "Somehow the sun is not shining as bright this morning." Indeed, it was gloomy.

An Uradnik importantly made his way through the crowd about noon and nailed another order that he had rolled up under his arm. He tacked it below the Proclamation, its heading: "Ukaz", Decree.

They implored him to read the "Ukaz" aloud. Clearing his voice he looked at the assembled crowd, nervously he began: In the name of the Tsar of all the Russians, it is hereby ordered that every man the age of twenty-one to forty-three report to the District Headquarters in Orsha the Guberny Province of Gomel for a medical examination this coming Saturday, August... The train will be at the station at three in the afternoon. His Highness, the Tsar, is furnishing transportation to and from Orsha." "Prokliat Nemetz" (Damned German) could be heard in the crowd. Resignedly, most went home, the shopkeepers closed their doors early. No one was in any mood to buy anything.

The proclamation of a war was shocking enough, but it really drove home when the Ukaz was nailed on the post. It had a telling effect on all present in the square. This was specific as to who would have to bear the brunt of the war. Twenty-one to forty-three, this would affect a large part of the population. "Report Saturday" echoed through the crowd, this hardly gave anyone time to arrange for the completion of the crops.

A war, for the Jewish population, spelled many anxieties. If the war took a turn for the worse, the Jew would be blamed. If on the other hand it went well, then the Jew

would be singled out for not contributing enough toward victory. Rightfully, Jews had very little reason to be patriotic to the Tsarist government, which treated them as second rate citizens. Why should they spill their blood for those who persecuted them at every turn. This was their reasoning.

Tolotchin, being predominately Jewish, was mostly of the merchant class. Friday was always a short business day, the shops and stores closed early to prepare for the Sabbath. This Friday the day was even shorter, the population as a whole was arranging to be at the railroad station on Saturday to go to Orsha for the medical examination. Many had the Declaration of War mixed up—some thought the Germans declared war on the Russians instead of the other way around. Why? Why, should they do it? That was the main topic of conversation.

During the Friday evening service in the Synagogue, the congregation prayed more fervently “Shuma Israel...” (Hear O Lord God of Israel) reverberated through the entire building as the Cantor was joined by the worshippers. After the service, they walked home silently. There was not the normal chit-chat from happy people welcoming the Sabbath.

Davidson’s home, like any other in town, welcomed the Sabbath with a spotless tablecloth on the table, with candles flickering its last glow and with the twists of white bread covered at the end of the table. The aroma of the gefilte fish and boiled chicken filled the quarters, as it usually did. But this time, like the sun on the Square that somehow did not shine as brightly on that morning, so was this entire setting lacking the

usual spirit. Chaim Meyer, with a shaking voice, asked the blessing, repeated by Chasia and Abram, and they silently partook of the meal. Chasia broke the silence, expressing gratitude to the Lord that their four sons were safe in America where there is peace. With the Lord's help the war would be over when Abram would be old enough to be called, or better still he would be with his brothers in America." As for us? Whatever will be God's will, will be." She never failed to console herself with the proverbial saying: "The lord sends the medicine before the plague." The children in America were safe from the war. Neither one dared mention the effect this would have on their expected sailing the next week from the Port in Libau on the Gulf of Riga.

After the meal they went outside to join the other neighbors who milled around in small groups, speculating on coming events. There wasn't any reliable news of what happened. Government representatives assured the peasants when the Germans were conquered as surely they would be, that more land would be available to the victors. Some really believed they would benefit from victory. To take out twenty years of manpower from a people, the burden was sure to fall on the women.

Saturday a new "Ukaz" was posted on the light pole: all horses under five years old were to report to the Square for measuring. A certain size would be used for the cavalry. Underscored was the assurance that this was not a confiscation, the Tzar's government would pay a handsome price for any animal accepted. Anyone who raised a colt to a horse, to them it was like a member of the family and no amount of remuneration justified taking this animal. This Ukaz was as difficult to accept as the mobilization. But this was an Ukaz and there was nothing one could do about it. In the

following days many Ukazes followed, there was a need for brass and copper. Samovars, the pride in any Russian home, had to be given up to melt down for bullets. Some beautiful samovars were destroyed on the spot, so as not to give a chance to divert them to, perhaps, the Black Market, as usually happens in any war. Grain was to be brought in to a central location and it was paid for with brand new money just gotten off the press. Rumors were flying thick and fast. Mail, which was never too dependable, was worse than ever. Whiskey stores, operated by the government, were ordered closed immediately.²⁰⁷

Saturday morning in the city of Tolotchin, like any other Jewish community, found everyone going to the Synagogue. There was apprehension amongst the worshippers about some of the hooligans taking advantage of everyone being away from the homes, and there was always the possibility of getting mobbed in the Synagogue where so many congregated. Patrols were organized to walk the streets.

Recruits began to gather in the Square, getting ready to go to the railroad station three versts away. The age of twenty-one to forty-three included many fathers and sons, some had just begun to sprout a beard while others had long beards. Emotions were mixed, as in any crowd about to undertake a new adventure. Some believed the Tzar's agents—that they would get more land. Others were just restless and were glad for the

²⁰⁷ Davidson is referring to vodka. Nicholas II “banned the sale of vodka first during mobilization and then for the duration of the war” because he believed “temperance would cure social ills.” This hurt Russia economically because vodka sales generated a great deal of revenue. See Steven Marks, “Russian War Finance, 1914-1917,” in *1914-1918 Online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War* (Berlin, 2014), 3.

opportunity of getting away from home. Most had faith in the Tsar Father, and once he ordered them to go, so be it.²⁰⁸ Many were not happy at the prospect of leaving that many women at home without enough men to protect them.

The Monopolka, government owned store, was in the process of locking up, on orders from the government. The outside shutters were being nailed up, bottles taken down from the shelves to be crated. As the crowd increased, some wanted to buy Vodka. They knocked on the door for the keeper to open up. When there was no response, the knocking became more persistent, evolving into a vociferous demand to open up. The crowd became unruly and some pulled on the shutters, which gave under the pressure. Once the shutters were down, window panes shattered some people climbed inside and began throwing out bottles of Vodka into the crowd. The Monopolka was emptied in hardly any time. Corks popped everywhere and the bottles were passed around. Some held on longer than the next, resulting in fist fights. Pandemonium broke all over the Square. Some had more than they could hold and became violent. Without any provocation some kicked cobble stones loose in the street, hurling them at houses. The feared cry of “Kill the Jews” was being heard here and there.²⁰⁹

The residents of Tolotchin had not been exposed to a pogrom, they had only heard or read about it, but to the Davidsons it was real. They hoped that somehow a massacre would be avoided.

²⁰⁸ See Melissa K. Stockdale, “Mobilizing the Nation: Patriotic Culture in Russia’s Great War and Revolution, 1914-20,” in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22: Book 2: Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory*.

²⁰⁹ See Eric Lohr, “The Russian Army and the Jews: Mass Deportation, Hostages, and Violence during World War I,” in *Russian Review* 60, no. 3 (July 2001).

Dr. Jacob Shoor, a medic, who served an area of about ten versts, had never refused anyone when they needed him, regardless of bad weather or whether they paid him when he made the call.²¹⁰ Dr. Shoor saved many babies' lives and comforted many old people. He was, without a doubt, the most loved and respected man in the area. When the crowd reached the height of violence, Dr. Shoor got on top of one of the vending tables, and before he had a chance to open his mouth, a ruffian with a knife in his hand jumped behind Dr. Shoor. A young Jewish boy, who was notorious for picking a fight, jumped at the ruffian and knocked him off the table with a hard blow. Dr. Shoor's appearance began to calm the crowd and, seeing the near tragedy, this had a telling affect [sic] on them. He asked for calm and self control—harming and destroying would not help the war effort. "We are all in this together, and let's share it together." His voice rang over the heads of the crowd. Slowly they began their walk to the station, to board the train to Orsha. Tolotchin was spared a horrible tragedy, not only to Dr. Shoor, but to the entire community living around the Square.

Like the calm after the storm, after the crowd cleared the Square, residents came out to sit on the benches in front of their homes, to talk of events that took place in the last days and to speculate on what the future would bring. What would happen in Orsha was the immediate concern. Would the rule hold that the oldest son would be exempt from service? Or in case there is proof that the one to be drafted is the only means of support? Someone piped up with the version that this is war and nobody would be

²¹⁰ Ten versts is the equivalent of 6.6 miles.

exempt. This gave some groans to some hopefuls who had elder sons, and in some cases where the provider was too ill, and the son was the only one they depended on.

At last someone got up enough courage to bring up what would happen to the Davidsons' plans of getting the boat to America next week. All plans were made to leave for Libau to get on the boat. All of their possessions were ear-marked for people to get when they left. Chaim Meyer, with his usual calm, voiced his opinion that all travel on the oceans would be stopped. If any ship ventured out to plow the waters, it could be captured or even sunk. Besides, trains were owned by the government and all travel had been suspended until all war efforts were taken care of. Chasia's consolation was that her sons of military age were safe in America and not involved in any war. To be stuck here for God knows how long was bad enough and with no means of support, but "The Lord takes care of the birds, surely he will open the way for support somehow." The cynic in the crowd had his theory, "Who knows, America, too, may be involved in this war." Chaim Meyer authoritatively informed him that America, in its entire history had never fought a war outside of its own shores. No one was anxious to retire for the night, they sat there late, speculating on what to expect.

The war days were taken in stride, mail was slower than ever, certain items were becoming scarce, such as kerosene and salt which had to come by rail. An Ukaz was nailed on the post frequently, it always made demands on the populace. A demand for copper and brass brought poles in front of the police stations. The gloomiest Ukaz was when horses were ordered to be brought to the Square for measure, to pass into the Cavalry. A corral was hastily built to keep the accepted animals. When a horse passed the

examination, it was promptly led into the corral, leaving the owner hopelessly standing with his eyes following the horse he had raised from a colt. It was more difficult for some to accept—that never again would he see the horse he had caressed and got up to be his pride and joy. The paymaster's offer of a generous price the Father Tsar offered for his horse did not impress the peasants at all. He was not too receptive to the whole idea, but silently he took the brand new rubles, crumpled them in his pocket and walked away with his head down.

It was a traumatic experience to watch these people part with their horses. When they returned home, they could not go into the house to face the youngsters whose pals had been led off to war. Instead a man would walk to the stable and stand there, where the horse not long ago neighed at him for affection when he appeared to feed him. As he stood there, one by one the younger members of the family walked up close to him, until finally the woman of the house would come over and caressingly lead him to the house. Scenes like this were too common in those days.

Draftees returned from the physical examination, given days off to get ready to join His Imperial Majesty's Forces. Some were rejected, and instead of being jubilant not to have to go, had a sense of shame. Very few did not pass the physical examination. The Jews did not feel shamed by rejection, to them a rejection was an asset. Why should they risk their lives and not be accepted on a par with the other soldiers? Humiliation was all they could expect.

Before too long the shortage of manpower was felt in every endeavor; in the fields, taking care of the stock, providing wood for the severe winter, and in general

running the house. Older men were helpful whenever possible, but the gap left by the mobilization of 22 years of manpower had a devastating effect on the entire life style. Illiteracy played an additional hardship. When a letter arrived from loved ones in the army, it had to be read by someone and they had to get an outsider to write for them, in answering letters.

Temporary desks were set up in the post office for letter writers who read and wrote letters. Intimacy, of course, was eliminated. Before long soldiers began to ask for “Sucharky” (dried bread). Black bread, when dried, is light and will not spoil. Parcels to soldiers could be sent postage-free, which was a big help to the women left behind. Packed in a linen bag, the bread was easily placed in an army knap-sack, soaked in water it regained its original shape and was quite good food.

Disruption of mail delivery affected the entire postal system. Foreign mail, considered a superfluity, came almost to a standstill. Chasia’s trips to the post office were in vain. The letters with the red stamp of George Washington were not to be seen anymore. Besides, censorship was very strict, she knew her sons’ letters were probably thrown in the wastebasket without even being read.

A kiosk was built on the Square to accommodate the various bulletins and decrees that were regularly issued. People gathered around the kiosk regularly in hopes of some good news. Big bold letters dominated the bulletin: “Russian Armies crossed German borders and will soon be entering Berlin.” This, of course, gave hope that the war would soon be over. Stands began to display posters, in color, of the heroism of the Russian Soldier, and particularly playing up the Cossack. The posters were very dramatic,

showing horses with eyes bulging as they were being shot down, throwing off the German soldiers.

The Davidsons began to feel the pinch of the war as their resources began to dwindle and there was no way of earning anything anywhere. Abram was enrolled back in Cheder. Often when things looked darkest, a money order from America would come in and save the situation for awhile.

On Saturday the whole town turned out to walk to the railroad station to watch the trains loaded with soldiers, waving frantically. Piled on top of each other at the windows, some were just loaded in freight cars. The engineers blew the whistles to add to the excitement. With lumps in our throat we waved back at them and cheered them along, although we knew they could not hear us for the noise of the moving cars. The transport trains ran with more frequency as the war went on. Every now and then a train stopped at the station for a short while to take on water and the soldiers rushed to the boiling water kettle every station was equipped with for passengers to have hot tea, the national drink. When the whistle blew they had to get on the train and had no time to visit with the people who would have liked so much to say some encouraging word to them. Sometimes a train would lay over for hours due to some malfunction.

One of these layovers happened on Yom Kippur. Jewish soldiers came to town to visit the Synagogue. Right before Musaf (an important part of the service) a soldier asked the Gabai, (the president of the Congregation) an unusual request: "I am a trained Chazan (a cantor) and would you let me perform the 'Unatana Tokef'?" The Gabai was taken by surprise at such a request and as tactfully as possible he explained to the soldier that they

had engaged a Cantor and this was his domain, so to speak. A quick consultation was held and the soldier was very persistent. “I am on the way to the Polish front, and may never have a chance to chant for my people again.” It turned out he was an understudy to the famous Cantor Sirota.²¹¹ The Cantor magnanimously agreed to step aside for that part of the service.

A Kittel (a vestment) was provided and the Gabai asked the congregation for their attention and forgiveness for what he was about to tell them and pointed out the unique privilege bestowed on all of them.

Word spread throughout the other two Synagogues and before long there wasn’t any room inside, people crowded around the windows outside. The soldier stood alongside the Cantor, waiting for his part. When the time came for him to take over, he did not move in the Cantor’s place but chanted from the same position. The Unsane Takef is a prayer where on Rosh Hashana one’s faith is written in the Book and on Yom Kippu it is sealed. The many things that can happen to one, good and bad: if one is to die, will he die from this cause or another cause; may it be by water, or by fire, or by the sword, etc. When he came to the words by the sword, he put so much emotion in it that hardly a dry check remained amongst hardened men. The Congregation could not hold back, they all joined him. There was a feeling as though one spoke to his God. He had to leave and could not stay until the end. He took off the Kittel and prayer shawl and left with the other soldiers. It left everyone speechless.

²¹¹ Davidson is referring to Gershon Sirota, a famous cantor. See his recordings online at faujsa.fau.edu/jsa/artist_album.php?artist=sirota.

Two years of war and no regular communication from America made Chasia realize their journey to America would be much later than they had hoped it would be. Sporadic help from America was difficult to rely on. They faced going on charity or starvation. Chaim Meyer could not find any employment of any kind, his training in forestry was not needed. Chasia did not have any financial resources to open any kind of business. The situation was very desperate. Hillel offered to help them if they could move to Truchnovichi.

The bulkiest things, such as beds and tables were disposed of, one chest of drawers was given to Abram's teacher for tuition. The wicker baskets that were to take their belongings to America were now loaded on a wagon to go to Truchnovichi.

The assistant millner, Igor, was called into the Army, his wife and child doubled up with her parents, as many had to do. His quarters were given the Davidsons. Hillel provided a stack of wood to fire the oven, enough to see them through winter. Necessities such as flour, potatoes, and a few other staples were put in the pantry, so that at least for the immediate future they had nothing to worry about. The millner's house, like any other peasant hut, was small but adequate. The large oven was used for cooking, baking and heating the house. The top of the oven, like all peasants ovens, was big enough for all to sleep in case it got that cold. A large room with a dirt floor separated the two dwellings, the other housing the head millner with his wife, Nadia, and five children. The oldest was retarded and had to be watched when in the house, he would stand against the wall and pick on the clay that lined the walls. He was a dirt eater. The second son, Nikipher, was Abram's age and there were three little girls. Abram and Nikipher hit it off from the start

and Chasia and Nadia got along well. Anton was one of those capable people who could do anything in wood. The gear that ran the mill had wooden teeth, which every now and then would get knocked out when a foreign object made its way into the canal that directed the water to turn the wheel. He made the blanks in his spare time to accumulate a reserve in case one of those breakdowns occurred. Abram was very intrigued with his workshop and spent much time there.

He and his friend, Nikipher, made sleds and wagons and were always busy making things. To bend the front of the runners for a sled, wood was trimmed to a certain thickness and then bent to the proper curve and for it to remain bent, it was necessary to take the green wood and dry it in the oven. Since Chasia's family was not large, she had more room in the oven and was glad to accommodate the boys, putting the runners to one side to dry. On one of these drying ventures, the string that held the bent curve in place broke, releasing the tension on the wood and as it straightened it broke the earthen pot with the meal in it. What a mess it made. After that, the runners had to be dried on top of the oven. It was so much nicer than living in the city.

Chaim Meyer began to buy grain in the nearby villages and had the peasants deliver the grain to the mill. He had it ground into flour and with the help of his brother-in-law, Zalmon Davidson, his sister Edith's husband. In Chasniki, twelve versts away, he sold the flour, giving him some income and something to do. He inspired confidence in the peasants, they trusted him not to misrepresent the current price of grain. He walked the distance from village to village.

Chaim Meyer undertook to teach Abram. Teaching was not one of Chaim Meyer's talents, he lacked patience and did not understand lesson assignments, the assignments were either too long or too short. In addition, there was a personality clash, which neither knew how to handle. Once, Abram and Nikipher had just completed building a sled and were about to take it out for a tryout. Chaim Meyer insisted on having their lesson at that moment. It was from Isaiah, where the donkey will always return to the trough it is being fed out of. Abram cared less about the donkey when Nikipher had the sled and he naturally was not very attentive. Chaim Meyer lost his temper and slapped him pushing him out of the door making some derogatory remark.

Abram remembered the road to his Aunt Edith in Chashniki and made a straight line for the woods to get on that road. He was determined to leave home to visit his cousins. It was typical December cold weather and he was hardly dressed warmly enough. A mackinaw, a fur cap, felt boots and woolen mittens. As he reach the forest it turned dark. Soon a traveler came along and pulled over to the side: "Where are you going, little boy, this late in the evening, aren't you afraid of wolves?" the traveler questioned him. "I am going to Chashniki," he replied. He would not give any other information, where he was from nor who his parents were. The traveler happened to be from Chashniki and made him get in the sled with him, making room for the little boy under his lap-robe to keep him from freezing. They soon reached a village. The traveler had some business at the first house. A good fire was blazing in the oven, with a row of potatoes baking in front. The little boy adamantly refused to tell them who he was. Baked potatoes with clabber tasted very good, as he related later. Before he got to Chashniki,

making sure that he was far enough away from Truchnovichi, he told the traveler about his Aunt Edith, whom the traveler happened to know, and late that evening delivered him there. They were all glad to see him, but were still mystified at his appearance and he just told them that he wanted visit them.

At dusk with Abram not anywhere around, it created some concern. Nikipher's last account of him was when he saw him go in the direction of the forest without saying anything. A thorough search for him in the mill and in any other possible place was to no avail, he was not anywhere around. As a result of the war, wolves had been driven from their habitat and were roaming the countryside in packs, no loose animal was safe. There was an incident when a woman, carrying a baby, was walking to the flour mill from the next village about four versts away. She was attacked by a pair of wolves who tried to get at the baby, but she managed to fight them off until she got to the mill. There were other tales told of wolves attacking single travelers, and in one case, to ward them off the driver set fire to his net of hay while he got on the back of the horse to beat them off from attacking the horse's throat. All of these tales did not help Chasia's morale. When she²¹² went into the log cabin where the peasants awaited their turn, a peasant drove up telling about a little boy who was picked up by a butcher from Chashniki, he would not tell where he was from or to whom he belonged, all he said was that he was going to visit an aunt in Chashniki. When he described the clothing he wore, Chasia was relieved, for she knew that this was her spunky little boy. The thought of what could have happened to

²¹² Two pages, numbered 175 and 176, are missing from Version D of the memoir. I used Version C to fill in the gap. See Abram Wolfe Davidson, 1979, *The Power of Pearls*, Version C, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

him if the butcher had not come along kept the Davidsons up all night. The next day Chasia was there to see him. She let him visit with his cousins a couple of weeks and then had him come home.

Winter soon came to an end, the snow melted, making going around the villages impossible, and the peasants by now had disposed of their surplus grain. The mill stopped operation for lack of customers and because of inundation as the rivers rose out of their banks.

The villagers had to protect the bridge from the onrushing ice, which could easily carry a bridge down stream with it. In the winter when the river was frozen over with ice two feet thick, the ice breakers were checked and, if necessary, new piles were driven. The bridge in Truchnovichi was not very long, it had five gates. In front of the gates there were three ice breakers: three piles driven down and tied with metal bands at the top, these normally were the height of the bridge. At a distance from it three more piles were driven, these at water level height, three more long logs laid at an angle from the highest group to the lowest group, secured by metal bands. They were arranged in a pyramid shape, a sharp iron bar placed on the top log to act as a blade. When the ice pushed on it by pressure of other ice, the bar scored it on the bottom, thus causing it to crack. The ice breakers were apart enough to permit the ice to flow through the open gate.

The rising of the river was quite a phenomenon to watch. When the snow took on a dull look and ground began to show in places, spring was not too far off. Roads got slushy during the day and hardened some during the night freeze. The mill began

preparation to close for the summer. Every portable object was moved to the second floor. It seemed miraculous it did not carry it away, but it was so built that the water flowed through it.

To drive the pile, a hole was cut in the ice, a log forced down the hole until it reached bottom. A pile driver was rigged up on the ice, the weight rode on pulleys. To the weight many ropes were attached which in turn also rode on a turning shaft. Many workers pulled on the ropes to raise it to the top and then it was released above the pile thus driving it down every time the weight, which was called Dubinushka came down on it. A song leader led the workers²¹³ in a song and at certain words they turned loose the ropes. This was quite an operation.

Loud groans were heard from the direction of the bridge, everyone rushed to see the amazing spectacle. As by a signal the river began to rise slowly. Anton, with some help, raised the gates and let the water rush through, moving the ice toward the ice breakers. Nadia called Chasia and Chaim Meyer, who was engrossed in a book, the samovar boiling away. Anton anticipated this occurrence and made sure to have extra help to raise the gates. To get them started after they were locked all winter was no easy task, they heaved and they pulled until the seal was broken, it was easy after that. The ice breakers withstood the tremendous weight and pressure as the ice climbed to almost the top of it and then, with a groan, splashed into the river and circled in the current, making its way through the gates and under the bridge. The water beyond the bridge was always

²¹³ This marks the end of the two pages from Version C.

lower because of the gates holding it back. When the gates were raised it did not take long for the level to equalize.

The river kept on rising and spilling over its banks into the meadows, inundating land for miles around. It came within ten feet of the house where the millners lived. Chasia and Nadia stood there, watching the edge as it kept on creeping closer and closer to the house. Nadia assured them that it never rose beyond this point.

Passover was a few days away and caught Chasia unprepared to be marooned for ten days. The only way to get to them was on horseback, to come across a shallow place in the field. Hillel had anticipated this and had a supply of Matzos for everyone. He also saw to it that other needs were taken care of.

War news—one could hardly believe anything. Rumors were fast and thick: the Germans were retreating, the Russians took Könisberg.²¹⁴ Here the Russians were fleeing from the front. Spy stories filled the air, all sorts of imaginative tales were told on the Germans. People began to be suspicious of each other.

Another money order came from America. Chaim Meyer went to Chashniki to cash it. He visited his sister, Edith, and she convinced him that, for many reasons, he should move to the city. There were some opportunities there that Truchnovichi did not have. Besides, Abram should be enrolled in Cheder and he too would be happier closer to a Synagogue.

²¹⁴ Könisberg, East Prussia, is now Kaliningrad.

The first winter in Chashniki was uneventful. The second year he was offered a supervisory job by his nephew, Mendel, who had a contract with the government to make snow shovels. Abram entered a Hebrew and a Russian School for Jewish children. Chasia took on knitting woolen mittens. They shared a house with a family who had a General Merchandise store and looked after their five children, the oldest, Abram's age. The parents had to be away much of the time.

On one of his trips to the post office early one morning to check if there was a letter from America, Abram found the windows still closed although it was past opening time. He was always able to single out the long envelope with the red stamp as the one from America, to get it and run with it to his parents. The postman was too slow and he might lose it. That morning he noticed something unusual was taking place behind the shutters, he could see through the cracks that they were not attending to the usual duties but stood around busy in conversation. Straining his ears he caught a word here and there, and the Tsar was mentioned. The postmaster said: "How are we going to manage without the Father Tsar?" Some made the sign of the Cross over their chests and someone said "It can't be, that he is no longer the ruler of all the Russians."²¹⁵

Abram did not wait for the mail, he ran home to tell Chasia what he had heard. Chasia was horrified for her little boy to be saying such things. The memory of Aaron was too fresh, and covering his mouth with her hand she ordered him not to repeat it anywhere. Abram was insistent that he say something about it. Chasia slumped in the

²¹⁵ Tsar Nicholas II abdicated the throne on March 15, 1917 (March 2 of Julian Calendar) after strikes in Petrograd. See Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 50-52.

chair. If what he said was true, what would this mean? The end of the war was her first reaction. Could it be possible that all the things Aaron argued for and gave his life for would come true, freedom, like in America? This called for a contribution to the charity box.

They lived near the Square, she threw on a shoulder shawl and walked over to see what she could find out. Small groups were gathered everywhere, people craning their necks so as not miss anything that was said. The rumor persisted. It was a mystery how the word got out so soon. The news was received with mixed emotions, mainly with fear of what is spelled for the Jewish community.

Sverdlov, a tailor, known for his clandestine Revolutionary activities appeared on the Square waving a red flag. He mounted the high steps of the stores and called out to everyone to listen to an important announcement. "Listen everybody! Listen everybody! We are free of the tyrants, the Tsar is no more."

Pointing to his red flag, which was nothing more than just a red piece of cloth, "Comrades," he called out, "This piece of red cloth that I hold in my hands represents the Bloody Sunday of January 1905 when our Comrades were mowed down by the tyrants after being lured to the Nevsky Prospect in Petrograd. Anyone who cherishes their memory and wishes to be identified with the Revolution, I urge you to make a small arrangement of red cloth, ribbon or whatever you have and pin it on you chest." Wearing the red ribbon signified a defender of the Bloody Sunday cause. The merchants on the Square soon sold out of all the red ribbon they had in stock, usually bought by the girls to tie in their hair.

Uradnicks (police) appeared in pairs on the Square leaving their sabres off. A momentary silence hovered over the crowd. There was always the fear that perhaps the whole thing was a hoax. Those who had red ribbons pinned on them hurriedly covered them with the palms of their hands. Sverdlov, louder than ever, condemned the Imperial swine, as they pretended not to hear him and went on their way. The crowd spontaneously broke out in a loud “Hurrah” while he continued his abuse, calling them “Imperial lackeys, and stoning them was too kind to them for all the misery they caused to our people.”

A parade was announced for the next day. Revolutionary songs had to be learned. Like any other community there was an underground group who had met from time to time to plot to overthrow the regime and who had quietly learned Revolutionary songs. Frantically these were copied and in groups practiced to sing them. The uncertainty of it being real that the Tsar was really overthrown and that these songs would be permitted on the streets without any interference was too good to be true. They did not dare sing loudly, they practiced in back rooms, still being secret about it.

The biggest open space in the city was in front of the church, where the parade was to start. Sverdlov, the tailor, took charge of the arrangements. Tailors were considered Intelligentsia of the working people, they were more vocal, while sewing their garments sitting cross-legged on the tables. They constantly argued various issues and seemed to have more time to read up on events. So when word got to him that the Revolution was on, he was the one to lead the local celebration. Sverdlov undoubtedly had clandestine connections outside.

It was a sunny day, the streets had not been thoroughly dry but dry enough to march without splattering each other. The Square was the highest place in town which dried out earlier than other places, a little water here and there did not dampen the spirit of the participants. Arranged four to a row, with hand made red flags, the crowd patiently waited for the go ahead order. Mostly young person filled the ranks, some in their late twenties braved the move to join. All in all they had a sizable turn out. The “Marseillaise” translated into Russian led off the march followed by “The Battle Song,” “Tears Spilling over all the Oceans,” “The Prisoner War Song,” and many others. When all the songs they knew were exhausted, they started all over again. There was a jubilant air as the parade went on, to the applause of the elderly and housewives who came out to the street to cheer them on.

On the Square, in one of the low buildings, makeshift benches were set up and some brought chairs. A table was placed for the speaker to use. The top of the low building was reserved for the people on the program, however, some important people in the community, as a matter of custom, mounted the platform. Ushers made them sit in the back, much to their dislike. Amongst them were the Priest, the Rabbi and some of the leaders in the community.

Friedlander, who lost one arm in the beginning of the war, was very outspoken against the system, but somehow was not subjected to any police harassment. He was the most educated in the lot and took charge after the crowd got there. Holding a red flag in one hand and a briefcase, later to become a status symbol, under his nub of the other arm, in his loud carrying voice he called out: “Comrades All,” waving the red flag, “Look hard

at this piece of cloth, Red, not because of its color but for what it stands for. It represents the blood spilled by the tyrants of our people, the heroic over the years who have forfeited their lives so that we, at last, will be able to assemble and be free.” He was greeted with shouts of “Hurrah” and applause. “We salute them in the name of the Republic of the Soldiers, Farmers, and Workers Unions.” The crowd responded with thunderous shouts of “Hurrah, Hurrah.” He then introduced a soldier whose rank was not on him (the first act of the Revolutionary Army was to do away with rank).²¹⁶ “This is a man who will bring you greeting from Petrograd.”

The soldier, in his early twenties, was evidently of officer rank, and he received a warm ovation as he waved at the crowd. His idiom of speech was not the peasant dialect, he belonged to the interior of Russia. “Comrades,” he called out to them in a ringing voice of the cultivated Russian language, “Kerensky is now head of the Government, but this is only a provisional Government.”²¹⁷ An election will be held and a permanent government will be elected.²¹⁸ Our government now consists of delegates from the soldiers, farmers, and workers from all Russia and on their behalf I extend to you greetings.” He went on to tell them how some of the ruling class had betrayed our cause, giving an example of the “long haired devils of the Church.” He was interrupted by the

²¹⁶ On March 1, the Soviet issued Army Order Number One which provided soldiers full civil rights off duty. See Christopher Read, *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and Their Revolution, 1917-21* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 47.

²¹⁷ The Provisional Government was created on March 1, 1917 (March 14) after Nicholas II abdicated the throne. Alexander Kerensky became the Minister of Justice, later the Minister of War, and finally the Prime Minister of the Provisional Government in July. He was also part of the Petrograd Soviet. See Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 68, 73, 84.

²¹⁸ The Provisional Government planned to conduct an election for a Constituent Assembly, which would then create a constitution. See *ibid.*, 68.

Priest behind him, “Son, son,” he grabbed the soldier’s sleeve. The soldier swerved away, denouncing him as “Braided Devil.” Many peasants in the audience, horrified at such treatment of the Holy Father, made the sign of the Cross over their chests.²¹⁹

The soldier told how when the Revolutionaries tried to search the church for weapons, the Clergy met them at the door and would not let them take arms inside the Church. Unarmed, they entered, to be mowed down by the Tsarist supporters who were inside. He further continued telling of the wealth of the Church while the rest were starving. “The Russian Church owns two thirds of all the wealth. They bathe in luxury, while you drench in poverty. Wake up and cast them out.” The crowd, shocked by the attack on the Holy Father, didn’t applaud at every denunciation of the Church as they did when he attacked the Tsar. The Priest quietly slipped out and disappeared.

The speeches concluded, Friedlander invited all who wanted to march and sing Revolutionary songs. Some of the older people went home, the younger were so worked up they lined up again and started all over again, but this time led by Sverdlov and Friedlander they marched to the police station and demanded whatever weapons and ammunition they had. Sabres were the only weapons of authority they got. That night a group of citizens had a meeting to decide on how to handle law and order until some instructions came. With the help of the soldier they elected a Provisional Committee. Friedlander was elected President, Sverdlov acted as Secretary. They called themselves

²¹⁹ The Orthodox Church was known for being loyal to the tsarist government. Richard Pipes writes, “In times of internal unrest the Church played its part in support of law and order through sermons and publications. The Church depicted the Tsar as the vicar of God and condemned disobedience to him as a sin.” See Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 89.

“The People’s Militia.” Armbands with this inscription and the sabres dangling were the only signs of authority they had. Members in the People’s Militia served without pay. They felt honored to serve the cause of the Revolution.²²⁰

Soldiers deserted the Army in droves, bringing their weapons with them.²²¹ The front lines were in a chaotic condition. Large landlords fled into the interior, they could not make their workers do any work around the estates. Prisons opened the doors for all prisoners, political or criminal. Looting increased. Anyone who had any valuables packed whatever they could and fled abroad.²²²

Hillel lived in an isolated area in his mill, and heard noises in the middle of one night. He saw a crowd gathering in the yard and overheard a discussion, what they should do with the old folks once they got inside. Grabbing whatever they could carry, he and his wife slipped out the back door through a patch of woods behind the stable and started walking in the direction of Chashniki. In the morning they reached Chasia’s house, they were exhausted, frightened and nervous wrecks.

When they returned at a later date to inspect what took place while they were gone, they found their house ransacked from one end to the other. Looking for valuables,

²²⁰ The “People’s Militia” was created by the Petrograd Soviet and acted in place of the tsarist police. See Read, *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and Their Revolution, 1917-21*, 47.

²²¹ Christopher Read writes of desertions: “desertion rates, before October, were much lower than the anecdotal evidence would suggest. The vast majority of troops remained at their posts and the High Command, while they were not overjoyed at the desertion rates that existed, did not see desertion as the most important problem the had to face.” See *ibid.*, 122.

²²² Davidson probably did not witness all of this.

they had broken furniture, torn feather bedding and the Torah he had in the Ark was taken out and unrolled on the floor, fortunately it was not damaged or desecrated in any way. Whatever money they kept at home, Hillel and his wife took with them. They had a home in Chashniki where he stored large items. They learned from the millner, Anton, that when they could not find anything to loot, they turned their anger on the cow, slaughtered her and divided the meat amongst them. That same night they broke into the Pan's mansion. The ballroom had mirrors that reached from floor to ceiling, they carried them to the village, not being able to put them in the house, for they were too tall, they put them in the barn. The cow saw another cow, charged into it, breaking the mirror into small pieces. That solved the problem for the peasants how to get mirrors in their hut.

The town bell rang violently one morning, sounding an alarm of some terrible happening. A farmer on the way to town saw two armed men forcing two men into the woods. The volunteer Fire Department loaded help to go to their rescue. The farmer led the way to the spot where he saw them take them. The posse combed the area, they thought very thoroughly. Later, by chance, the bodies were found tied to a tree and showed evidence of being gagged.

In the winter a leather merchant and his future son-in-law left for a nearby town, Lepel, where they bought leather from a wholesale house. They never reached Lepel and were not heard from. In the Spring, children were wading in a river and spotted some strange object among the bushes near the bank. Upon investigation they discovered a body. Not far from this place another body turned up. Evidently they were murdered and stuffed under the ice and must have floated down from where the crime was committed.

Being under water for months, their beards had grown and their finger nails seemed longer.

In the city of Vitebsk, the capital of the Province which was located on the banks of the Western Dvina River, the river was navigable during most of the summer. A steam boat originated above Vitebsk and floated down to Riga on the Gulf in the Baltic Sea. Chasia's landlady, a lovely person who operated the General Merchandise Store and left Chasia to look after her five children, traveled to Vitebsk to get her merchandise for the store. Beshenkovitchi was some thirty versts away, where the steamship docked to take on passengers for Vitebsk, or down the Dvina to Riga. Neshia Rappaport rode to Beshenkovitchi and boarded the ship there for Vitebsk.²²³ This was a normal procedure for her, or for anyone who dealt in the big city.

A terrible catastrophe happened in Vitebsk. A steam boat sank, loaded with passengers coming downstream. Reports were sketchy. No one knew exactly what had happened, or the number of passengers on it. Moses Rappoport, Neshia's husband, was concerned but hoped his wife was not one of the passengers.²²⁴ A week passed and there was no word from her so Moses went to catch the boat to Vitebsk to investigate why he had not heard from his wife. Among the unidentified drowned persons, he found his wife, Neshia.

Chaotic as conditions were, the crowd could not be held back and the boat had been overloaded. To top it all, the Captain of the ship was inebriated and when the ship

²²³ Beshenkovichi was a town in Vitebsk Province of the Russian Empire and is now part of Belarus.

²²⁴ Davidson uses both Rappaport and Rappoport within the memoir. I am not sure which is the correct spelling.

left its mooring, the stream, being swift from Spring swells, carried the ship sideways, panicking the passengers. They all rushed to one side making it list to one side. It hit the ice breakers in front of the bridge broadside and broke in the middle, hanging on the ice breaker. Most of the passengers were trampled to death trying to get out through the portholes. This was another example of lawlessness and disorder.

The trade union was the first formal organized group to administer the affairs of the City and the surrounding villages. Instructions came to arrange for an election to be held in the main village, three versts away. Elections were set for the Fall. In the meantime, numbers were given the different parties. The Social Revolutionary party had a number, the Anarchists had their number, the Zionists had a number and so did the Bolsheviks.²²⁵ Speakers came to tell about each program of the respective Party. They were all convincing and had the population confused as to which party was best for them. One speaker spoke for one party, then a few weeks later the same speaker spoke for another party. Some recognized him and some did not know the difference. On one occasion one of the double speakers was booed out of town.

There was much excitement in town about the voting to take place. Instructions were meager. Safeguards were necessary, but to what extent, no one knew. Voting was a new experience. The ballots arrived at the Trade Union Headquarters with instructions not to open the boxes until the day of the voting and then in the presence of the officers

²²⁵ The Socialist Revolutionary Party, or SRs, was a leftist party that promoted terrorism against the tsarist government and supported redistribution of land for the peasants. See Read, *War and Revolution, 1914-22*, 11.

of the Trade Unions. Boxes were built with slots to insert the ballot and for lack of locks they were tightly nailed.

The morning of the voting those who had horses with flat beds volunteered their services free to take loads of people to the Village where the ballot boxes were set up. The People's Militia, with the dangling sabres, distributed ballots to the various Party Members who called for number so and so. Number seven was the most popular in Chashniki, it being the Zionist Party, next were the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks, Number five, was least popular of all. All Zionists hoped to get out of this ballot was just a representation, they knew they would never have a Zionist Government in Russia. But it was a thrill to have old men and women, their feet dangling from the sides of the flat bed wagons, go to express a voice, no matter what the result of the vote would be.

The peasants in the village, where the ballot boxes were set up, were as puzzled as those who were hauled in to cast the ballots. This was beyond their comprehension. Authority always came from the big city and they did what they were told to do. How would this little slip of paper, with a number on it, select someone to rule them? Many of them thought it was just a "Zhidovskaya" (Jewish) contrivance and would not have anything to do with it. They just stood on the sideline, to watch them fold that slip of paper, to deposit it in the box with the corresponding number on it. The People's Militia, not having any previous experience, did a tremendous job of it.

The Provisional Government issued new money, later known as the Kerensky Money, in denominations of twenty rubles and forty rubles. With the appearance of the

Kerensky Money the Tsarist money took on much more valuable face, many believed that the real Russian currency would still be the Tsarist denominations.²²⁶ This period was a difficult one for Russia. The populace had no confidence in the new government and were uncertain what the future held for them. The people were tired of war and the Provisional Government declared allegiance to the Allies and vowed to continue the war. Recognition of the New Government was not forthcoming, the Army was in disarray, there was no discipline. The economy, poor as it was, broke down completely. Rumors of enemy forces to the Revolution were being organized on every side. Poland was talking of secession, Finland wanted her independence, Latvia was talking of autonomy, Estonia and Lithuania had their eyes on a separate government. The Germans took advantage of the weakness and kept on pressing on the Eastern front.

The ravages of war were being felt more by the day, war casualties were tremendous. Women did the best they could to fill in for the absence of the menfolks, but could not produce enough to supply the cities.

A new breed of suppliers appeared on the scene, known as “Meshetchniki” (small bag paddlers)[bag men]. All sorts of products were packed in a sack. (The word “Meshock” means bag.) These small amounts were taken to the large cities to a central place that became known as “Suchoy Bazar” (dry market) and were sold or bartered for various objects. City dwellers got very hard up for food and were getting rid of their

²²⁶ See Marks, “The Russian Experience of Money,” in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22: Book 2: Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory*, 127-128.

unneeded objects that could be carried to the market. The Kerensky Money became so worthless that it was counted in thousand ruble packages.

Abram took a trip to see his Aunt Sarah, Chaim Meyer's sister in the city of Polotzk. Normally a four hour ride, it took him all day. It was relatively easy to get on the train in Vitebsk, no red tape, no delay in getting the ticket, the wait for the train was also not out of the ordinary, somewhat late but not as reputed to be. The lights in the car did not work, window panes were stuffed with rags or paper wherever the glass was out. The Meshtchniki, who made up most of the passengers, had either small lanterns or just plain candles which were used sparingly. The car was of Fourth Class. A row of benches had three tiers on one side and solid tiers on the opposite side of the aisle for those who wished to sleep. It was not deep enough for anyone to fully stretch out but if they knotted up, folding their legs, it was possible to sleep some, and in case there was no one to occupy the tier, lying diagonally across one could stretch out. Abram was afraid of the sanitation of those tiers and preferred to stand in the aisle until a seat became available.

Every so often the train stopped and an announcement urged the passengers to get out to help load wood into the engine. Teams of workers piled logs along the tract for the locomotive to take on to make steam. There was not any coal to run the trains. A human chain was formed and the logs were passed from person to person until they reached the engine. The cab filled, slowly the engine chugged along until it reached another pile. They had to repeat this process four times to get to Polotsk.

Back in Chashniki, everyone wondered what had happened to the results of the election. One day three young men arrived wearing Sam Brown belts with revolvers prominently displayed on the sides. Their jackets had four flapped pockets and their riding pants had leather patches between their legs and patches on the seats of the pants. They looked sharp, dressed in this manner. They came to the People's Militia quarters to inform them that the Government now was in the hands of the Soviet Socialist Federal Republic of the Proletariat and that they would organize a local branch of the Government consisting of a Worker, Health, and Executive branch. In a few days there were a few young men wearing similar uniforms who were introduced as the members of the Red Guard and would be responsible for law and order and would carry out instructions from Vitebsk.²²⁷ The citizens were relieved to know of some authority that was so badly needed.

Sometime before the Red Guard took over, one morning the town bell rang as though it might fall out of its frame. Everyone knew that some crisis had occurred or was about to happen. The populace ran to the Square, some bringing their youngsters with them, not daring to be separated from them. A member of the People's Militia climbed on the Fireman Wagon to make the following announcement: "Several days ago in Kgonev, a neighboring city, a certain Igorov gathered a bunch of outlaws and made demands on the city: a very large ransom sum."²²⁸ If not delivered by a certain time the punishment would be very severe. The demand was so outrageous that the citizens could not possibly

²²⁷ The Red Guards were an "armed workers militia" See Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 115.

²²⁸ I cannot identify the city of Kgonev.

meet it. There was no way to negotiate, he did not leave any place to contact him. One early morning the hooligans rode into town on mounted horses, heavily armed, and they began to gather the older Jews, decapitating them and throwing the bodies in the wells. While the populace wailed for the dead, the outlaws proceeded to loot and destroy what came their way. The younger people managed to flee into the fields. There was no organized defense. We need to organize an “Ochrana” (a watch), to prevent this from happening to us. We also must be careful not to fall into a trap, like another city who had a self defense plan, but they came from behind them, after sending a decoy to the other end of town to attract the defense in that direction.

“This will take much sacrifice and courage. We are asking for volunteers.”

They had more volunteers than they could get Army rifles. Some who had military training, they headed the organization. A plan was devised for those who knew how to handle a rifle to take one to their house. Rifles were distributed to every two or three houses and the members of the watch were instructed to sleep near a window with their clothes on, to be in readiness for any emergency. The plan called for patrols at the end of each main street leading out of town. The city plan was a Square at the center of town, four main streets going out in different directions with alleys connecting the main streets. The main streets were like four spokes in a wheel, equally divided.

Two members of the patrol, at each end, were to walk a short distance in each direction. By doing this they could observe a long ways, and with the patrol on the other street doing the same thing, they felt that they almost covered a circle around the city. The signal they had was that if anything suspicious appeared, to make sure it was not a

decoy, and then fire the rifle. This would alert the guard at the belfry and sound the alarm. Emphasis was placed to give assistance to any group that needed it.

One night Abram and another member of the Watch were patrolling one end of the street. It was a quiet night, the moon was full and visibility was excellent. They had sawed-off shotguns that could be concealed when held close to the body, butt under the arm and the barrel against the leg. They separated, Abram walked one way while his partner walked in the opposite direction. After the first tour they met and simultaneously both remarked at the disturbance they heard from behind the barn, that stood out in the meadow. The barn stood clear of everything around it in this clear night. This really created a problem for the two youngsters. Their first instinct was to get flat on the ground and strain their ears to determine what this noise could be. As they lay there on the ground they were sure they heard whispering but could not make out what was said.

They were in a quandary as to what to do. Was it a decoy? Or was it the real thing? The last thing they wanted to was to cause a false alarm. They decided to get in position somehow to see what was behind the barn. Separating again, they crawled on their stomachs in opposite directions to get far enough out so they could see behind the barn. As they began to crawl, they heard the magazine of a rifle click, when the bullet is inserted in the barrel. It was repeated again, they were too far to turn back, they had to go on. When they reached a position to see behind the barn, to their relief, they found two horses grazing. The iron hobbles and the stretching of imagination was the magazine sound, the whisper was the horses munching the grass. They walked to see the horses and had a good tale to tell the next day.

One another occasion, a Watch Patrol spotted six men, who seemed to be armed, approach them. They let them get within firing range and ordered them to halt, instead they shifted the bullet in the barrel while falling to the ground. Neither one fired. They waited it out and the Patrol demanded identification. After some tense moments, they were identified as Red Guards, sent from a nearby City to help the local Watch. A good laugh was had by all.

A young Kapusta, whose father had a reputable vending business in earthen pottery and other trinkets, was known through the entire country side. During a terrible blizzard, he knocked at the door of one of the peasants in a village. He identified himself to his father's friend, who knew his father well, they had traveled together on many occasions. He told of his father, turned over in a snowbank and in need of help to pull him out. The friend was glad to be of help, he hitched his best horse to a light sled and they drove off into the night.

The peasant's body was found in the Spring when the snow melted. Young Kapusta took the horse to town and sold him to a trader with the provision that he would drive him home. The horse trader knew who he was and agreed to take him back. His body, too, was found next Spring. The horse was sold several times, with the same fate to all the traders. Kapusta never concealed his identity. He had gotten very bold in his activities, often stopping a caravan of merchants, and with pistol in hand he would rob them and disappear. He was a lone operator and almost impossible to capture.

One summer morning he came into a small town to a shoemaker, he was barefooted and ordered a pair of boots. The shoemaker measured him very carefully,

studying him all the time, he thought he recognized him. When Kapusta gave him a gold ten ruble coin as a deposit, he was convinced he had the right man. A date was set to try the boots for a fit. When he came in, the shop was surrounded and he was taken into custody.

Many people whose relatives had disappeared came to ask him if he knew or heard of them. There were so many casualties or unknown whereabouts of so many people, perhaps he knew about them. Kapusta was amazingly relaxed and would talk only if they brought him food.

Another change took place in the Central Government. In October the Kerensky Government was replaced by the Government of the Soviets. Kerensky fled and the Central Committee, whose Secretary was Nicolay Ilyich Lenin, became the Dictatorship of the Soviets.²²⁹ Leon Trotsky became Commander-In-Chief of the Red Army, replacing the Red Guard, and the People's Militia.²³⁰ Everyone welcomed the change from the Red

²²⁹ Nicolay Ilyich Lenin was not Lenin's correct name. His real name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. The Bolsheviks seized control of the Winter Palace on the night of October 24-25 and replaced the Provisional Government. They claimed they represented the Petrograd Soviet. Kerensky was able to escape the Winter Palace early October 25. See Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 491-2.

²³⁰ The tsarist army was destroyed but "as the military threat to the new government began to build up, there was a rapid return to more conventional military thinking" and the Red Army was created. See Read, *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and Their Revolution, 1917-21*, 209. Read writes that "independent militias like the Red Guard were being either disbanded or absorbed into conventionally-structured, centrally-controlled institutions such as the Red Army and the Cheka, the first Soviet secret police force." Lenin made Trotsky Commissar of War in March 1918. See Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 123, 139.

Guards, who were mostly renegades turned loose from prisons. They were prone to bribes and appropriated confiscated objects for their personal use.

This change of Government brought about many other changes in the way of life of all the people. Ownership of any kind was abolished—everything and everybody belonged to the State—commerce, as such, was forbidden, Cooperatives would replace it, all distribution would be made through these agencies. In spite of doing away with the Red Guard, its effect was still felt for a long time to come. Every community organized a Soviet and in most cases the members of the Red Guard stepped in to head these Soviets. They freely operated the way they had before, only under a different label.

Trade, as was known until the Soviets took over, had to go underground. Large cities felt the pinch sooner and harder than small towns who still had avenues to the country and were in a better position to obtain food and other necessities. The plight of the large cities was getting desperate. A new type of trader came as a result of not being able to trade openly: they were known as smugglers. This gave the self-appointed authorities a chance to confiscate goods hauled to the cities. Raids were often made at the source or road blocks set up in the villages. No explanation was ever given as to what happened to the confiscated goods. It all appeared on the Black Market, until some other official had his hand in the till. The situation became chaotic. The smugglers resorted to all kinds of ways to conceal what they were transporting. At first, food was the main commodity to take to the city, later on, from the area of Chashniki, there was dye and

sugar, and saccharine. The smugglers organized in caravans and frequently an encounter took place with some of the hardliners.²³¹

At a predetermined time in Winter, the sleds were loaded in concealed places and would meet some distance away. Sometimes as many as ten or more sleds formed the caravan, which would start in the early evening and by-pass villages by making a new road around them. This was possible to do in Winter, the ground was frozen so hard. Often they defied the officials and rushed right through the village.

About half-way into the forest, off the main road, lived a forester. His big yard made a perfect place to unhitch the horses to feed and water from the deep well that never had gone dry. This place served as a layover for many travelers. The house, some bigger than the average hut, had straw spread on the floor for any traveler to take a couple of hours to of sleep. The samovar was always boiling for tea and the travelers had a chance to exchange experiences and have a meal, consisting of black bread and Salo (fat-back) that Russians eat raw. Often someone had a little Samogonka, (homemade whiskey)[moonshine] just enough to socialize. Rested up, the covers taken off the horses, the sleds hitched again, they would start before daybreak. The forest was about twenty versts long, on a flat terrain, and the road was always in good shape. When they passed the forest, the danger of confiscation diminished because they were getting near the big city and traffic was on the increase and the general mood was different about the

²³¹ A barter and black-market economy emerged during the “War Communism” years. Steven G. Marks writes, “As government-issued currency had lost much of its ability to function as a means of exchange, natural money substitutes- bread, salt, milk, potatoes, rye flour, firewood, overcoats, or matches- took its place.” See Marks, “The Russian Experience of Money,” in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22: Book 2: Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory*, 133.

smugglers. The forest always presented the problem of possible ambush by some lawless element, and they took advantage of the horses being frisky after rest and made them trot until they cleared it. The rest of the way they traveled leisurely, getting off the sled on an incline and jumping on it going down hill.

In the city, every group had its own congregating place. A fee was paid the owner of the yard for letting them make use of the house. The tall gate concealed the activity in the yard. Buyers came to purchase whatever was there and hurriedly transferred it to their means of transportation. The smugglers then made their way to the Market Square to bargain for whatever was there they thought could be exchanged for local commodities.

The Western Dvina River, a navigable river in summer, was frozen over solid in Winter. Drivers like to take advantage of the flatness of the ice and not have to go up and down hills when travelling on the road. Frequently they took the Dvina two-thirds of the way, to go downstream was much easier on the horses to pull the sleds. The drivers didn't need to get off and on the sleds like they did on the road. They rode all the way and the horses were not as tired.

Not long after the Bolsheviks took over the Government they launched a propaganda campaign to discredit the past.²³² Posters were placed over gates in strategic places of all kinds, one was particularly viewed with alarm: it was a huge poster depicting three figures: one was a fat Tsar, with the crown on him; the other a fat Financier with a money pouch; and in the middle was a grotesque looking Priest; each holding what

²³² The Bolsheviks took power October 25 (November 7 of Gregorian calendar) 1917.

looked like a worker in chains. Other similar posters attack the Kulak (prosperous looking peasant) and a wounded soldier raising his head from the trenches with the caption “End To War.”²³³

Two new names appeared on the political horizon; Lenin and Trotsky, these were names to reckon with. Trade Union Headquarters, across the street from Chasia’s apartment, became a beehive of activity. Meetings were held, field workers came and a new authority came into being: the Commissars—no one exactly knew their function, but seemingly they gave the orders. A senior Party organization came into being known as R.K.P., Russian Communist Party.²³⁴ Only three persons were enrolled who had a long revolutionary background. They, in turn, organized a youth movement known as the Komsomol (Communistchitheskaya Soyuznaya Molodezh) [Communist Youth League].²³⁵ They fared much better with a nucleus of fourteen members. These were the students and some apprentice workers. The Commissars constantly lectured to them, indoctrinating them.

The most shocking Declaration hung outside Headquarters: in essence it stated that all personal property belonged to the State. No one had any claim on any real estate. Rents could not be charged, no one could be evicted, etc. The citizens could not believe what they read. The wealthy people had anticipated it, and had fled taking whatever they

²³³ The term kulak “had no precise meaning for the peasants themselves, being applied sometimes to the rich, those who employed hired labor, traded, and lent money, sometimes to the hardworking, thrifty, and sober.” See Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 100-1.

²³⁴ The Bolsheviks changed their name to the Communist Party on March 8, 1918. See Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 128.

²³⁵ Kommunisticheskii Soiuz Molodezh.

could with them, but there were thousands upon thousands of desiatins of land (a destiantina, equivalent to 2.7 acres). Rumors of raids, to confiscate surpluses of any kind, were floating around. Chashniki, mostly a merchant class, was not jubilant or hopeful of sharing in others' misfortune. Despondency reigned everywhere.

Deserters from the Front were in evidence more every day. Those who had not heard from soldiers in the Army began to realize that they must have fallen as casualties or were captured. The slogan of the Provisional Government, "War to an End," was replaced by the Bolsheviks, "End to War." The soldiers took them at their word and began to desert en masse. The war seemed to have come to a stalemate, nothing was heard either way.

Rumors persisted that the Germans were about to enter Lepel, thirty versts South of Chashniki.²³⁶ No one understood why the Germans would advance this way, there was no Army to resist them and as far as local people were concerned this was not a very strategic place.

The snow began to melt in the usual March weather, the street turned slushy, in some spots the sun dried it, promising a nice warm approaching Spring day. A sound of hoofs from the Square was strange. To the surprise of everyone, the German Hussars in full force were coming from every direction, as though dropped from the sky. Evidently they surrounded the city before they entered and then converged on the Square. The populace was dumbfounded. Was there no Russia any more? Were they to live under a

²³⁶ Lepel is a town in Vitebsk Province, now located in Belarus. 30 versts is equivalent to about 19.9 miles.

German occupation? Or would Germany annex most of Russia? Many feared the German atrocities that were told about in the Tsarist propaganda.

At a command they came to a halt, the officer in charge pulled out a rolled-up map, and while carefully looking at it he began to write orders to two soldiers who rode up beside him. It was amazing how well they covered the city before they got there. The Commandant's residence was earmarked, the place for the Veterinary stable, the Infirmary would be established to care for the sick. The best stables were selected with large yards for their horses, the kitchen was centrally located, they knew who had fodder, oats and straw. A leather dealer had some fine doeskins to make boots, they came by to see them, but did not take them. The school was converted into barracks, some tents were pitched in the school yard.

The Infantry came next. They did not stop in the city, they marched through and established a border twelve versts, to the north.

Later people found out they came under a treaty signed in Brest Litovsk by Leon Trotsky. In exchange for a separate peace that let Russia out of the war, they forfeited part of White Russia, all of Poland, and most of the Ukraine.²³⁷ The Germans did not bring any supplies, they subsisted on what they took away from the Russians.

They did not endear themselves for the heavy demands they made on the populace. One egg a week had to be given to them, a fourth of a cow from a herd. The

²³⁷ The Brest-Litovsk Treaty, negotiated between the Russians and the Germans, ended Russian involvement in World War I. The Soviets made a great deal of concessions in order to achieve peace. According to the treaty, signed March 3, 1918, the Soviets would cede "Finland, Russian Poland, Estonia, Livonia, Courland, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Bessarabia." See John W. Steinberg, "The Treaty of Brest Litovsk," in *Russia's Great War and Revolution* online at russiasgreatwar.org/media/international/brest.shtml.

community had to buy a fourth of the number of cows to give to them. The fields were often raided to dig potatoes, with no concern about what happened to the rest left in the ground. Later, toward fall, when the kernel began to fill out in the rye they trimmed the tops and brought them in to dry in the sun in the school yard. It was demoralizing to see such waste.

The first thing they did was to re-establish the Uradnik system (the old Tsarist Police force), a very vindictive bunch who made life difficult for those connected in any way with the revolution. Instead of being protectors, they were always looking for someone to punish.

An announcement was made about an important event to take place on the Square and the police rounded up anyone they could find to go to the Square. The band was playing, which could be heard all over town. A table was placed in a prominent place. The commandant, with his whole entourage, took up the most conspicuous place. Three persons were led by a German soldier and lined up near the table. One of them was recognized as the leather dealer who had the doeskins. Two soldiers got hold of the merchant and made him lie face down while the band was playing. A soldier, with a lash attached to a handle, lashed him across his back twelve times, then the same was done to the other two persons. One of them had the temerity to object when a German made advances to his wife. That was his offense. The third allegedly stole something. The leather dealer sold the skins. No one had told him that the Commandant wanted them.

In the Spring, when manure was hauled to the fields, the Russians having rotating crops had to take it across town. On cobblestoned streets it was impossible not spill some

of it. The Commandant rode up to a peasant to reprimand him in German, and the peasant of course did not understand German. This infuriated the Commandant and in a fit of anger he lashed the driver without mercy. They were so despised by the populace that it was not safe for an individual German to travel anywhere. Many lost their lives to snipers, which in turn made them impose more punishment. It became a vicious circle.

A work detail was instituted by the Germans to dig post holes. There were no posts anywhere around and why post holes were needed no one could understand. At the end of the street a Captain was picked, and his responsibility was to round up so many boys to work every day for so many days then another group was to be furnished. Abram was picked to go with a detail to dig holes near Truchnovichi, an area he knew very well. While living there, he and his friend, Nikipher, walked over the woods picking berries, mushrooms and wild apples. Asked to be excused, he walked in the woods and kept on walking, the German soldier ordered him to halt but he kept on going and soon he was out of the German's sight. The soldier did not dare follow him. Abram was received with open arms, when he told them, in a nearby village where he had friends. So hated were the Germans that anyone who sabotaged them would be welcome.²³⁸

The Russian border was so close that infiltrated activity took on many forms. Telephone wires were constantly cut to disrupt communication, kerosene poured on food

²³⁸ Aviel Roshwald argues that “the German military advance was initially welcomed as a potential liberation from the systematic persecution they had suffered at the hands of the Russian military.” He describes the occupation as a “mixed blessing” as the “German occupation authorities introduced basic principles of civil equality and the rule of law” but “the equality experienced under the Germans was a harsh equality of arbitrary military edicts, strict rationing of basic supplies, onerous economic exploitation, and rapacious requisitioning.” See Roshwald, “Jewish Cultural Identity in Eastern and Central Europe during the Great War,” in *European Culture in the Great War*, 102-103.

whenever possible, and sniping from hidden places was a common occurrence.

Messengers on bicycles had to be in groups of as many as five, even then one or more could be a sniper casualty. To retaliate, the Germans, when they found a shot soldier, would surround the nearest village. All living things would be run out and the rest set on fire. Toward the end of the occupation one could see villages burning in all directions. In August a Bicycle Division moved in to replace the infantry that was needed on the Western Front. They were a fine group of soldiers. They were not so many so their demands were not as great and they let up on the population.

Before the Bicycle Division there was a Commandant who was impossible. He issued a command that all male citizens salute the soldiers and tip their hats to an officer. On Sunday when the peasants came to town, he rode on his horse and if they did not tip their hats he simply let loose with his lash. Many heads were bleeding as a result. Fortunately he was called back and the Bicycle Division replaced him.

During the summer, Abram, with his Uncle, neared a village to sell axle grease. A barrier at the end of the village kept them from going inside the village. Uncle got out to investigate the barrier and a German soldier, with rifle drawn, ordered them to remain where they were. It seemed a search was in progress. They were searching for weapons. The Russian border was a short distance away and supposedly a shipment of arms was received in this village. Soldiers were going up and down the village, they searched the houses, the stables, the hay barns, poking bayonets in suspicious places but did not find anything.

They were getting ready to leave but needed to water the horses they had with them. They had their own buckets to lower into the wells, the wooden buckets the villagers used the Germans didn't trust. When one bucket sank to the bottom, it scraped something. They lowered one of their soldiers and found what they were looking for. A number of rifles was lowered in this well, as well as the other well. Every prime male was arrested, their hands tied behind them, they were marched off, and this was the last that was heard from them. It was a heart-breaking scene to see the short German soldier tying the hands of the six feet tall Russians.

A saboteur was caught in the city who had just gotten across the border. Chashniki did not have a jail house, a residence was converted to detain law-breakers. An outhouse was built near the fence. The saboteur was the only person in jail. He asked to go to the outhouse. While he was in there the German on duty kept one eye on the place. He was there too long, the sentry went by to look in the crack of the door, he was still sitting there. At last he called out to him, but there was no answer. The soldier broke down the door to find the saboteur had arranged his coat in a way that it looked as if he was there, and had put his cap on top. The saboteur crawled through the hole, climbed over the fence, stole a change of clothes from a clothes line and was gone. Later it was learned that when they closed in on him at the river he cut a reed and submerged until they left the area. He later came back to pay for the trousers he took off the line.

Bells in the Church usually rang for Holidays on Sundays, but this time in the middle of the summer the bells kept on ringing. There was a service held inside for very

few people. Later it was learned that the Tsar was dead, and this was a service for him. No other details were available.²³⁹

Toward the end of the summer an unusual movement of troops began, all of the Infantry was moving toward Poland. The Bicycle Division seemed to have covered a retreat. Herds of cattle were being driven ahead of them. Earlier when there was a movement of troops, there was always a replacement, but this time they seemed to have been retreating.

Under the German occupation, the large landlords returned and took possession of their large estates. The Pan in Truchnovichi settled in his palace and turned over the management of his estate to a Zalmon Dickman and his son Mendel, a veteran.

When the Germans began to withdraw, they evidently were taken into confidence and instructed the managers to liquidate whatever they could, for the Pan knew this was his last chance to realize anything from his estate.

Everything was being sold, nothing was held back. Chasia got up some cash and sent Abram to buy a supply of potatoes for the winter. He was too late, it was all sold. He was getting ready to walk back when Zalmon suggested he stay over and ride with them, when they would go in for the Sabbath, it was on Friday.

They wound up their affairs for the week and got into a surrey to drive to Chashniki. Mendel sat on the right side, driving the horse, and Abram was perched on a

²³⁹ Chekists murdered Nicholas II and his family on July 17, 1918 in Ekaterinburg, Russia. The Cheka were Lenin's security police. See Pipes, *The Russian Revolution*, 745, 529.

box behind the seat, his arms folded, between the driver and his father, looking ahead between their shoulders. When they entered the forest, Abram noticed a person ahead of them crossing the road. He had what looked like a weapon. He watched the man stop. As they neared him he was convinced it was a rifle. He raised it, aiming it at the road. Loudly Abram warned Mendel that there was a man aiming at them, he hardly let the words out when a shot was heard, and another and another, there were five in all. One of the bullets grazed Mendel's shoulder and also Abram's student cap and shot off the student emblem he wore. Later they found other places on the back of the horse's yoke. What probably saved them was Mendel's presence of mind, he began to zigzag the horse so that the following bullets went astray. One more tale to tell of a narrow escape.

During the entire war Germany occupied most of Poland and in 1916 Poland proclaimed its Independence under German Protectorate. In 1918 when German pulled out from the occupied territories under the Brest Litovsk Treaties (of course they pulled out because the Western Front was collapsing) Polish Armies began to advance toward Russia. Not having any opposition they advanced within 15 versts of Chasniki and Lepel was taken. They could have gone further but settled there and dug in to defend it.

The R.S.F.S.R. (Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic) Government found itself surrounded by enemy forces from everywhere.²⁴⁰ Trotsky had just begun to organize the Red Army, there was no one to lead them. Officer Training Schools were

²⁴⁰ For more information on the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, see Richard Pipes, *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (New York: Atheneum, 1968).

established to make commanders, as they were called, to lead and train the ragged Army they were able to gather. The future looked very bleak. From Siberia Admiral Kolchak was advancing with a bunch of mercenaries, General Denikin advanced in the Ukraine, cutting off the bread basket of Europe.²⁴¹ General Wrangel occupied the Don Basin where all the coal for Russia came from, General Udenitch was knocking on the door of Petrograd.²⁴² General Petlura roamed at will in the Ukrainian area and spilled over in neighboring areas, robbing and pillaging, particularly against the Jewish population (he was later assassinated in Paris by a son of a victim, it was a world-famous trial in the twenties).²⁴³

The situation was very tense. Polish patrols penetrated beyond the established line to probe the defense of the Russians, they questioned whomever they found. The people had no information to give them, Poles thought that it was kept from them and often

²⁴¹ For information on the Russian Civil War, see Jonathan D. Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926: Ten Years That Shook the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Admiral Kolchak led the White military forces in Siberia, while General Denikin led the White Volunteer Army in Southern Russia and Ukraine. See Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 147.

²⁴² General Baron Wrangel became the leader of the Volunteer Army after General Denikin's resignation. See Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 152. General Nikolay Yudenich led White troops to take Petrograd but was unsuccessful. See Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III, 1914 to 2008*, 33.

²⁴³ Symon Petlyura, or Petliura, was a Ukrainian nationalist who led forces to "re-establish an independent Ukraine" during the civil war. Though there is no evidence which proves Petlyura authorized the violence towards Jews in Ukraine, he did allow his forces to engage in pogroms without consequences. Antony Polonsky writes, "Petlyura was nevertheless to tolerate those within the armed forces who were guilty of anti-Jewish violence." Shalom Schwarzbard assassinated Petlyura in 1926 for his involvement in the pogroms. See Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III, 1914 to 2008*, 34, 37, 36.

punished the question persons. Even if they knew anything, it would be construed as treason by the Russians, so it was bad either way.

Several divisions made up of Latvian soldiers, who had excelled on the Petrograd Front, were dispatched to protect the Chashniki area. Trenches were hurriedly dug, again the population had to supply the manpower. Darkness of night was used to dig for the first contingent, later when the Polish tide was stopped, a breather spell for a short while was welcome.

The day before Yom Kippur a drive by the Poles began toward the area, the Latvian Army retreated on the outside of town and the Poles advanced close to the other side of town. A few cannon shots were exchanged over the city, but fortunately nothing exploded in the city. The River Ulianka originated from the marshes above Lepel and Lepel had locks to control the flow of water. Suddenly the river rose, they opened the locks in hopes of catching some of the soldiers in low places. Some rifles were abandoned when they fled to higher ground. Martial law was declared immediately, catching worshippers in the Synagogue. Some made their way by hugging walls and not appearing in the open. Service was cut short to enable the worshippers to get home earlier. The belfry in the Church was set up as an observation point. The Rappaport back yard was in full view of the belfry, which made movement impossible. Chasia was not anywhere to be seen and this created much anxiety. Abram and Lazar, the oldest of the Rappaport children, fifteen years of age, had responsibility for the other three children, two girls, thirteen and eleven and a boy, five.

It was too dangerous to go out to look for Chasia. They gathered close to the house so as not to be spotted from the Belfry. A patrol on horseback, at high speed, rode over the cobblestone street from time to time. The echo of the hoofs in the quiet of the night sounded very ominous. The city itself was in no man's land and with the exception of the patrol, nothing was stirring.

An ice house between the Rappaport house and next door was the only building. The ice house belonged to a soft drink plant. An ice house was a structure over a deep pit in the ground that was filled with blocks of ice, sawed on the river and dropped in it. This was then covered with straw and it served to preserve the ice until fresh ice came in. The structure over it gabled and came down to about two feet off the ground. From this direction a faint call came. They recognized Chasia's voice. Lazar and Abram crouched over to the place, got a ladder and helped Chasia to get down from her perch on top of the ice house. She managed to get to the top, but was afraid to slide down too fast. When the curfew had caught her away from home, she managed to slink over to the soft drink plant and climb on top of the ice house.

It was a happy reunion for her with the little children, they all gathered around, as she said later, like little chicks under a hen. Moses Rappaport, the owner of the house and father of the children, was away on a business trip.

Chasia later recalled what took place that Yom Kippur Night: the service was in progress when suddenly two soldiers rushed inside and ordered everyone to leave and get home as soon as possible. After a certain hour, anyone caught on the street would be shot. There was a scramble for the exit. The women, being separated from the men, did not get

the message, but could see from their balcony that something was amiss. When they began to evacuate the Synagogue it took them much longer than the people on the first floor, this was why she did not get home in time. She had to make her way from yard to yard.

Before dawn the town was awakened to what sounded like cannon fire, the windows shook. This firing did not last very long, apparently the other side did not respond and so they waited. There was no movement of any kind all day long. To be in no man's land is much worse than under attack, they all agreed.

At the end of the day another patrol streaked through the town back and forth. Nothing happened. Evidently the patrol was probing its way to see if there was still any enemy there. Shortly after, artillery came clanking along on cobbled stone streets, surrounded by foot soldiers. The water, released by opening flood gates, had no effect on the Latvian Army. From all indications the Polish Army just probed the strength of the Latvian Force here. They retreated to their dug-in positions until Trotsky launched an attack and drove the Polish Army all the way to Warsaw.²⁴⁴

Trotsky realized that the Red Guard was not a force to build a dependable Army. He did away with the Red Guard and replaced it completely with the Red Army. It was not easy to mobilize again after the Army deserted. People were tired of fighting, they did not want any part of any army. It was a new ball game. How could he get the people awakened to the threat of the Capitalists who were determined to choke the Revolution?

²⁴⁴ On Soviet-Polish War, see Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926*, 153-157, 164-166.

A tremendous educational campaign was launched. The Komsomol organization played a very active part in making the program successful. Young men, sent in to the villages, fraternized with the local Soviets and sold them on the life and death importance for the success of the Revolution in the face of all the vultures who gathered on the periphery. The Rabotchiy Fakultet (Workers Faculty), where a young man could become an officer in a very short time, had great appeal.²⁴⁵ The Army at first was a halfway voluntary force and gradually added conscription in the early twenties. A new hat was designed along the lines of the German Kaiser Helmet, with a pointed arrangement at the top, only it was made of cloth.

The Communist Party insisted on having control over the military command. They had a Political Commissar at every Command Office so as not to be tempted to do anything wrong. It created some discontent at first, but worked out very well in the long run.

The problems seemed insurmountable, and it is difficult yet to realize that the effort resulted in victory. Logistics were such an enormous task—how do you transport an Army when you do not have any means of conveyance? Each community was mobilized to furnish vehicles, horses and drivers to take supplies or whatever to the next community. The next community did the same thing and this way it got to wherever it was destined to go. The soldiers marched on foot, like they always had. Heavy, large guns that took as many as twelve or more horses were supplied the same way. While going through Chashniki, some of the heavy artillery and a horse dropped out, but this

²⁴⁵ Rabochiy fakultet or Rabochii fakultet.

did not faze the soldiers, several mounted in place with ropes across their shoulders until a horse was brought up. Uniforms were scarce, the only times that were plentiful were the hats with the peaked tops. On the whole, it was the most ragamuffin army one could imagine, yet they reached Warsaw.

When the Russian Armies got into Poland they found the situation quite different, there was never too much love between the two people. Supplies did not reach there in time to do any good. Marshal Pilsudski was a great strategist, he drew the Red Army too far in, and then counterattacked on two flanks, forcing a retreat toward the Berezina River and inflicting tremendous losses.²⁴⁶ Soldiers who came back gave horrible accounts of the crossing of the river. Literally speaking, a bridge of fallen horses and human corpses was made to get across the river. Pilsudski kept on pressing until the Polish Army came back to its old position outside of Chashniki, where the Front remained until a peace treaty was signed in 1920.²⁴⁷

Many unnecessary skirmishes took place and casualties on both sides were useless. Constant shifts of soldiers from one front to another was one those common occurrences. During one of these exchanges a Division of Siberian Cossacks came over to replace a Division that had been there quite awhile.

The newly arrived soldiers, fatigued from the long journey, were warned of the possibility of a sudden raid such as had been taking place regularly. They let their guard down and retired for the night, unsuspecting that during the night the Poles would attack

²⁴⁶ Józef Pilsudski was Polish president and commander-in-chief. See Smele, *The "Russian" Civil Wars, 1916-1926*, 153.

²⁴⁷ Fighting ended in October but the Treaty of Riga was not signed until March 18, 1921. See, Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 202.

and cause twenty-six casualties in the most brutal way. In addition to bullet holes, their bodies were pierced with bayonet holes.

It was nothing unusual for casualties to be brought in from the front, but somehow, this time it aroused the entire community. They were brought in two to a sled. A common grave was dug at an open area in front of the church, they were laid in the grave, cordwood fashion, in two rows. High military officials made speeches condemning the brutality of the enemy. The funeral military march had more meaning that day than at any other time. Everyone attending threw a shovel of dirt over the bodies. The International was sung with great enthusiasm and full of emotion.

Not having any barracks, soldiers were stationed in homes. Everyone shared whatever they had with the soldiers. On one of these Army exchanges, Chasia and Abram shared their quarters with three young soldiers in their late teens, one was an Estonian, the others were from far away. They were such nice boys that the Davidsons hated to see them go when their time came to leave for the Front line.

To wake to the vibration of window panes from the sound of artillery was nothing unusual. After one of these battles, wounded soldiers were brought in to town for treatment. The same young boys who had stayed with the Davidsons were among the wounded. This shock really brought the whole war close to home.

After the Germans left, the area had what seemed an unlimited supply of dyes, sugar, and saccharine. Open trade was forbidden by the Soviet Government and a Black Market traffic took over. Vitebsk became the key point for this area. By now the ration

system was established. The distribution was to three groups: Labor got Card Number One, Non-working Class had Card Number Two, the Number Three card was given to the Bourgeoisie who received what was left over. Then there was a Children's Card which received first preference over all.²⁴⁸

White Russia, mostly agrarian country, had a difficult time getting adjusted to the new system. Demands on peasants to give up their residual farm products forces them to dispose of whatever they could to the Black Market smugglers. The same was true of anything they needed besides farm products—salt, sugar, dyes for their yarn and countless items need for family use.

In the course of transporting these goods they became prey to the various Soviets in the villages. These goods would be confiscated, supposedly by order from above, but in truth, they never reached any Government warehouse to be distributed by the Commune store.

Many clever improvisations were made: sleds had double bottoms, hay nets had a small net holding the dye or saccharine or a bag of sugar. This would be put inside of the large net, hay packed around it and the passengers would sit on it. Women made jackets, sewing vertical rows every five inches apart and filled it with granular sugar, throwing a Kozhuch (sheepskin coat) over it. In case of a search they just sat there on the hay net, thus protecting the net and whatever was in them. New roads were always made around the village over the frozen ground to avoid going through it. In the city, on the Black

²⁴⁸ On War Communism, see Silvana Malle, *The Economic Organization of War Communism, 1918-1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Also see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *The Russian Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 78-83.

Market Square, the smugglers had only things they could pick up and run with, once the alarm of a raid was given. Some were always caught and their goods confiscated then, they were brought to the Police Station. Those arrested frequently sat helplessly for endless hours awaiting their turn to be questioned and given a patriotic dressing down by some illiterate, rude, official for not being loyal to the cause of the Proletarian Revolution.

Summer made it possible for a bunch of youngsters to engage in the act of smuggling sugar to Vitebsk and bring notions back. Thirty versts from Chashniki, they left in early morning and leisurely walked to catch a Steamboat in Beshenkovitch, to travel all night. The boat, always crowded, had standing room only and they rested their backs against the wall and napped, swaying back and forth, waking when the back of the head hit the wall. Not to arouse suspicion they had to be on the move. In the City they had their sources to unload the sugar, some of it solidified, being close to the body, but this was no obstacle, they pulverized it in the bag and it was acceptable. Not very sanitary, to say the least, but this was an accepted fact.

At the Dry Market, or Black Market as it was sometimes called, they bargained for head kerchiefs, sewing thread, rubber shoes, anything light and saleable. This Abram did all summer long.

In building a Russian oven, a layer of salt to keep the heat in was spread under the top layer of bricks for the floor of the oven. The more salt, the longer the heat would stay in. During the many shortages, salt was one of the critical items. This was due to the broken down transportation system. Salt, to a peasant, was a very necessary item. When

hog killing time came along, or any salting down of meats was done, salt was the necessary item.

Someone had the bright idea that there was plenty of salt under the oven floor. Soon the oven floors were raised and the salt was replaced with sand. In the meantime salt became available for preserving foods. Salt became a hot smuggling item.

Kerosene, very difficult to conceal in smuggling, for awhile became very scarce. The peasants used kindling for light, the cities had a much more difficult time. The Commune Stores tried to supply it on a ration basis. To light a large lamp was a luxury, most resorted to a wick inserted in a bottle and used them, it gave up a poor light and smoked but it gave some light. To make kindling required a certain type of pine, the layers split off very easily once started. A contraption like a clothes pin held the splinter, the charred part had to be clipped off every so often to keep it from going out.

A military tribunal in the Headquarters of the trade union was set up to try deserters from the Army. It was located across the street from Chasia's living quarters. One could see the whole procedure of justice, meted out to the offenders. The Judge was a young Commissar in his early thirties, he sat behind a desk, a soldier on each side. An offender was brought in, one of the soldiers acted as a prosecutor and spoke vehemently to the Judge, all the time pointing a finger at the defendant. After a short while, the Judge spoke. The accused was taken out of the room and was seen led away by a guard into the field. A few shots were heard and shortly after that the Guard, an Armenian, came back whistling. This aroused the curiosity of the youngsters, who had watched the proceedings

from Chasia's window, they went into the field to investigate and found a freshly covered grave. There were other graves nearby.

During the winter months, when soldiers were constantly shifted to this front and sporadic battles took place, a Chinese Division came and one of those battles took place bringing many casualties into town. An appeal was made for blankets. The response was negative. The next time it happened on a Saturday, when they were on the way to the Synagogue. The Chinese Commander had his soldiers stationed on the main streets and proceeded to take off the fine Caracul and Fox coats from the backs of the people. He had a house piled high.²⁴⁹ An announcement follow: "All coats are redeemable in exchange for old coats or blankets." It did not matter in what condition the coats or blankets were, as long as they served to cover the wounded. Abram had an old coat and gladly swapped it with a wealthy neighbor for several pair of flannel underwear.

Mordecai did much work in coping saw art, making many kind of intricate designs such as tables, picture frames, and many designs of his own. While he was sawing away at the different patterns, Abram collected the odd shapes and let him imagination roam as he assembled the many interesting forms into all sorts of imaginary fantasies. From then on, any time there was any construction or cabinet building, he was fascinated with the rejects.

²⁴⁹ A caracul is the pelt of a karakul sheep or lamb.

A tombstone carver chipped away at granite, to carve letters, and added a design of the Star of David. Abram picked up a chip from the stone and shaped a chisel in the blacksmith shop and began to play around with it. Without realizing it, he had a face carved in the chip of stone. The stone carver, a gentle man, encouraged him by giving him a much more suitable piece of stone and loaned him one of his small stone chisels. This set Abram on the road to thinking in terms of sculpture. Pottery was his next expose to creativity and after getting a piece of clay, he began to shape small heads: such as a likenesses good enough to know that they were Turgenev, Lermontov, Gogol and Tolstoy—the Russian authors he had studied in his school book.²⁵⁰

Always in need of some supplementary income, Abram made pocket books using book binding cover material and sold them wherever he could. Carving cane handles proved popular. Soldiers going through were fascinated with some of the designs, especially since some were buxom, naked ladies.

When Mordecai went to America, he left his coping saw frame and a couple of packages of saw blades. Abram took advantage of it and soon excelled in the craft, making small jewelry chests with secret compartments that he was able to sell.

Sitting on a bench in the street one day, where there was much soldier traffic, he was busy carving a cane handle and had some of his canes displayed by him. He noticed the same boots passing back and forth in front of him. When he looked up there stood an officer in the Red Army, he was in public relations. “Do you have any other carving that you have done?” he asked Abram. This inquiry frightened him at first but the officer put

²⁵⁰ These were authors of Golden Age 19th century Russian literature.

him at ease and sat next to him to gain his confidence. When the officer saw all the little heads he had done in clay, he was very impressed and suggested that Abram go to an Art School. This was more than Abram could hope for. To go to an Art School was not as simple as it sounded. Chasia entered into this plan. An Art School—where? And how could it be achieved? The officer felt sure that he could arrange for it through his connection with the public relations department in the Army. Chasia needed to know whether he, at such a young age, would have to volunteer for enlistment. He assured her that this case could be handled as a special educational promotion of talent discovery. He promised to return in a few days with all the necessary credentials and again insisted that Abram would not be a soldier.

This was not an easy decision for Chasia to make, especially since the news that Chaim Meyer had supposedly died in the city of Kharkov when the Germans and Red Army had one of those unnecessary skirmishes.²⁵¹

A mutual friend who lived in Kharkov was advised that Chaim Meyer was a casualty of a battle and was in the hospital in a very serious condition. The friend never had been able to establish how he died or the exact date of death, there were so many casualties they lost track of all particulars. A book peddler also tried to find out something, to no avail. It was through this book peddler, when he came to Chashniki, that the family got any information that he had died. This was very difficult for Chasia and Abram to bear.

²⁵¹ Kharkov, or Kharkiv, is a city in Ukraine.

Uncle Hillel lived next door to Chasia. He sent word to Abram to come by to see him early one morning. This was an unusual request, for Abram to come to see him this early in the morning. Something out of the ordinary must be taking place. Abram came as requested, Hillel and the samovar on the table and a glass was placed at Abram's place. Near the glass was a note, it was so close it was almost in the way. Abram pushed it aside and poured his glass and waited for Uncle Hillel to come out with whatever he had on his mind. His conversation was strange, as he talked he pushed the note back over to Abram. Being brought up not to read anyone else's mail or notes, he pushed it back. Hillel finally handed it to Abram and said, "Read it." The note read: "From today on you are to say Kaddish for your father."²⁵² In a choking voice he told him that sometime later he would tell him more about it, but for now he should go to Shul.

Chasia was not in any shape to receive such a blow, she had just gone through emotional problems that had caused blisters on her head, they would burst and leave open scars which attracted lice, something everyone in Russia had to deal with constantly. Abram was the only one she could show it to without being embarrassed. She was just getting over it, with her scalp clear.

According to Jewish tradition a tear in clothing must be made as a sign of mourning, this Abram could not do, for it would be a sure giveaway.²⁵³ The Rabbi suggested that an inner garment would suffice, but that too created problems because it had to be laundered. Abram avoided a change of clothing for a long time, but finally she

²⁵² Kaddish is "a prayer customarily recited by Jewish mourners." See Polonsky, "Glossary," in *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume II, 1881-1914*, 412.

²⁵³ This is a "ceremonial representation of rending the garments in grief." See Zborowski and Herzog, *Life is with People*, 378.

got wise to it and discovered the tear. She took Chaim Meyer's death very hard at first but soon got over it. For many years she never gave up hope that he would return. It was not easy for Abram to go to the Synagogue three times daily to say Kaddish.

It was a surprise when she agreed to let Abram go and for her to be left alone. Actually it was difficult to make ends meet, and this was one way of getting some relief. Help from America stopped coming, not even a letter had been received since the Revolution began.

The Officer came with the proper introductory letter to the Chairman of the Executive Soviet for the Province of Vitebsk with a request from the public relations department of the Red Army to make it possible for Abram to enter the Vitebsk Government Art School.²⁵⁴ Uncle Hirshel was going to Vitebsk with a load of linseed oil, he let him ride along.

Headquarters for the Province Soviet was in the former Tsarist Governor's Palace, overlooking the Dvina River. After passing the picky interviews by the various officials, Abram was at last escorted to the Chairman of the Executive Soviet. The large, sumptuous office had fine furniture such as Abram had never seen before. Behind a huge desk, with a glass covered top, sat a hard looking man. He stretched his hand to Abram to welcome him to the big city. His hand, when he shook it showed signs of hard work. Attentively he read the letter of introduction and was impressed with the letter from

²⁵⁴ The Vitebsk Art School was created by Marc Chagall when he was given the position of Commissar for Fine Arts in the Vitebsk region. See Victoria Charles, *Great Masters: Marc Chagall*, 22-23.

Chashniki R.K.P. (Communist Party) that stated that in Abram's background was a revolutionary brother, and by virtue of this occurrence he deserved every consideration. A slow reader, he looked at the letter a long time while Abram took in the room. Behind him were the insignia of the Hammer and Sickle and in the room, prominently displayed, were portraits of Lenin and Trotsky.

"Tovarishch [comrade] Abram, do you have any examples of your work to show to the school?" he asked. Abram had an old mackinaw, fur on the inside, and sewed tightly on the bottom. The pockets had no bottoms so the little busts of the Russian authors were way down in the corner of the mackinaw. Raising the corner so as to reach down, he began to pull out of the busts and placed them on the glass top of his desk. He broke out in a hearty laugh and invited some of his associates to see what native talent could do. After some difficulty he contacted the school and Abram was on the way to the Vitebsk Government Art School.

The Art School occupied a two story building formerly used by an insurance company. The School was founded by Marc Chagall whose home was Vitebsk. He left for Paris and Kazimir Malevich, the founder of the Suprematist Movement, and his assistant, Vera Yermolayevna, in a wheel chair, had charge of the school.²⁵⁵ There was a free atmosphere in the school, everyone worked and assisted each other. Malevich, wearing a smock and a tightly fitted oriental-like headcover decorated with an abstract design, circulated among the students, giving suggestions in a low gentle voice. The sculpture class was held on the first floor. A sculptor, who worked in Paris and did a

²⁵⁵ Malevich eventually replaced Chagall as the director of the art school and changed the emphasis to Suprematism. See Gery Souter, *Malevich: Journey to Infinity*, 189.

bronze bust of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, criticized the class once in awhile. The sculpture class, like the painting class, helped each other. Abram got a job posing a couple of hours per day. This entitled him to an extra ration of bread daily. In the class was a cousin of Marc Chagall, who painted placards for the theater. Abram made friends with him and the two worked closely, doing heads of each other.

Getting into school was one thing, but food and shelter plagued Abram. During the day was not so bad, the burners were fed wood by everyone and kept the place warm, the difficulty came at night. The wood burner had to be constantly fed, otherwise it would go down and the place became like an ice box. To get on a regular food card, Madam Yermolayevna, through her influence, got Abram a job at the Komsomol Headquarters to take care of the Communication Book, a record of all communications received and going out. Each message had to be numbered, stamped and dated when it was picked up by the courier and when a message was received. It was rather important, but Abram did not realize it at the time. He had this job in the morning and went to Art School in the afternoon. This job gave him a food card and a canteen to use in any kitchen. Two large chairs he pulled together near the stove and put a heavier block of wood, to last longer, and he spent the nights in Art School.

By Spring many changes took place. The job at the Komsomol Headquarters required a member of the Communist Party, which automatically eliminated Abram's job, doing away with his ration card at the kitchen. Posing for the class was discontinued, the only food available to him was on his regular children's ration card which was not enough. During the time when the kitchens were distributing food, there was always the

uncertainty as to what would be portioned out. Frequently it was kasha (groats), and this was not bad, a half of a canteen could be stretched out to last a couple of days. Stew was absolutely inedible. Standing in line, the aroma of the food was tantalizing. Once, as the line got closer to the window, a lady in front keeled over at the sight of a frog that got hung on the side of the ladle. The attendant jovially threw the frog aside and went on serving the fish stew. This was one of the inedible foods.

The artists in the Art School seemed to have gotten along somehow, they were all from the city and knew their way around much better than Abram who came from the country and had no connections in the hierarchy. It was necessary for Abram to drop out to get some work in order to exist. A distant relative whom he met, who operated a watchmaker shop and sold jewelry on the side, had connections had offered to help.

Back at the Art School, Kazimir Malevich, the Artist in Charge, was a delightful individual, mild in manner, who circulated among the students or colleagues and freely shared his ideas about art. He told them that he could not see why anyone should have to go to the Ukraine to paint reapers, what was wrong with reapers here? Perception in pictorial arts should be the experience of non-objectivity; there was no need to fool ourselves about space, how much is space?

The First International Art Show was organized in Moscow in 1919-1920 and the Government Art School in Vitebsk made lengthy preparations to participate. All the participants worked day and night to have their best to enter. A box-car was provided for the students to ride in and take their work. This was the general mode of transportation at that time. Malevich rated to ride in a passenger car. It seems that in most Art Schools

there is always the non-productive, fraudulent character, the Vitebsk Art School was no exception: He was a pseudo-student character who wore a gymnasium hat and had the air of an intellectual, always critical of everything, posing as an authority on everything pertaining to art, but could not do anything himself. Puffing on his curved pipe, he looked as if he might have belonged to the decadent bourgeoisie and tried to hide his past. How he managed economically no one knew. Malevich did not have time for his type, and Kunin's resentment for Malevich was understandable. Somehow he managed to get permission to go with the group to Moscow.

Traveling in the box-car with the Artists gave Kunin the opportunity he probably was looking for to be with them where they would have to listen to him. He attacked Malevich's theory of Suprematism from the point of view of it being useful to the Revolution, his not getting along with Marc Chagall, advocating to get rid of Malevich before he destroyed the School.

A night meeting of the entire school was called. Tension was high, no one exactly knew what was wrong, but during the Revolution many crises took place and somehow worked themselves out. Some thought that perhaps a report on the International Exhibition would be given and looked to it with anticipation, however, the ringleader were ready for the kill.

The meeting was called to order, as planned, and a report was given on the Exhibition, comparing the School to other schools. They were pleased to report that on the whole this School was favorably accepted. They related the difficulty they had in getting a box-car to come back on. It looked as if they might be stranded in Moscow for

some time to come. From the railroad station to the Exhibit Hall was not as simple as it was in Vitebsk. Here all they had to do was engage a Drozshka (a dray cart), but in Moscow they had to manage on the street car.

Kunin, a trouble maker, took the floor and directed all complaints to Malevich. Sneeringly, he remarked: "He rode in a passenger car, why should he care?" In this Proletarian Society, I didn't think we had any distinction, for the head to ride like a bourgeois, and the rest the best way they could." Glancing over the audience, he thought he had captivated them and he became vituperative. He went into a tirade: "Let him explain how his theory of Suprematism can serve the Proletarian Society." While all this abuse against him was shouted, Malevich stood there unconcernedly, smiling, looking into the faces of all the artists of the School.

Kunin got so exasperated with Malevich's nonchalance, he walked up to him and rudely spat in his direction (something a common peasant would do) hitting his coat. This impudent act horrified everyone. Malevich cupped his hand, raked the spit as though to kiss it, at a distance from his hand. He smacked his lips, still smiling, and said: "If my work can provoke this kind of anger in anyone, it must be worthwhile." This broke up the meeting. Malevich was surrounded with well wishers, while Kunin remained standing alone.

Difficult times lay ahead for Russia. The drought in the Volga Region, causing three million people to perish; the Kronstadt uprising, taking a heavy toll on the finest youth of the country; typhus epidemic in an alarming proportion all over Russia,

spreading due to lack of sanitation.²⁵⁶ The Health Department introduced an educational campaign against hand shaking or spitting anywhere. It discouraged kissing, as was the custom in Russia when greeting each other, especially if they had not seen each other in a long time. Appeals were made to avoid crowds, a very difficult task. In summer, cholera played havoc, particularly in the country. Enemies of the Revolution at one time surrounded Moscow within six hundred versts from every direction.²⁵⁷ Life became more difficult all along.

Activity in the Art School felt the squeeze, like any other Government agency. Wood to heat the building was impossible to get, paints and brushes and oil for mixing paint became very critical.

Abram was forced to leave and look for a means of support. The most difficult item was housing. By then a Housing Department was set up. A survey was made of all occupancy. No one had the right to occupy more rooms than was required by the formula. You registered in the district you desired to live in and they would assign quarters. You were given an order to the owner of the rooms and they had to provide rooms for you. Some fine people were forced to let in undesirables, resulting in tragedies.

Through Abram's distant cousin's connection, he was taken on as an apprentice in a jewelry shop on the main street in Vitebsk, Voksalnaya Ulitza (Railway Station Street). No one was supposed to have any gold, this was just a shop to repair jewelry. He, with

²⁵⁶ The drought in the Volga region caused a famine which killed millions in 1921-1922. See Christopher Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 203. Kronstadt sailors protested against the Bolsheviks but were quickly suppressed by Soviet troops and hundreds were executed by the Cheka. See Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 199-201.

²⁵⁷ 600 versts is approximately 397.7 miles.

his wife and small child, lived in the back of the shop. Getting the apprentice job was an opportunity of a lifetime—to work in a goldsmith shop, especially a job shop where all kinds of various jewelry came in.

Three doors from Abram's cousin lived an elderly lady whose house had been surveyed and listed for occupancy. She was in constant horror about whom they would send to live with her. When she heard from the cousin that Abram had applied for quarters, she asked if he could ask to move in with her, but the place called for two persons. Abram knew a friend from Chashniki, who was working for the Government, and invited him to share the quarters. This worked out fine. They kept the fire going for her and themselves and she had nothing to fear.

The Goldsmith shop consisted of a small anti-room with a counter. Behind the counter Rosen and Abram were the only workers, sitting on stools in front of narrow benches, with leather aprons to catch the shavings and filings of the gold. Each man had a piece of charcoal, preferably birch due to its lack of grain, approximately four by five inches long, big enough to hold in the palm of the hand. A cavity was carved in the center of the coal was a slight channel for pouring the gold out when it was melted. A metal tube flat on one end and round and curved at the other end, the flat part a quarter of an inch by three fourths of an inch. The flat part was taken in the mouth and blown into, against a flame from a wick in a metal-type flask. The coal was held with one hand and the tube in the mouth held with the other hand. It had to be blown, without interrupting to breathe, cheeks going up and down like bellows. When the gold melted, it formed a ball, a purifier dropped on it and brought skin out. This ball was emptied into a metal form, the

size of a heavy nail. It was then ready to form in whatever shape was needed. The ring of the gold indicated when it needed annealing and this process was repeated many times until the desired piece was made.

The Cheka (secret police) knew Rosen had gold and were quite aware of his Black Market dealings but could never prove anything on him. Forms shaped like nails, on the wall only made of gold and smudged over with his kerosene lamp, had all kinds of dirty rags and old clothes hung on them. During one of their raids, the Cheka literally turned the place inside out looking for hidden gold, they even sawed through legs of stools, thinking he had drilled holes in the legs to hide gold. While all the searching was going on, the gold was in forms of nails in the wall.

The Russian mark for gold was a Lion Head and 56. A demand on the Black Market was for a certain type of ring with a stone in it. Rosen set out to falsify gold by cutting it in half: one part gold, part copper, part tin, melted it gave twice the volume of gold. He made a steel punch large enough to cover the Imperial mark for gold. The tip of the punch would be heated and then placed over the real mark. Someone would hit it and it would make a pattern of true gold mark, he then punched his false gold rings with it and Black Market dealers peddled them. While Abram had a marvelous experience learning the trade, it was nerve-racking to work with anyone so dishonest.

A Red Army Officer came one day, a typical professional soldier, who would have easily had the rank of a General. He had the order of Lenin on his chest and many other medals, a large revolver dangled from his Sam Brown belt and a long sabre hung on the other side. He threw the door open with the air of authority, looked around and threw

a twenty-five ruble gold piece on the counter, “Can you make me a ring from this coin?” he questioned Rosen in a loud throaty voice. Shaking his finger horizontally, he looked at Rosen: “If you do any tricks,” he put his hand on the sabre, “Off goes your head.” To emphasize his point he pulled on the shiny sabre which looked terribly ominous. It frightened Abram but did not shake Rosen. He gave Abram the signal to prepare a mixture of “twenty-eight” the inexpensive quality gold while he prepared a coal to melt the twenty-five ruble.

The metal form had three slots in it to pour the melted gold, this was placed between Abram and him. The General would not leave, he wanted to make sure his gold piece was used. He watched the piece turn a rose color and gradually whitish and then disappear into a liquid and finally into a ball. Rosen watched Abram’s progress and at a given signal both poured the gold into the form between them. As the gold sliver turned dark, Rosen engaged the officer in meaningless chitchat and then picked up the gold to form the ring. The gold he picked up was the gold Abram melted. The next day Abram was looking for other work. When he questioned Rosen about the incident, his answer was: “He thinks I am a crook, so why should I have any consideration for him?”

This was a very difficult period for Abram in the city of Vitebsk, all the subsistence he had was the ordinary ration card which was not adequate. The alternative was to go back to Chashniki, but there Chasia hardly had enough to keep going. While in Vitebsk, he frequently visited the center sponsored by the Jewish Newspaper “Forward” which was an off shoot of the American Relief Administration organized by Herbert

Hoover, to send food and parcels of clothing from relatives in America.²⁵⁸ The Forward carried a list of packages that had arrived, by towns, and Abram often found out and informed people in Chashniki if a parcel was ever there. Postal service was not dependable so this was a useful service. And now, when he was unemployed and going through pangs of hunger, this was a good way to kill time.

While roaming the streets aimlessly one day he was tantalized by the odor of food. He followed the odor, it came from an upstairs dining room, and as he stood there wondering what kind of an eating place this was, a flat street car loaded with prisoners drove up. Lined up in twos, they were marched up the stairs. Risky as it was, Abram mixed in among them. They all lined up in front of a counter, with metal plates in their hands, but first they got a sizable piece of bread. Abram took the bread and sat down to eat some of it, stuffing the rest under his belt in the Russian blouse. When the prisoners were ready to go back, Abram had a hard time convincing the guards that he got up there by mistake.

On another occasion, free meals were announced in several central places to celebrate the passing of the nineteenth amendment in the United States, giving women suffrage. A stew was served. It was so salty and the meat was so tough that it was impossible to chew it, a knife could hardly cut it. All sorts of speculation rose as to what kind of meat was served. The bread was so good, so it was not all lost.

²⁵⁸ The American Relief Administration, directed by Herbert Hoover, attempted to “alleviate famine conditions in Soviet Russia and Ukraine in 1921-2.” See, Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: Volume III, 1914-2008*, 291. For more information, see Benjamin M. Weissman, *Herbert Hoover and Famine Relief to Soviet Russia: 1921-1923* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1974).

The Kronstadt uprising took place in March 1921. Trotsky, as Commander in Chief, took charge of the suppressing of the sailors on the Island. Only members of the Komsomol Units were supposedly used to put down the revolt on the three battleships in the harbor. The complete account of the battle was never fully told in print, those who returned gave this account of it; the Gulf of Finland, frozen over solidly this time of the year, offered no shelter to the advancing troops. The first wave was mowed down by machine gun fire, the second contingent used the bodies of the first wave for protection as they advanced, sliding the bodies in front of them. It took three days to suppress it. The casualty list was never revealed, but it was of staggering proportion. Many of Abram's friends were among the casualties.

Not finding work in Vitebsk, Abram went to see his relatives in the city of Polotsk, some 90 versts away. Normally, a 90 mile trip by train took two to three hours, but these were abnormal times.²⁵⁹ To clear the tracks after the blizzard a few days earlier took much longer; the conditions of the cars were bad, many window panes were out and stuffed with rags, paper or anything to keep the wind out, candles provided by the passengers provided the only means of lighting; the only heat came from the human load. The cars were packed to capacity.

Twice, during this distance, the train stopped in what seemed to be nowhere. On the side of the tracks a pile of wood was stacked, for the locomotive to take on as fuel.

²⁵⁹ 90 versts does not equal 90 miles. 90 versts is the equivalent of 59.6 miles.

Every able-bodied person was ordered outside to form a human chain all the way to the wood pile, with logs passed from person to person to the cab behind the engine. Wood was the only source of fuel and it burned too quickly so this process had to be repeated farther down the road.

Abram's uncle who married Chaim Meyer's sister Sarah was in the grain business, so he retained his dealing even though on a limited basis and on the Black Market. Dealing on the Black Market was no stigma against anyone, this became a way of life for everyone.

Although officially, there was no such thing as owning real property, once one occupied a residence, no one bothered to repossess it. Abram's uncle bought a house from a party who was moving away to another city and, for a certain consideration, he forfeited his claim to it. It was located about two versts from the present home, near the Dvina River.

Polotzk, quite a large city, had its water works disrupted when the enemy was dug in across the river and shelling went on continually for some time. The city itself was laid out on the gridiron plan, the citizens dug a ditch facing the intersection street to cross over to the other side. Water carriers brought water from the Dvina River by the bucket. One of the water carriers was a displaced person from the Volga Region where three million people had died from starvation as a result of the drought in 1920. He was a large man and built a route to supply water, including Abram's uncle on the route. Uncle was not quite ready to move into the house and was afraid vandals would carry off whatever

they could so he asked the water carrier if he and his family would like to live in this house until he will be ready to occupy it. He gladly accepted the offer.

A couple of weeks later Abram and his cousin, of the same age, paid the water carrier a visit. He and his wife and a twelve year old daughter lived in the house. There was hardly any furniture of any kind, and they used boxes to sit on and for a makeshift table, where a fire was going in the small oven to keep them warm. On the floor were funny looking skeletons that attracted the attention of the visitors. Upon inquiry they found out they were skeletons of rats. "In the Volga Region even this kind of food could not be had." Seeing this, Abram felt his hardship of having just about two ounces of bread a day on his ration card was not so horrible.

The railroad ticket was soon to expire and so after having a nice visit Abram went back to Vitebsk.

A pleasant surprise awaited him: a letter from Mordecai from America, the first in four years. They had received letters Abram had sent through various channels, like Finland, Manchuria, and routine mailing. There were many groups who would announce help in sending letters, some were lost but some found their way. The death of Chaim Meyer was known to them but they did not know the cause.

He was also saying that financial help would be forthcoming as soon as a way was found and he advised Abram to go back to Chashniki so as to make it easier for them to contact him.

Back in Chashniki, the news of receiving a letter from America gave new hope to Chasia and all the relatives. Chasia managed to work up a business by taking dyes to the

country to barter with the villagers for farm products. Her experience with the peasant women in her childhood paid off, she knew how to get along with them.

Abram found employment in a Linseed Oil Press Mill. Linseed oil was very much in demand for use in paint. The Mill was a small operation consisting of an eight-inch diameter metal drum, five feet long with lids at each end, a square rod entered in the center of the metal drum extending beyond, long enough to rest in a collar, a handle on the end to turn it. This was placed on metal legs and under the drum was a bed of hot charcoal. The drum was filled with crushed linseed to about three-fourths full and turned over the hot embers until exploded, pushing the end cover off. It was then ready for the press, consisting of a large oak screw with bars through the top. On the side, two men on a catwalk pushed each end of the bar, turning the screw against the exploded hot linseed. As they turned the screw, oil came out into a bucket on the side. The raw linseed was first ground between two wheels before being put into the drum. The pay was not enviable, but it was a job.

Another impressive thick packet came from America with Mordecai's hand written address. It was too evident that this was more than just an ordinary letter, because it was covered with a whole row of stamps. The envelope contained 17 different documents, all in English. Mordecai had learned that the Soviet Government gave some passports to people who were stranded because of the war and who were not counter-revolutionaries. He was convinced that Abram and Chasia would fit this description.

Mordecai instructed them to take the documents to the Soviet Government and apply for a visa. This document would give proof that they would be admitted to America.

To apply for a visa it was also necessary to translate the documents. As luck would have it, three natives from Chashniki went to England and when the Revolution broke out they came back. They were delighted to translate what turned out to be affidavits, declaring that Abram and Chasia would never be a charge on the community, that they were responsible citizens and had the means to guarantee for their well being. In addition to the translations, they needed a statement from the local authority assuring that neither one of them had any inclination toward counter-revolutionary activity and that they would not undermine the Soviet Government once they got to America. Aaron's activity helped in this case.

There was only one way to present the application: to take it to the Foreign Department, in Moscow, headed by Chicherin. Mustering the necessary finances for the trip, he [Abram] packed a large loaf of black bread, a small can of butter, some hard candy to use in place of sugar when stopped for hot water to make tea, a metal cup for getting water, the valuable documents Chasia had sewed to the inside shirt to prevent them from being stolen, and an extra pair of Laptias (bark shoes). Abram had only one leather boot on, the other was a bark shoe he wore at home and the other in the bag for the trip equipped him with three bark shoes. Bark shoes, worn by the Russians, was like a sandal it was made from the bark of basswood, made in such a way that it had loops for a light rope to be pulled through it. Many pieces of linen cloth were wrapped around the foot all the way to the knee and the ends of the rope were wrapped around it clockwise

and counter clockwise and tied at the top. If properly wrapped it was the warmest kind of attire. He attached himself to a caravan of smugglers who were going to Vitebsk.

The only train ride experience he had had was going to Polotsk and this was to visit relatives, but here he was going to a strange city and it would be necessary to change trains in Smolensk.²⁶⁰ From history books, Smolensk had a charm ever since the days of the Napoleonic War of 1812 and the Dnieper River originated not too far above. There was a fortress built during that war that fascinated him, he had hopes of having time to see it. The thought of Moscow frightened him, he did not know a soul there and had no idea how he would manage. The Alexander Railroad Station was his only hope, if they would let him be in there.

To get on the train in Vitebsk was relatively easy, it was crowded but there was standing room and the ride was not too long. Smolensk was quite a different situation. Refugees from the Volga Region filled the station from wall to wall, some having been there a long time. They slept on the floor, the stench was unbearable, many suffered from typhus. It was dangerous to come in contact with anything, even to lean against any object was dangerous for it could be contaminated. To be on the safe side was to be on the outside. To stay warm one had to keep moving. Train schedules were difficult to find out, the outside information board was not accurate. According to the information on the board, the train to Moscow would not leave for eight hours. This gave Abram the opportunity he was hoping for, to go to see the Fortress.²⁶¹ He found out it was located across the bridge over the Dnieper River, a distance of several versts. His knapsack did

²⁶⁰ Smolensk is the administrative center of Smolensk Oblast, Russia.

²⁶¹ Davidson is referring to the Smolensk Kremlin.

not get any lighter from walking back and forth outside the station. He took the hike and got back in plenty of time to board the train.

There was not much to see of the Fortress, just a wall covered with snow and no access to it, but it satisfied his curiosity.

At the station, three persons attracted Abram's attention, there was something different about them. They were not like other smugglers. Abram hung around close to them, particularly to one who showed warmth to the young inexperienced traveler. "Where are you from, Sonny?" he inquired. "You don't seem to have anything to sell." Suspicious of everyone, Abram was cagey about revealing his mission. The traveler had a way of probing until he gained Abram's confidence, and little by little they became good friends. It turned out that he, too, had connections in America. "If you will trust me I will see that you are not left in the cold once you get to Moscow." He fully realized that the little fellow was inexperienced in traveling and he wanted to help. Abram was skeptical at first, but not having anything to lose he agreed to go along with him.

At Smolensk no passenger trains were available, only boxcars were used for the public, and they felt lucky to have that. In the corner of the boxcar stood a pot belly stove and with that, plus the human load temperature, it was quite comfortable.

When the train stopped at a junction, the door to the boxcar slid open letting a gush of cold air in. It was a welcome change, for the air in the car was getting stale, this helped to freshen it up. Some passengers got off, others got on, officials came to spot-check credentials. It would have been almost impossible to check everyone, so crowded was the car. Stops were more frequent as the train neared Moscow. A feeling of

reverence came over everyone when the Station Yasnaya Polyana was entered (the home of Leo Tolstoy).²⁶² When the train approached Moscow, the door cracked open and everyone craned their necks to see some of the Onion Bulb domes of the churches, they could be seen a long way off. Abram's excitement knew no bounds at the prospect of at last getting a permit to leave Russia. The discovered friend, a six footer wearing a tall fur cap, stood above all the other passengers, making it easy for Abram not to lose sight of him.

At the Alexander Station in Moscow, where they got off, Abram was advised to follow his friend without speaking to him, he promised not to abandon him. Leaving the station they waited for a street car. The street cars were numbered, theirs was number six. When he got off, Abram followed. Carefully he looked around to see if anyone was watching and proceeded to walk, Abram had to run to keep up with the long steps his friend was making. They came to what looked like an abandoned house, on the side of the gate dangled a wire, he pulled the wire several times and waited. Before long a lady appeared. She knew him. After exchanging greetings, he pointed to Abram, assuring her that he was trustworthy. Later he had to explain his reason for coming to Moscow, for everyone who stayed in this house dealt in some kind of Black Market and Abram did not have anything to sell. They went through the abandoned house and behind it was another house used by the guests who lodged there. This place proved to be a rendezvous for smugglers. The inside was cheery. A huge samovar was on the table, people with different dialects from all over Russia had their tales to tell. This particular group dealt in

²⁶² Davidson is referring to the railroad station at Kozlova Zaseka. Yasnaya Polyana was Tolstoy's estate.

currencies and jewelry. There was a time when people had no confidence in the Soviet currency, many still thought that the Tsarist certificates would be redeemable. They were a jolly group, many escapades were told, especially about fooling the dumb authorities. Straw spread on the floor served as a pallet to sleep on.

The next day Abram made his way to the Foreign Office, Chicherin was the Foreign Commissar, and they occupied a building a few blocks from the Red Square. A Mr. Brodsky had charge of the office. Abram was questioned at length before being admitted to the building proper. Naively, he asked to see Chicherin, of course this was impossible, but Commissar Brodsky would see him.

Reaching into his bosom he pulled all the credentials he brought with him, affidavits, local Soviet character certificates, applications, photographs and personal letters appealing on behalf of his mother to let them leave Russia and join her sons. In the letters, it was also carefully pointed out the Revolutionary activity of her son, and his brother, Aaron, who was a victim of the Tsar. Commissar Brodsky appeared sympathetic and asked him to come back in a couple of days. The couple of days dragged into over a week, in the meantime Abram's bread was giving out and he realized it would be impossible to get any rationing or to buy Black Market bread. He made a last appeal and asked that they send the papers to his home.

Among the smugglers was a supply of head kerchiefs used by women. Abram bought thirty of these kerchiefs, also two pounds of Turkish tobacco and on the way to the station a smuggler had a sheepskin coat on his arm with a fine collar. Taking stock of his remaining bread he felt he could make out without two pounds of bread—the price for

the coat. He wrapped the kerchiefs around his body to keep them from being confiscated and put the sheepskin coat over his mackinaw and felt secure that no one would suspect that he had any Black Market goods with him.

No schedule was available for Smolensk. This gave Abram anxiety about bartering off some of his bread. The spare bark shoe came in handy the other one wore out long ago and he had had to replace it and was about to wear out the second spare shoe. In the station were many Ethnic groups: Polish, Mongolian, Ukrainian and the many different peoples who inhabited the Russian country. All settled down in front of the various iron gates for different parts of Russia to await the train announcement. It was cold, to keep warm one had to be on the move, flap arms and just plain keep active. The wait lasted forty-eight hours. The people in line were very good about saving a place for anyone who had to leave for one reason or another.

At last the iron gates for the Smolensk train opened. The crowd rushed over several to reach the boxcar train with half-open sliding doors manned by guards checking credentials, holding a lantern in one hand and controlling the rushing passengers with the other, while the other guard inspected the credentials. Once past the guards, one climbed into the boxcar as best one could. Once inside, sandwiched between the people, Abram was so exhausted that he fell asleep standing.

While in Moscow, waiting for a day-to-day call from the foreign office, Abram took in the architecture of the city. The tallest building he found was a nine-story apartment house. He climbed all the floors to the top floor, to take a look at the city from high up. The statues of Minin and Pozharsky, the butcher and merchant who rose against

the invaders and established Russia back to the people; the statue of Pushkin, on a low pedestal for children to enjoy, impressed him.²⁶³ The wall of the Kremlin posed a peculiar threat, he stayed away from it. The famous Black Market Square intrigued him, it had the reputation that one could get anything one's heart desired there. It was a huge square where smugglers brought their wares and many displaced persons brought whatever they had left to barter for items they needed most. There were also stands to display some of the goods, if they wanted to risk a raid and have it confiscated should they not be quick to gather it and run with it. The most vicious operation was by the so-called "Wolfpack Children." They were abandoned urchins, some abandoned by parents, or their parents killed.²⁶⁴ There was no provision to take care of them, they had to fend for themselves as best they could. They always operated in groups, therefore called: "Wolfpacks." They had a system: one would engage the operator of the stand while another would grab whatever was handy and run with it. The Vendor would make off after the thieves, in the meantime the rest would descend on the stand and clean it out of everything they could carry off. It was a frightening sight to see it in operation. The Cheka (secret police) frequently raided the Square. Everyone ran in every direction, some got caught and their wares confiscated, even taken to the police station and a fine given. Most of the time just taking away their goods was punishment enough. This type of operation prevailed all over Russia.

²⁶³ Davidson is referring to the Minin and Pozharsky monument on Red Square and the Alexander Pushkin monument in Moscow.

²⁶⁴ Many homeless children, *besprizornye*, "were forced to live on the streets, and turned to sometimes horrifyingly violent crime to survive." See Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 164.

In the boxcar, after leaving Moscow's Alexander Railroad Station's wait for forty-eight hours, they were so glad to get settled that not much was said amongst the passengers, a few kept the pot-belly stove going, the rest just dozed while leaning against each other or were just content to be quiet. Some passengers made their way close to the door to get off when the train stopped. These stops were short, just long enough to let passengers on and off. The main layover was at the junction, a few hours down the road.

At the junction a full complement of police was stationed at every car to check credentials. Abram was horrified to find that his small coin purse was missing, in it he had his identification and what small amount of money he had saved for an emergency. When he raised the ends of his coat, to reach in his pocket, he discovered a slit in his coat he knew was not there before. Feeling further he found that the slit was all the way through the head kerchief wrapped around him. He was really on the spot, he could reveal the kerchief, but had to show the slits to the police to show that he was pick-pocketed (evidently a professional saw him put the coin purse there.) The police were ready to take him off the train, if it had not been for an elderly peasant woman and a burly looking Russian man who volunteered in his behalf to the police that they saw him with the purse, and besides, they argued, he could not have gotten on without having credentials. They did not mind going to the Station Master as witnesses. The trainmaster held up the train until the Cheka cleared Abram to board it again. The only paper to write on was a piece of wrapping paper. The Cheka official wrote the permit and put his official stamp on it, which was good only for this train to Smolensk. The Cheka would have to issue another permit to Vitebsk.

In Smolensk the train was on the tracks, which meant it would be pulling out shortly. There was no time to go to the station master, who in turn would have to turn him over to the trainmaster.

Abram went straight to the train engineer and appealed for help by offering to shovel coal into the engine until they got to Vitebsk. The engineer would not hear of it. The two pounds of the Turkish Tobacco he had traded for in Moscow proved a good lure. He offered him the tobacco, plus being his coal boy, if he would only let him get home on the coal cab. If he would only claim him to be one of his crew, he would work hard. The engineer motioned for him to get on. He buried his knapsack in the corner so as not to arouse suspicion, he pulled the whistle and the train chugged along out of the station yard. The engineer warned Abram that he could not let him ride into the station, he would have to jump the train before they got in. If they discovered him on the engine coal cart, the engineer would be in serious trouble. He promised Abram that he would slow down the train and explain to him how to jump without getting hurt. Abram was sure the engineer never had a better coal shoveler, he worked faithfully not to give anyone a chance to think that the engine lacked steam. It took a lot of coal to keep one of those monsters at full capacity.

When they neared Vitebsk the engineer talked to Abram at length about how to jump and not get hurt, it was to his interest that he did not get hurt, he wanted this to be a clean jump. Abram was to keep his knapsack in front, if he fell face down it would act as a cushion, and keep him from getting hurt. He was to jump ahead of the train and away from it, in a diagonal way. With the knapsack held tightly against his chest and holding

on to the rail with the other hand, standing on the step, when he blew the whistle after slowing the train, Abram jumped into a snow pile and landed on all fours. The knapsack, as predicted, kept him from getting jarred.

The railroad station was about three versts away. He cut across fields to avoid getting anywhere near the station guards. Once in Vitebsk he felt quite secure as far as the police were concerned, he knew his way around and after all this was his home province. The most feared system, if one is caught without any identification, was the dreaded Etap (relaying prisoners from city to city until they were delivered to the place they claimed they were from). Jails were so filthy, one certainly would contract some disease and die along the way. This Abram felt he did not have to face any more.

It was April and rivers rose from their banks inundating all flat lands and covering bridges over streams. All transportation was at a standstill and here Abram was in Vitebsk without any food left to hold him. The last smugglers had left for Chashniki a few days before and were not expected back for three weeks.

There was nothing left to do but to walk the ninety-six versts. While checking at the Black Market Square, he traded for a pair of rubber overshoes for Chasia. He could make her a pair of shoes by using cloth for the uppers and the leather from leggings for soles. Not anymore said than done, he started to walk the long walk.

The snow was melting in the road and was making it slushy. Walking on the edge, it was possible to pick out some drier places, but that made the distance much longer by walking in and out. As he started through the long street that took him out of Vitebsk to the edge of town, it was up hill, the sun began to melt the snow and a never-ending

stream came down in the furrows the sleds had made. It was too late for sleds and too early for wagon wheels. Traffic was stopped and only pedestrians along the side of the road.

Out of the city, Abram turned back to look at the long, wide street he had just passed. The thatched roofs on the houses showed no sign of snow on them, the warm sun had melted it all away. It was a clear day and he was glad that the days were getting longer to enable him to cover more ground before night. The road had no markings, the width of it was the only identification that it was the main road in the direction he was going.

In the past the peasants' hospitality was extended to anyone who ventured by, but in these days, to trust anyone was a thing of the past. Every stranger was a suspect and was not welcome in any home. Abram tried to make it the first day to the place in the forest where, during the smuggling days, he stopped with a caravan to rest and feed the horse. He had hoped they would recognize him and let him rest awhile before continuing on the rest of the journey.

Walking briskly, he covered much ground that day. Right at dusk, in a village at the edge of the forest, he asked a peasant family to let him rest and have something to eat. He had hoped to swap one of his kerchiefs for something to eat. They had a fire going for the evening, a row of potatoes in front of the fire was about ready to come out. To his surprise, they offered him a baked potato and some clabber, a slice of bread and some milk. It tasted so good, in gratitude he gave the lady a kerchief with the slit in it. She was

thankful to get it and said she could easily darn the slit so that no one would know it was there.

The man of the house came in as Abram was getting about ready to go. When he found out where he was heading, he shook his head, looking down at Abram who was small in comparison with the large peasant: “Little boy, don’t you know about all the bandits who roam these forests? They’ll kill you for your coat. I guess in the morning your body will be found by the side of the road, or whatever is left of it when the wolves get through with it.” Casually, Abram answered him: “What would anyone want to kill me for? I have nothing but my soul, and this is not of much value to bandits, as for wolves, I thought of them, but I think I can fight them off with a healthy dubina (heavy stick).” Not giving it any more thought, Abram started out on the road that took him through the forest.

The sky was clear, no sign of any snow and soon the moon would be out. A light frost hardened the snow on the side of the road, giving it a crunchy sound as he walked on it. He cut down a sturdy sapling to make a stick for protection against wolves and to make it easier to walk. The echo of falling dry branches mixed with his crunchy footsteps and an occasional owl screech, the moon began to make its appearance over some treetops. It was relaxing as he walked fast. He had always heard that the way to fight off a wolf was to swing a heavy stick, to aim at the legs—a wolf had four legs but only one head. Somehow, the deeper he got into the forest, the less he felt any danger. Robbers—the idea sounded ridiculous to him. He felt more in danger if he was on a sled or wagon,

for then, he reasoned, they would have some reason to hold him up, but a lonely kid walking with a bag on his back would not be bothered.

He came to a clearing in the forest, a small bridge spanned a brook and the sound of the running water was soothing, Abram stopped to rest, leaned over the rail to watch the swift running water underneath, the edges frozen over forming a lacy pattern where the moon shone on it. The sound was soothing and he did not feel so alone. In the distance he heard horses' hoofsteps, a welcome sound, and he could make out a man walking behind the sled, a normal way for a driver to spare his horse. The man was startled when Abram spoke to him, evidently he did not notice him leaning on the bridge rail. The driver jumped on the sled, hit the horse and sped away. This episode struck him as being very funny, here was a young, un-armed kid afraid of anyone who could be dangerous, and there was a grown man scared of him. This paradox made him laugh out loud and helped him to continue his walk.

It must have been midnight when Abram reached the lonely house in the forest which the smugglers used as a resting point. The moon hid behind the oncoming clouds, there seemed to be a snowstorm in the making, the wind was blowing harder and felt sharper all along. The house was well protected by several dogs and they kept Abram from getting close to the house and he was busy to keep them from getting close to him. The owner of the house, with a lantern, came out to investigate what agitated the dogs so. It did not take long to establish identification. He was fed left-overs a drink of vodka to relax him and retired on top of the oven. Tired, he slept until noon. The rest of the way was much more difficult, he faced the wind for many miles, he was forced to walk

sideways most of the way. Beshenkovichy was not too far away but it took him the rest of the day to get there. Relatives put him up for the night, to start again the following day.

On the third day he came within sight of Chashniki, he could see the church spire. The river was still within its banks but was rising. Ice slabs whirled and rushed down the stream. To wait meant to be marooned for several weeks, this he could not afford. The only way was to manage to jump from slab to slab, a dangerous thing. He made it.

Preparation was being made for baking Matzos (unleavened bread) used for Passover. This was a communal affair: a house was prepared in accordance with all the ritual demands and approved by the Rabbi. The kitchen was scoured and all utensils used during the year removed, the oven fired and swept clean for the next firing, special new wooden containers were brought in to make sure no dough ever soured in it, tables were scrubbed and washed for rolling the dough. Long wooden poles and long pallets, the end looked like a shovel, picked up the baked matzos in the oven. The physical end of the operation completed, a professional baker was hired, it took skill to know how long to leave a matzo in the oven, it could easily get burned if not removed in time.

A family who intended to use the facility provided a lady to roll the dough, she also rolled her own and helped with the others', and they reciprocated the same way. Once the matzo was rolled to the proper thickness and size, it was then spread out on a table for scoring. This was usually done by youngsters who had a big time running the toothed wheel over it, making all sorts of designs on it, this kept it from bubbling up. The flour used was white wheat flour of the best quality.

Chasia could not afford to get such flour, she resorted to oat flour she had ground in the Mill and had the Rabbi's approval to use it. Oat flour was sticky and would not roll, she was very embarrassed by it, but did not know how to get out of this dilemma. They all felt very sorry for her and would have gladly offered her some of theirs, but she was too proud to accept what she would consider charity. Courageously she kept her tears back and struggled right on, trying to make this flour do.

One of the unbelievable things happened at this very moment: the postman brought a post card from the American Relief Administration, informing her that five parcels of food were waiting in the A.R.A. Office, sent from Mordecai in America. Everyone jumped for joy and the necessary wheat flour was arranged as a loan until the packages were received. Someone knew a friend in the next town who was a recipient of such a package and there was quite a bit of flour in it. The postman came back, there was another food package in Abram's name that he had overlooked. The way the project worked, a relative in America was allowed to send a limit of five packages per person, each package was worth ten dollars, two thirds of the food was delivered to the relative and the other third was used for relief to the Russia people. This program saved millions of people from starving under Herbert Hoover American Relief Program.

Abram hired a horse and wagon as soon as the roads became passable and was on his way to claim the packages, he had no idea what was in them. This was quite a different trip from all the other trips he had taken. At the warehouse, after establishing his identity, he was called in the office where he met his first American, he could not help but try to imagine his brothers to be like this man. Abram had the copies of the affidavit

that he took to Moscow, which proved without any doubt that he was the right owner of the packages. The packages were piled on the platform. Each package contained the following; fifty pounds of wheat flour, fifteen pounds of sugar, twenty-five pounds of corn (they thought it was rice) ten pounds of smoked bacon, twenty cans of condensed milk (another item in Russia they did not know how to use), one pound of tea. Multiply this by ten and it's easy to understand that this made them the wealthiest people in town. The condensed milk, since they did not know how to use it, was sold in Vitebsk to some sophisticated people who took advantage of them. The bacon, Abram and a cousin took to Moscow, he was anxious to inquire about the visas, but got nowhere. The bacon they swapped for gold coins that were still available. The corn just would not get soft no matter how long they cooked it.

Stopping in the foreign office to inquire about the visas made Abram realize that they had to find another way to get out of Russia. He was determined when he got back to Chashniki to begin work on another avenue of escape.

Communication was rather sporadic, time lapsed between mail deliveries. To receive a letter was an adventurous event.

By now a peace treaty was signed with Poland, they moved back quite a distance from Chashniki.²⁶⁵ However, all kinds of goods were hoarded by speculators who still carried on a lucrative Black Market business.

²⁶⁵ The peace treaty with Poland was signed March 18, 1921. See Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 202.

The Government began to consolidate its gains and to organize a stable Government on the Soviet ideology. The enemies who threatened from all sides were defeated: Kolchak in Siberia, Wrangel driven out from the Don Basin liberating the coal, Denikin was no longer in the Ukraine, Udenich was no threat against Leningrad.²⁶⁶ Taxation became more uniform. They began to focus their attention on preserving resources in the Interior.

Distribution of land belonging to large landowners began to take place everywhere. Soldiers returning from the Army got first choice. Newly formed families, who normally shared in the parents' meager allotment of land, now had an opportunity to get some of their own land. There was much land that belonged to the Pan that came to the edge of the city and was now divided into plots. It was previously announced that the plots along the main road would be of a certain width and of a certain depth. Many Jewish people, who were denied farm land under the Tsar, now staked out claims to certain parcels. This of course was subject to approval under certain conditions, especially the proximity of the land. Many Jewish people simply were not the agrarian type and did not bother about it. Uncle Hirshel who had three boys old enough to plow and make a crop staked off a strip near the city. The land was yours as long as you worked it, but even then it was unbelievable that a Jew would be given claim to a piece of land. Collective farms were organized for workers who lived on the estate. There was

²⁶⁶ Kolchak was captured and executed on February 7, 1920. Denikin resigned in March. Wrangel assumed control of the Volunteer Army but was eventually defeated by the Red Army. Christopher Read argues that the Whites failed because "politically, the movement was as incoherent and disorganised as it was militarily organised." See Read, *War and Revolution in Russia, 1914-22*, 152-3.

skepticism of how this kind of arrangement would work. The Pan left many cows and teams of horses and much of the farm implements quite suitable for a collective farm. Some families, who lived in the Manor, moved in the Pan's far too elaborate house and, not suitable to individual living accommodations, it created problems. The large kitchen, for one thing, had to be shared by too many families.

So dilapidation set in, window panes were broken, other facilities broke down. Some claimed to work harder than others to keep the quarters livable. Before long, many left and went back to the villages where they came from. Some were successful in staking out some land that belonged to the Pan for their use.

A soldier, Peter who was wounded in the early battles of the Revolution in Petrograd, had priority over anyone else to get enough land close to the village of his father. He secured a choice piece of ground and a piece of meadow for a hay crop. While in Petrograd he met a woman who was willing to adapt to the life of a peasant woman in spite of being a city person. She did not know anything of peasant life and her speech dialect was of the Great Russia, quite different from the Byelorussian dialect. She had difficulty getting accepted.

There was no room in the parents' house for them, so they made a temporary quarters in the hut where the grain was dried. Abram made friends with him and saw a lot of them.

His brother helped him fell trees for a cabin, his father let him use his horse and sled to haul the logs to the location. The villagers, in true tradition, came around to help clean the bark off and hew the sides as well as notch the ends to fit on top of other logs.

Since Peter did not have anything, they made their women prepare means and bring them to the job, a custom normally supplied by the person who is doing the building. The women were very intrigued with this city woman, whom they had sized up as a useless person, proving to be as much help as a man. With the whole village helping it did not take long for the cabin to go up. Straw for the thatched roof was also provided, unsolicited.

When the cabin was livable, neighbors started bringing house warming gifts: a rooster and a couple of hens, by one neighbor; a young pig; a calf; a yearling colt, given by this brother; a sheep; even a couple of geese. His father gave him a young cow. Abram visited him a couple of years later and he was surprised at how quickly he became a Khoziain (a respectful boss).

Patriotism, to the cause of the Revolution, took on a fanatical course, especially among the younger set. Indoctrination was so thorough that no sacrifice was too big. Chashniki had a small Senior Communist Party R.K.P., but the zeal and devotion was unbelievable for the size of the town. There was also a Komsomol Party (a youth party) and when a call came to do something patriotic, no line was drawn, everyone felt it a privilege to serve. Subbotnik (to give up the day of rest for work) was very popular to give to the State.

Chashniki had a brewery, it was not in use since the first day of the First World War. Someone had the idea that if the partitions were knocked down, it would make a great theater hall, or just for use as public hall.

A cadre of Subbotniks was organized and ropes tied to some of the walls, they tugged and pulled and hammered on the foundation. Elderly citizens also got in the spirit to help, mostly with advice. This work was going on for a long time on every weekend until finally the walls fell. In those days mortar was made of red clay mixed with sand, after it dried it was unbelievably hard. All the brick had to be cleaned to use again once the construction would begin.

A paper factory was located near Chashniki, the pulp wood was floated down the river and collected in a huge manmade pond. Again the Subbotniks were called on to cut trees and float them to the Mill. That year, winter was setting in much earlier than expected and much of the pulp wood was still in the pond, it had to be pulled out so that it would not freeze in the ice and be lost next Spring when the river rose and inundated the entire area. Again the Subbotniks came to the rescue. The freeze was coming in so fast that the clothing on the workers froze, it stood up when taken off.

When the Revolution broke out, lawlessness had no bounds. Peasants, who were deprived of cutting trees for homes, went on a spree of cutting trees at random, never bothering about cleaning debris. As a result, it created a tremendous fire hazard. The Soviet Government started a conservation program and needed workers to go into the woods to get the dry brush and haul it over to accessible places where it would be control-burned. Crews of young people were taken into the woods to do this job.

Abram and a friend found out about a supply of wooden nails in the next town, used by shoemakers. They walked a distance of about fifteen miles, bought the nails and

sold them at a profit. This they did for several weeks. Banditry was flourishing during that time, and they had to find a way to conceal their money in case of a holdup. They sewed false patches on their pants and concealed the money in the patches. Someone learned of their operation and not too much later they were held up by a couple of ruffians, who made them turn their pockets inside out and lower their pants while they searched around their bodies, but the money they never found. This experience scared them enough to give up this venture.

Mania, Hillel's younger daughter who married Yerofim Suchotin, the lawyer, lived in Penza, Siberian Russia.²⁶⁷ He became very wealthy, when he and two partners developed a match that hissed when ignited and the wind could not put it out. They sold it to the Tsarist Government for the Army and made a fortune out of it. When Kolchak's Army occupied Penza, Suchotin and many other Bourgeoisie undertook to support his forces in the area. After Kolchak's defeat, he and many others were shot by a firing squad. Mania had to renounce her past and learn to sew to survive. Her only daughter, who was growing up under a French Governess and a German Governess, was forced to change her name and to renounce her father.

Such things were not uncommon and while they sat there, talking about Abram's cousin's fate, they all felt he got what he deserved. A friend, who was a Rabbinical student of great promise, told them that he had just applied to the Komsomol and had given up his Rabbinical studies. To join the Komsomol was not as simple as all this. A

²⁶⁷ Penza was not in Siberia.

member of the Komsomol had to submit your name and you were passed by the entire membership. After passed, the Komsomolets who submitted his name was known as the sponsor and responsible for this member for a certain length of time. The organization also appointed two members to act as surveillants of the new member. The Central Communist Party had to give its final approval. Lazar, who lived in the same house with Abram, was particularly interested as he had ambitions to go to medical school.

Scouts from the R.K.P., the Central Communist Party, were said to be in town to recruit promising young men with some education to enlist in the Rabochii Fakultet [Workers' Faculty]. Upon completion of this course, they would be commissioned as officers in the Red Army. This was a quickie course. To be a part of this elite group, one had to be a Komsomol member, but they said that this would not be an obstacle to be accepted, as this could be easily processed.

The Reds had quite a problem. When Trotsky undertook to organize the Red Army, there was no one to lead them. Officers of the Tsarist Army belonged to the nobility and they were either driven out or simply killed.²⁶⁸ Of course, many managed to escape to foreign lands. This friend said that they were looking for anyone who had the equivalent of two years of the Gymnasium (High School). He also informed this group that many of them were detained and were being investigated before being approached. Lazar was not very happy at the news, because he wanted to go to medical school since

²⁶⁸ Actually, many tsarist officers served in the Red Army. Christopher Read writes that “there appears to have been a core of around 15,000 to 20,000 ex-tsarist officers constituting 75 per cent of the officer core in the Red Army in 1918 and 53 per cent in 1919.” See Read, *From Tsar to Soviets: The Russian People and Their Revolution, 1917-21*, 210.

his older brother was already in Simferopol Medical School. Abram, too, was not too enthusiastic, he was scheming how to get out of Russia. Since they were not approached and had no official notice, they hoped their friend was wrong.

Day dreaming became a way of life for the people in Chashniki. The past eight years had witnessed many changes, always dreaming for the time when things would settle down and a normal life would again prevail. Every family had its own trauma to cope with: war casualties, epidemics of major proportions, displacements of all kinds, be they material or spiritual. It seemed to the old timers that the world had turned topsy-turvy and they wondered if the end would ever come. The young had their own concerns: although there was no fighting going on anywhere at this time, still conscription had not abated.

Sitting in the back yard with friends, Abram related some of the happenings to his family: the Pogrom; the Tsar doing away with brother Aaron and all the trials and tribulations his mother had to go through to steal Aaron from jail, send him to America and for him to come back to fight for the Revolution; then at last for the family to get ready to sail to America, and the War had to break out the week before; losing his father somewhere in Kharkov and not knowing what had happened to him; his experience in Vitebsk Government Art School and starving there and then out of a clear sky to receive all that food. Someone suggested that perhaps his brothers would find a way of getting them out.

PART III: IMMIGRATION

As they were talking, a postal messenger, also a friend of theirs, ran toward them waving a paper, a telegram. The Telegraph Office was part of the Post Office. The telegram was written in Russian but the language was different, and it read: "I am leaving for Riga today-signed-Leotka." The dateline was from New York. They all could read it, but did not know the meaning. The telegram was addressed to Abram and Leotka was his brother in America. There was no doubt for whom the telegram was meant to be. Again the help of the two brothers who translated the affidavits earlier was needed. Luckily they were in town and gladly translated the message. Chasia was beside herself with joy.

All they knew from this message was that her son was coming to Riga and presumably he would come all the way. Chasia immediately deposited 54 kopecs to the charity box for his safe arrival. Her hopes were rekindled anew, she somehow felt that this time it would come through and she would be reunited with her sons in America.

The news spread rapidly that this American was coming to Chashniki. The Davidsons once again, after the food they had received became popular even more now. Relatives of those who lived in America wanted to be sure to have a chance to speak to him, perhaps he knew some of them. America, to most of the provincial people, was just America, and surely everyone knew everyone else. Abram and Chasia were no longer ordinary citizens.

If he left New York on the 30th of May, it would take two weeks for him to get to Riga, and then surely he would travel to Vitebsk and then by steamboat to

Beshenkovitz.²⁶⁹ This, they reasoned, would be his itinerary. They did not know that there were boats that could cross the ocean in six days and that Libau was not the only port.

At any rate, to keep him from falling into the hands of bandits who no doubt had stakes out to rob this wealthy America, Abram walked over to the Dvina in Beshenkovitch and met the boat from Vitebsk every day. Although he was only five years old when his brother left for America, he was certain he would recognize him by the photographs they had received and besides he would be the only American coming off the boat. After a week, he gave up and came back to Chashniki to see if there was any word from him.

Nothing was heard from the American and they were getting very anxious about his safety. But by now they were used to waiting out suspense.

On Friday, the last week in June, a letter arrived postmarked Vitebsk. It was addressed to Abram, but the handwriting on the address was not familiar. There was a peculiar premonition about this letter, they fingered it until they finally got the courage to open it. Their premonition proved right, the letter was from Leotka, but why was the letter addressed in a strange handwriting? Fear struck them, and their first reaction was that something must be wrong. Hurriedly they read the letter which instructed them to do what the bearer of the letter told them to do. On the back of the letter, in Russian, were the instructions: "Pack all your belongings so light that you can carry them on your back

²⁶⁹ The year was 1922.

and make your way to Vitebsk immediately.” He would contact them at the given address below. “Copy the address on another piece of paper and destroy this letter.”

Friday was a bad day to get anyone among the Jews to hire out to take them to Vitebsk, and Chasia considered it a bad omen to have to ride on the Sabbath. The wise Rabbi came to the rescue and gave them dispensation to ride on the Sabbath in this particular case, he compared it to life and death and gave them his blessing for a safe journey. A cousin, Edith’s son, gave up his weekend and gladly contracted to take them to Vitebsk.

Chasia felt terrible not being able to tell her friends goodbye, she embraced Edith, Chaim Meyer’s sister, and the two had a real old timey crying goodbye. They took a last look at the place, left everything in it to Edith and, full of mixed emotions, they drove off in the early morning on their way to Vitebsk and hopefully to America.

They arrived Sunday. Abram knew several places where smugglers stayed, he selected one that Chashniki did not patronize, and it was near the address he was to contact. It was located close to the bank of the Dvina River.

By special arrangements the owner of the place consented to let them stay there. Smugglers stayed only overnight, not over two nights, but in Abram and Chasia’s case it was uncertain. The nature of the stay could not be revealed, but the lady in charge would not turn them out. However she cautioned them to be very discreet in their actions. There was very little rapport between Chasia and all the incoming guests. This was especially difficult for Chasia, for she was a gregarious person.

The letter was destroyed after copies of the address were made, Abram had one copy, the other was held by Chasia in case he lost his. The address Abram was to call on was on the banks of the Dvina River, ironically, across the river from the Governor's mansion where Abram first made contact when he came here two years ago. The writer of the letter had no way to contact Abram and Chasia for he did not know where they would stay. The next morning Abram took a walk along the bank of the Dvina to look for the address.

The house had the appearance of belonging to a once-prosperous man, all the shutters were closed, the gate to the yard looked as if it had not opened in years, the walk-in door, a part of the gate, had all the marks of being frequently used. The door to the porch on the side of the house also seemed not in use. To one side was a handle for a bell on the inside. All houses along the Dvina had long porches on the side. Abram knocked at the gate without any results, he checked the address to make sure it was correct, and then walked over to the bell. He tugged at it and could hear dinging inside of the gate but no one came to the door, he repeated it several times and was about to walk away from it, but as he turned he heard a squeak, the walk-in door cracked some. He could see eyes behind it looking at him as the door widened. A finger motioned for him to come closer. After a few questions he was asked inside the gate and to follow the person into the house. He bolted the door as soon as they were inside. The only light to enter the living room came from the cracks in the shutters. The living room looked elegant, a crystal chandelier hung from the ceiling, the floor had a carpet, something Abram had heard about but this was his first real sight of one. The furniture, too, was hand-made and

looked expensive. A nickel plated samovar was on a table. The person was of middle-age with graying temples, his beard was small and well-groomed, his voice was a vibrant, cultured, well-spoken Russian. There was an aura of elegance everywhere.

Cautiously, he began to question Abram in his nice, cultured, voice as to identity. He obviously was not satisfied that this was the young man he was looking for. Gradually he began to drop a name here and there that evidently Leotka had briefed him on. Chaim Meyer he question about, surely Abram would identify with that name, and so this went on for a few minutes, then he opened up. "Ignatii, who gave this address to you and the instructions to come to Vitebsk, waited, but for security reasons had to leave." He had instructed this gentlemen to get their address, he would get in touch with them when he came back and felt it was safe to contact them. This gentleman repeatedly cautioned Abram to be extremely careful and to instruct his mother not to tell anyone what they were doing here.

Abram did not dare tell Chasia the whole truth of the visit, he was afraid she might get panicky if she knew the man had left them, he only warned her not to tell anything to anyone, and if someone came by to ask about Abram, to find out all she could about where to contact him.

Chasia was much braver than Abram gave her credit for. She was very well-adjusted to handle critical situations. There was no problem as far as she was concerned about hanging around not doing anything, but for Abram it created a very difficult situation. He had to be on the go so as not to create suspicion. He visited the Art School, the Black Market Square, other smuggling lodgings, but always not too far away from

Chasia in case the man called for him. During his ramblings he visited the Jewish Organization which distributed parcels that were sent by relatives in America for people here in the Soviet Union. This was the same place he checked from time to time when he lived here and had informed people back home when they had a parcel.

Checking the bulletin board, he could hardly believe his eyes, there were two parcels for him and his mother. He hired a horse and carriage, loaded the two parcels and rushed with them to the lodging place where they awaited the messenger. It could not have come at a more opportune time from many angles. Their resources were running low and morally they needed the boost that this gave them. Of course it also gave the appearance of a reason for them being there.

It was like opening a grab-bag when the packages were opened. They sold so many things—two pairs of shoes, a fine coat for Chasia, long underwear, silk socks, pajamas, something Russians were not accustomed to using. This reminded them of a package that was received by friends in Chashniki, it had two pair of pajamas with braids across the chest and, not knowing what these things were, the two brothers dressed in them and paraded all over town. They could not understand why the American clothes did not have any pockets in the trousers. Abram hated to give up some of the fine dress shirts, but he knew that he had to get rid of them. An Army khaki overcoat had Sam's name in it. He had been in the American Army. This coat came in handy near the frontier and on the boat. The sale of all this had brought a good bit of money which made them feel more secure.

A peasant inquired at the lodging place for Abram. He introduced himself as Stephan, he had a kind and trusting face, his manner was light and calm. “Would you like to take a walk along the Dvina River?” he said in his calm, peasant dialect. Chasia’s facial expression was priceless, she hoped this was the person they waited for, yet, she was anxious, apprehensive and had some fear. But she gave no appearance of it at all, instead she was just as casual as she watched Abram go off with Stephan as if he were on a routine trip to the well to get some water.

Stephan’s outward appearance could not in any way suggest that this ordinary peasant could be the type of person to negotiate their escape from Russia. Abram soon found out he was wrong. They walked along the bank of the river in the direction of the house Abram had visited earlier. The conversation was sparse and irrelevant, every now and then he mentioned some familiar name such as Chashniki, Chasia, and finally he spoke of Leotka. Abram, too, had to be on guard not to fall into a Cheka trap. All along he scrutinized him from the corner of his eye when he mentioned some familiar name. This sparring went on for about two versts, they had passed the house where he had called to make his first contact. Before they turned back, Abram began to doubt the sincerity of the man, and thought that indeed he was a front for the Cheka. Stephan reached in his pocket and came up with an envelope and pressed into Abram’s hand. Making sure no one saw this, Abram opened the letter, slowly unfolding it. There was money in it, he thought this to be rather strange, but then as he removed the bills he recognized Leotka’s handwriting.

For the first time, Stephan boldly spoke: “Your brother sent this to you and your mother, should you need it.” From then on everything took a normal course. He gave instructions for them to follow from here on.

Whatever belongings they had they should pack into a bundle, preferably in a large tablecloth or sheet, and meet him at the Railroad Station at five o’clock in the morning.²⁷⁰ At no time were they to speak to him or even let on they knew him. The bundle they were to leave in the middle of the floor in the lobby and walk away from it, never to look at it again. He would look after it from then on.

At all times, they were not to lose sight of him, when he got in line to get a ticket, they were to get in the same line behind him, as close as possible. He would ask for his destination loud enough for them to hear so that they could get their tickets to the same place. When he got on the train, they should get on the same car but use the opposite entrance. They were to get seated and not worry about him, he would find them and try to get a seat as close as possible. All through the train ride they were to keep an eye on him but not speak with him.

The passengers got off at a small Railroad Station near the Latvian border about twenty-five versts away. They were forewarned that the station would be full of the Cheka looking for suspicious persons and contraband usually channeled through these kinds of places. The Station was a beehive of activity. Many were there meeting relatives, others were seeing relatives off and there were the arriving passengers.

²⁷⁰ This would make Davidson look like a bagman trader.

Stephan was standing near an open dray cart waiting for Abram and Chasia to come over. Stephan perched in the front, Abram and Chasia got on the back, the rest was soon filled with others who wanted to ride to town, a few versts away. Stephan had the bundle near him.

They unloaded at a blacksmith shop. Here, too, was much activity. Besides the blacksmith shop there was a store inside the house that dealt with farm needs. Stephan felt right at home here as did other peasants who evidently used this place as a kind of exchange place. The owner of the establishment was Jewish and came to welcome them in his private quarters, offered tea and food, was very solicitous about Chasia's well-being, how she had made out on the long trip. He inquired if she needed rest and generally made them feel at home.

When he left the room Chasia turned to Abram: "There is something about this Yidel (a derogatory remark about a Jew, amongst Jews) I don't like. I am afraid he is one of those poisonous sugar-coated individuals." Stephan was to come back to take them across the border sometime later that evening. They were too excited to rest. Abram went outside to watch the blacksmith operation and Chasia just looked around to stay busy.

They were invited to come in for a meal, the samovar was steaming away, the table was set for them, the usual bread, butter, milk were in the center. The lady of the house was quite a contrast to the red headed individual whom Chasia did not trust. As soon as they sat down, he came in rubbing his hands and had a peculiar, leery, expression on his face. The lady, his wife, conveniently left the room. He began in the cunning ways that befit this type of an obnoxious individual, to describe the danger of this whole

operation of getting people across through what was known as the “Underground Railroad,” how easy it was to be picked up by the police and, of course, the ensuing consequences. Stephan had asked him to put them up for the night in the attic, he had to check if all was well while he had been gone to get them, it had been a week, and much could happen in a week. He assured them that the attic would be comfortable. Many migrant persons spent time up there until the way was clear. When they got in the attic from the outside, he shut the door and they heard him remove the ladder. There was plenty of straw on the floor. The only light came in from the edge of the roof. But this did not matter.

They hardly had time to get acquainted with the surroundings, the straw on the floor, the sanitary facilities and the general surroundings. They had rather he did not dwell on the conditions and the risk involved in this venture. Both were too exhausted to think too much about anything, they just sat there quietly, deep in thought.

A sound came from the direction of the door, one could hear a ladder bumped against the wall and it sounded as if someone was ascending it. Patiently they waited, their eyes glued to the door as it was stealthily opened, and the red head could be seen coming in. He was a changed man as he sat next to Chasia, his eyes narrowed, his voice raspy and ominous. “Stephan sent word that something has gone wrong and that I will have to lodge you for several days, and that is costly and adds to the risk involved. I have to bribe officials to stay away from here, don’t lose sight of the fact that you are strangers here and you’d better do what I advise you to do.” Chasia was bristling herself for what was to come. He cleared his throat, looked away, and began: “I know that people who go

to America have valuables sewed in their underclothes and you had better give them to me for the protection that I give you. Do you know what will happen to you if I turn you out before Stephan gets here?"

Subdued as Chasia was over all that happened to her, his threat she could not take. She rose to the occasion like her old self in the days of Belytze when she had to deal with the Tsarist Regime. She sat up erect and gave him a hard look, and in a firm voice she commanded him to listen to her: "I know your kind, how do you think the authorities will feel toward you carrying on this contraband activity? All they can possibly do is arrest us and send us back home, a disappointment to us of course, but we are not counter-revolutionaries by trying to get to my children. You, with your filthy hide and the many of your kind who made the rest of us Jews suffer by your unscrupulous dealings. I have more confidence in Stephan's toenail than I have in the whole of you. He will come as he promised and you had better leave my presence before I claw your eyes out." Without uttering a word he backed to the door and left, removing the ladder.

Exhausted from the unexpected encounter, she broke down and cried uncontrollably, and then fell asleep on the straw pallet. Abram sat there watching over her, awaiting the next development. The red headed man never appeared again.

The sun was getting low when Stephan came up to the door in the attic, to see him was like seeing an old lost friend. In his nice, gentle, voice he said that right at sundown they would proceed to the border, to cross it sometime in the early morning. His original plan was to wait another day but he found conditions favorable for crossing and he had

better take advantage of it, and besides Leotka had promised an extra bonus if he got them sooner.

Stephan's appearance could not have been more timely. Waking from the short nap, they found the attic was not very inviting to stay in indefinitely, since the threats of the red headed man were not easy to forget. They sat there waiting for Stephan, hoping that he would come as promised. The clanking of the metal in the blacksmith shop, the sound of hoofs on the cobblestones, the squeaky sounds of wagon wheels, loud laughter of peasants on the outside, all added to the tension as they watched the sun get lower. Stephan's appearance made it all go away as though it wasn't there at all.

Abram came down first, so as not to arouse suspicion he walked around the place. Stephan helped Chasia get down. Dressed like a peasant woman, she sat on the middle of the cart, he sat beside her, driving the horse. Abram, in his khaki Army overcoat, sat behind, his legs hanging behind. The cart was an ordinary farm work cart that peasants took to town to haul their goods. Stephan had plenty of hay arranged for Chasia's comfort and it was well camouflaged so as not arouse any suspicion.

The sun was still high on the horizon as they started on the wide dirt road that seemed much traveled. The dust was still settling from wagons that had passed on it earlier. Stephan did not drive his horse hard, because he was gaining time before dusk set in. Entering the forest the sun glow could be seen behind the trees. It was quiet, the moon would soon appear to throw its golden glow on the trees and penetrate through in some spots.

A soldier on horseback came charging toward them at galloping speed, chilling her insides, they thought this was it. But the soldier waved a friendly arm and sped by. Stephan comforted Chasia that messengers from the front lines, which were only a few miles away, constantly went back and forth and not to pay any attention to them. Darkness seemed to descend suddenly on them when they were far in the forest.

Stephan jumped from the cart, hurriedly grabbed the bridle and led the horse in to the woods. There was no sign of any road anywhere. Soon they were far away from the road. Abram, too, got off the cart to walk behind it. They lost track of time and hardly knew how far in the woods they walked. The quietness was nerve-wracking, dry twigs kept on breaking under the wheels, under their feet, a screeching owl was the only evidence of anything alive.

They came to an opening in the woods, the clearance appeared to be nowhere. The horse urinated, the sound was unbelievably loud, so strained were their nerves. Surely this sound would give them away. Stephan asked Abram to hold onto the bridle while he had to see about certain things. Should anyone come to them, he warned him not to panic, it would be a friend and they should follow his instructions.

In a few minutes they heard water splashing, they were near a pond they did not see. A person, in his early twenties, called to them in a quiet voice. He embraced Chasia as if she might have been a relative and spoke reassuringly to Abram. He pulled over a log, to tie the horse to do it, and asked them to follow him. A submerged gangplank was about 18 inches under the surface in the pond, the pond was an oval shape and it was

unclear why they could not go around it but had to go across it. They had to shuffle across it, the young man led Chasia by the hand and Abram followed behind.

They started out in a crouched position in a dry creek, and the bushes helped to hide them. Dawn began to break as they crawled along. In the distance they made out the bonfires the soldiers had made at the border. A village was discernible on an incline. Suddenly a volley of shots were heard from the direction of the village. They all fell to the ground to wait for the young man to go investigate what was going on, he came back reporting that his accomplices had arranged a party for the soldiers on duty and some had a little too much and just got trigger happy, but everything was safe now to proceed.

It was getting much lighter now, and they clearly made out houses, barns, fences and horses grazing at a distance. Their guide led them behind a barn to conceal them in a patch of hemp, the size of cornstalks, this hid them completely from any view. They were to wait for someone who would be over shortly to see them across the border, which was a stone's throw from there, according to the guide.

Footsteps were heard approaching in their direction: a Red Army soldier with a bayonet in his hands was coming toward them. This really unnerved Chasia, she thought this was it, they were trapped. She went into convulsions, her teeth chattered so she could not close her mouth. Abram put his arms around her trying to comfort and assure her that everything would be all right, although he too had his doubts of the outcome at this point. The soldier's friendly smile was of some comfort when he got near them. He put his arm around Chasia, bending over her, and in a friendly voice he said: "Matiushka" (little mother) how are you this early in the morning. You are shaking so, you must be cold,

would you like my coat? Brace up dorogaya (dear). We do not have very far to go.” His arm still around her, he practically had to carry her as they walked through the hemp patch to the edge of a river. There was Stephan with their bundle that he had cared for all the way from Vitebsk.

Without uttering a word he took Chasia by the hand, motioned for Abram to take the other hand and started into the river. The water came up to Abram’s chin, Chasia had to be floated across to the other side. Once on the other side, Stephan hid them in a clump of bushes. “You are now in Latvia and no Bolshevik can bother you.” Someone would come by for them here, he would be whistling a tune and Abram should respond to the tune. He leaned over, gave Chasia a hug and kiss goodbye, wishing her a safe journey to her son and to forget about all the anxieties she had up to now. “Dosvidanie Matiushka (goodbye little mother)” and with that he waded back to his place. His farm was divided when the border was established, with part on the Latvian side. This made it possible for him to cross at any time he wished to do so.

Wet and tense they both shivered, awaiting the next person. It wasn’t long before another young man came along, whistling merrily, he was a brother to the one who had met them at the pond. He walked them across some fields and hid them in another growth of bushes. “In just a short time a person driving a manure cart will come by, when you see him, call out to him and he will take you to a place where you will be on the way to the train.”

The manure cart had an open bottom where the boards were stacked to one side and one had to sit in it sideways. The driver of the cart came into the field, standing in the

cart. Abram hesitated to call out to him. This did not look fit for anyone to ride in it. The person circled the field a couple of times and was about to leave. Abram stepped forward to get his attention, leaving Chasia in the bushes. This turned out to be the right cart. He took them to a highway where they met the young man who had just left them. He had a fine pair of horses and a change of clothes for Chasia and Abram, and plenty of food with a plentiful load of hay. “We are on the way to the train where someone will take you into Riga.”²⁷¹ They spread their wet clothes on the wagon to let them dry in the sun, relaxed they both dozed off. Chasia joked that this was more like it. She thought perhaps they would wind up their long trip in a manure cart. They all had a good laugh.

In the middle of the day they got thirsty. From a distance they saw a little girl draw water from a well, this would be good place to get a drink of water. When Abram approached the little girl she ran toward the house as fast as she could, spilling much of the water. Abram was concerned, all he did was ask for a drink of water, he thought he had better follow her to the house so he could explain that he did not mean any harm. When he came to the porch, the mother of the child came out. He explained to her what had taken place. She took off a ladle from the wall, picked up the bucket and filled it with water and told him to drink it. For those in the wagon, they had to bring their own containers. The ladle was called a “Public Cup.” This was a group of Old Believers who did not share any utensils with anyone.²⁷²

²⁷¹ Riga is the capital of Latvia.

²⁷² Old Believers “rejected the reforms of the rites and ceremonies of the Russian Orthodox Church made by Patriarch Nikon in the 1650s.” David Moon writes, “As many as 15-20 per cent of the population, mainly peasants, became Old Believers.” See Moon, *The Russian Peasantry, 1600-1930*, 239, 277.

Toward evening they came to the city, to the Railroad Station. There was a wait of several hours for the train. The driver took Abram in the station, offered him a drink and if Chasia wished anything, he offered to buy it. They compromised on wine for Abram and rolls and milk for Chasia. The station, while not very large, was quite a contrast to the Vitebsk, Smolensk or any other railroad station in Russia. This was scrupulously clean, and courtesy, unknown in Soviet stations, by contrast was overflowing here.

The driver advised Abram to hang around near the bundle, someone was supposed to come over and identify himself to ride with them on the train to Riga.

The schedule showed the train was due in the next hour and there was still no one to see them to the train. It was beginning to get dark. The bundle, the key to the identification, rested on the floor with Abram and Chasia standing over it. There was no need to be afraid anymore.

A comical looking character, wearing a straw hat and swinging a cane, with thick horn-rimmed glasses, in a dark coat with striped pants came strolling by. He looked down on the bundle, then looked in Abram's direction as he hurriedly walked away, only to come back near Chasia. She was not as amused by him as Abram was. The next time he came around he slowed down near the bundle so that Abram had a good look at him. He was cross-eyed, in addition to his other strange manner. He called out Chasia's name as he passed: The same old routine they had gone through in Vitebsk. Abram was bold now, "Who are you looking for?" Abram asked him. He came back, "Are you a Davidson?" They got together, he gave them their railroad tickets and said he would help them get in

the car, but he would not talk to them. They learned later that Leotka had offered a bonus if they were not arrested. Normally, anyone who came to Latvia illegally, automatically was arrested and released on a certain non-forfeitable bond. Leotka paid the bond but did not want his mother to spend any time behind bars. This was the reason for all the extra doings.

“So this was Riga” was their first reaction, after so much uncertainty and so many times on the brink of failure. At last they reached their goal, the place that assuredly would lead them to the place they had been dreaming about for eight years.

A friend of Leotka’s met them at the railroad station with greetings from their son and brother who would see them shortly. This friend was taking them to a place where they would stay until they could depart for America.

The place was more than a boarding-house and not quite a hotel. Many traveling persons who had business in Riga stayed there, meals were served boarding-house style. They were taken to a room where there was another family who had just gotten across the border, with their American brother awaiting them the way Leotka had to do. They were comparing their experiences of crossing the border, only these people were in their twenties and could take hardships much better.

Many people entered and went through this room when Leotka appeared, Chasia immediately leaped toward him. She had not seen him since he left, when he was only fifteen years old, and Abram, who was then only five, did not know him at all, but there was something of a family resemblance so that, unexplainably they knew who he was.²⁷³

²⁷³ Leotka was probably 29 when he saw his mother and brother again.

“Mein tyerer zunele (my dear son)”, they were both so overcome that they could not say anything for some time, they just stood there, embraced. They were taken to the dining room to have breakfast, where the table was loaded with so much food, they did not believe there was that much food anywhere on one table. Trays were full of all kind of rolls, pastries, eggs, jellies and there was a general feeling of affluence, something they had not seen in Russia in a long time. Only a few hundreds miles away, Riga was like entering into a different world, the street so clean, stores displaying goods of all kinds, all one had to do was go in and purchase whatever one needed. Drozhkys (surreys) were all over the city, for hire, to take a passenger anywhere. People were sitting around on benches in the parks, the general atmosphere was gay and free.

Leotka discarded all their clothing they came over in and brought new outfits for them both. Abram was not so difficult to clothe but Chasia was accustomed to having her dresses custom made and that created some difficulty. Also, they felt a lady should have a hat, and not go around in a head kerchief as she had always done. Abram passed by her not recognizing her when she approached him after being outfitted in the hat. The plume or feather just did not belong on her head. They had to get used to it. Much fun was poked at her hat. Leotka informed them that from here on he was not Leotka any more but “Louis,” this was the American name he had adopted and this was how he was known in America.

Louis gently broke the news that he had met someone and that they would be attending a wedding. Parties were given in the couple’s honor and of course everyone had to meet the in-laws who had just moved there from Russia. The entire social environment

was out of the orbit of Abram and Chasia. Abram did not feel comfortable at all in any of these gatherings, he felt it too much of pseudo-bourgeoisie tone and he was still indoctrinated with the proletarian feeling. He abhorred it, but not to embarrass Louis he went along, much to his disgust. Every time he came to the boarding house after one of these receptions, where he had to follow suit by clicking his heels and kissing the backs of the ladies' hands, he stood on the running board to spit all the way home. This lasted for three weeks until the wedding took place. He thought to himself: here he was playing a bourgeoisie lackey, after being indoctrinated in Communist ideas. Chasia's diplomacy had her in good standing all the time, quietly she went along, just waiting to get to America. The necessary arrangements were made at the American Consul to secure the proper credentials to certify them as man and wife.

After the Jewish ceremony they boarded the international train to Paris with a stopover in Berlin. Abram was one happy person when the time came to get on the train, he took all he could without exploding at all the doings. Chasia took it in good grace, she was resigned that this is the way it was supposed to be. The train left Riga at night and arrived in Berlin the next day. When they came through the Danzig Corridor, the curtains were drawn over the windows, this was part of the agreement of the Versailles Treaty.²⁷⁴

A White Star Line representative was supposed to meet them at the station to direct them to a hotel that was to be reserved for them.²⁷⁵ The representative was nowhere to be found. This irritated Louis, because he was accustomed to American efficiency and this neglect was not to his liking. The truth of the matter was the Germans had very little

²⁷⁴ The Danzig Corridor was also known as the Polish Corridor.

²⁷⁵ The White Star Line was a transportation and shipping company.

regard for Americas, Louis always felt this was a way of getting even with them. He had reservations at the Kaiser Hotel, but the problem was to take care of the baggage the bride had brought along. Things in Berlin in 1922 were quite chaotic but after much aggravation, it was arranged and all the baggage and the passengers were loaded in two taxis and were driven to the hotel. This was the first ride for Abram and Chasia in an automobile. He was worried about the driver knowing where he was going, since he could not see the wheels, how did he know where they were turning?

Berlin was depressing in many ways, the streets were full of crippled World I veterans selling pencils and all kinds of trinkets. Hostility toward Americans was thick enough to cut with a knife. Louis had one of his suits altered for Abram so he got the American treatment in many places. The German Mark dropped from day to day, when they registered at the Kaiser Hotel their room was 500 marks and when they left three weeks later it was over 1500 marks. The Kaiser Café, where Abram and Chasia ate most of the time was a hangout for streetwalkers, so brazen were they that they motioned to Abram to join them.

A friend of the bride, who with his parents had escaped from the Bolsheviks and was residing in Berlin, was Abram's age and the two, with Chasia, took in much of the city.

Many funny things happened to the two from the country in the big city. During one of their frequent walks on Unter den Linden, the main boulevard in Berlin, Chasia had to use the rest room, they were too far from the hotel.²⁷⁶ There were numerous

²⁷⁶ This boulevard is where the Kaiser Café was located.

subterranean facilities on the boulevard. Abram waited while Chasia went down in the Frau side. He heard an awful commotion down there and could hear Chasia's voice above the other voice, instinctively he rushed down to investigate. There was a fee for the use of the facility, but Chasia did not have any money to use it. The lady blocked her and Chasia, in desperation, gave her a shove making her lose her balance. Abram handsomely tipped the attendant and all was well again. When Chasia got to street level she dejectedly said: "Son, I never dreamed that you would have to bail me out of a place like that, and of all places, in Germany!"

In the hotel the toilets were in a central location, all were in one room, one for men, one for ladies. Chasia did not trust herself to go by herself, she always had Abram go with her and wait for her outside. On one of these trips they met a gentleman in the hall, on a runner just wide enough for two people to walk on it. To let each other pass they kept getting in each other's way. The gentleman bowed and courteously apologized: "Pardon madame." After he had gone she looked back, turned to Abram; "The devil take him, did you hear what he called me?" The sound "Pardon" in Russian is not a very nice word.²⁷⁷ A good laugh was had when Abram explained the meaning of the word.

Berlin was a paradox, a depressed city on one hand and filled with gaiety on the other. In spite of all the peg-legged soldiers and one-armed veterans who were peddling anything, and beggars on every turn, night life flourished. Movie theaters were full, people stood in line to get into shows. The zoo showed no indication of any hard times. The Luna Park had entertainment from a bicycle ride on a tight wire high up in the air to

²⁷⁷ In Russian, a "perdun" is someone who breaks wind.

many other stunts on the ground.²⁷⁸ The zoo boasted the largest and smallest elephant. The Nile River simulation with all the animals, plants and supposedly true Nile water fascinated Abram and Chasia. Then there was the sight-seeing bus, on hard rubber tires, which took one to many places such as the church where the Kaiser worshipped, the Charlottenburg Palace where the guide took them to a side door pointing out that this place served as a mausoleum for the nobility.²⁷⁹ He told this gruesome story of a young lady buried in a vault down there. Later when another person was taken down, they found the skeleton of the young lady out of the vault, the top down, and they could see the dried blood on the door—the theory being that she was buried still alive and came to, and tried to get out. After the three week stay in Riga and another three weeks in Berlin, the Bolshevik indoctrination began to fade a little, Abram even bought a walking cane to sport like the other gentlemen did. They left Berlin on a schedule that meant they would have to change trains when they reached Cologne on the Rhine, then they would have to take the train on the other side of the Rhine. The reason given was that the railway bridge had not been rebuilt since the war. This proved to be false. At any rate they enjoyed crossing the Rhine River in a taxi and had a chance to see the magnificent cathedral there.²⁸⁰ Abram was so excited when he saw the cathedral that he forgot his cane in the taxi, not too terrible a loss.

²⁷⁸ Luna Park was an amusement park in Berlin.

²⁷⁹ Davidson is referring to the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. Charlottenburg Palace was built in 1713 and holds the bodies of Prussian and German nobility.

²⁸⁰ Davidson is referring to the Cologne Cathedral. Construction began in 1248, but the building was not completed until 1880. For more information, see William W. Clark, *Medieval Cathedrals* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006).

The first capital, Moscow, was clouded in mystery, fear, anxiety and was physically dirty: the second Capital, Riga, was full of hope like a rain after a drought. It was free, and sparkled like a jewel; the third capital, Berlin, was a stop-gap, it had its rewards, the government buildings, the Brandenburg Gate, the beautiful Unter den Linden, the next compensation was being farther from Russia; the fourth capital, Paris, a marvel anywhere one turned with the wide boulevards, the wonderful Louvre, the Arc de Triomphe and the sense of freedom that prevailed everywhere, only the time allotted was far too short, only three days. During one of these days, Louis wanted to take them to the famous Russian Restaurant “Medved” (the “Bear,” it was operated by Imperial Russian refugees). Louis was curious to see the reaction Abram would have to the aristocracy who were reduced to being just plain servants of the public. Abram did not show any sympathy for them, only contempt. Their predilection for the upper crust was not let up even here where people were people. The best service was offered to their own class, who still controlled much of what they had absconded with. It was interesting for Abram to listen to their spoken Russian, because it was literary Russian. Louis looked more the American and got the most attention. Abram never lost sight of the fact that not too far back these same waiters would not permit anyone of his kind to even enter their restaurant. Nevertheless, they all enjoyed the truly Russian meals prepared in a strange land.

At the hotel dining room they were seated at a table so laden with food it was hard to believe possible. The trays were full of a variety of all kinds of food. At the time Abram did not understand the charge was made for the food selected only, he asked

Leotka: “It is impossible for anyone to eat this much.” Laughingly he explained how this worked. In Berlin Abram learned to like the beer so he asked for beer. He found out that in France wine was the national drink, just as in Germany beer was the popular drink.

The last leg of the trip on land was the train ride from Paris to Cherbourg.²⁸¹ There they would take a boat and be on the way to America. Chasia was delighted that this was the last trip in Europe. On the train a vendor came by to sell all kinds of fruit. Leotka brought a few bananas, a new fruit for Abram. He peeled it back halfway, and handed it to him, explaining where the fruit was grown and that in America it was a common fruit. Abram took one bite of it and threw it out of the window, spitting out what was in his mouth, it tasted to him like biting into a piece of soap. It took him a long time to get used to eating bananas.

Cherbourg, a typical fort town, was dirty and had poor accommodations. There was one kosher hotel, which pleased Chasia. The rooms were small and, though clean, had a musty smell to them. The guests were mostly sailors, Abram and Chasia were the only immigrants. Louis and his bride stayed in a better hotel. Besides Abram and Chasia, a few young men, Americans, who had visited their parents in Poland, checked in later and some tourists who were scheduled to sail on the same boat.

The young boys were veterans of the American Expeditionary Forces of Jewish descent. A pinochle game was in progress and later Leotka joined them, the rest of course did not know what it was all about and the strange language they spoke did not help. The

²⁸¹ Cherbourg-Octeville is a city and former commune in Normandy, France.

veterans who had visited their families in Poland had many tales of horrible experiences with the police, when they tried to visit some of their relatives.

A French vendor, laden with all sorts of tapestries and textile wall hangings, came by the hotel to sell some of his wares. The pinochle players cared little about what he tried to sell them. His persistence got on their nerves, when he pitched his line of opportunity to get some genuine designs and quality, stressing the originals he had, saying that they were making a big mistake to pass them off. He went on and on until one of the players casually remarked “Yeah, all these originals were probably made in New Jersey.” This irked the Frenchman, who made a derogatory remark about America. The veteran dropped his cards on the table, pulled out a silk handkerchief from his front coat pocket, the American flag, and waved it in the Frenchman’s face saying: “If it was not for this flag where would you lousy French be?” Bodily he picked him up and threw him on the sidewalk with all his wares. The others applauded him loudly. Of course at the time Abram did not know what the whole thing was about, but Louis later explained it all in every detail.

The final check for steamship tickets, visas, health checkup, and general inspection lined people up at the dock building. Many were immigrants but most were tourists who were going back home. Excitement mounted with each arriving group, some knew each other from previous meetings, others had just made their acquaintance while in Cherbourg. Various experiences were freely shared, and it was a happy group of people. Chasia and Abram had their spirits lifted to be in such happy surroundings. Their anxiety dissipated completely as they looked across the unending body of water.

Only immigrants had to go through the health test, and especially those who came from Russia and Poland. Men went into one side and women entered a different area. Chasia was reluctant to go in by herself, so a passenger volunteered to act as interpreter and assured her she would stay until she was dismissed. Abram had no difficulty in getting the proper stamp on his passport and approval to get on the boat. Chasia's passport was delayed. When she came out with the lady interpreter, Abram sensed something was wrong. He was asked to go into the inner office for an explanation. Americans were not subjected to this examination, so Louis was in no rush to get over there. When he came, he and Abram went in to see what the problem was, leaving Chasia sitting outside.

Louis had replaced all of her clothing in Riga, and destroyed everything she brought out of Russia, but there was one girdle that she did not give up, and it showed signs of having had lice eggs at one time. This required her to discard the girdle and to remain in quarantine for seven days, to report to the nurse each day for an examination. If ever a white lie was to be told, this was the time. They could not tell Chasia the true reason for holding her back, but did tell her she would have to discard the girdle and she came to America in a French girdle. As she said later, her figure was not exactly French.

There was no need for Louis and his bride to change his plans and remain in Cherbourg. Olympic, the White Star Liner, was the one they were all scheduled to leave on.²⁸² The Homeric would be there the next week, September 21.²⁸³ Louis arranged with

²⁸² The Olympic was in service from 1911 to 1935. See "White Star Line History" online at www.whitestarhistory.com/olympic.

the White Star Line officials and as soon as reservations were made, assurance was given that Chasia and Abram could get on the Homeric, Louis and his bride left and said they would wait for them in New York.²⁸⁴

All the details of the transfer of reservations were made, but the most difficult task remained and that was to tell Chasia that she could not go on this ship with Louis, that she would have to wait until next week because of the required visits for a week to the nurse, all because they came out of Russia. Again another disappointment. They saw Louis go through the gate to the other side of the dock to get on the ship. Silently they walked back to the hotel not daring to look at the big body of water that just a short time ago had looked so hopeful. Now, like so many other times, a doubt was cast on them. Shrugging her shoulders, she said “Who knows? In 1914 they said it would only be a few months and it lasted eight years.”

She still felt the long embrace she gave Louis at the dock, hardly able to turn loose of him. Resigned to her fate, as always trusting in the Lord as in the old Jewish tradition, she was sure that everything works out for the best.

On the daily visits to the nurse, walking along the pier was delightful. From time to time she stood there where she had watched Louis pass through the roped area to the other side of the dock. She was brave to hold her tears back, and the lump in her throat was getting most uncomfortable, but she held out.

²⁸³ Homeric was originally a German ship named Columbus but was given Britain as a war reparation after World War I. The White Star Line bought the ship in 1921 and renamed it. See “White Star Line History” online at www.whitestarhistory.com/homeric.

²⁸⁴ Louis and his bride sailed on the Olympic, but Davidson and his mother were forced to follow later on the Homeric.

To pass the time, they watched fishermen coming with some of the strange catch they had in a burlap sack. Continuously they picked up the bag, to slam it down against the paved strip, doing this repeatedly. Every once in awhile they emptied it and the strange looking aquatic animal, with many tentacles, would squirm only to be maneuvered back into the bag and repeat the beating. Later we found out it was an octopus.

The produce market they found very intriguing. All kinds of fruit were brought in, including grapes of many varieties which were fascinating, so colorful. Money exchange and the language created some problem, but on the whole they managed very well.

On one of their walks they ventured out of town on a very inviting road. It went up a slope, now and then they turned to see the view—they could see the city below and the water in the distance, though hazy, as the channel was seldom clear, but it was still breath-taking. Slowly they kept on going up. On the side of the road, not too visible from the road stood a small building resembling a sentry house in Russia, with no one around it. As they got further up they found themselves surrounded by uniformed men who excitedly tried to tell them something. They kept on saying “Passport, passport.” Looking over the passports and visas, as well as the steamship tickets for the Homeric, they escorted them down the hill and waved goodbye to them. Later they found out that some sort of a military fortress was located on that hill. No one was supposed to get that far into it without permission. Fortunately for them, they were told later by some of the hotel people, the officer in charge was an understanding man. He probably had a good laugh at the dumb tourists who were just killing time.

At last they were dismissed from the quarantine, to have their visas properly stamped and they were ready to get on the boat the next day. Their elation at the news was beyond description, so excited were they that they could not sleep that night.

With their few possessions they made their way to the pier much earlier than the admission gate opened. Chasia sat on her suitcase, the first in line.

The anticipation of seeing the big ship from the pier as it would approach soon gave way to the drizzle and fog that so often is the case in the channel. So full of disappointments over the years, they had their reservations that this was the real thing.

The rope was removed to the gate and they were motioned to come forward. On the other side of the pier was a small, open boat bobbing about in the turbulent water along with other smaller boats tied there. They were motioned to get into the open boat, but being the first in line, to get into this small boat seemed unreasonable, they stepped aside making sure that others would get in it first. The boat soon filled with passengers, Chasia had to be helped into the boat by one of the sailors. The drizzle turned into a beating rain, but umbrellas were of little help, Abram's khaki Army coat was heavy enough, although drenched, and took a long time to dry but it gave protection from the cold rain. The boat started over the choppy water. Chasia anxiously inquired if this was the way they would have to travel across this tremendous body of water, and laughingly a person next to her assured her that they were going to meet the large ship in the open water. Visibility was so poor that one could hardly see the other end of the boat.

Suddenly, in the middle of the big body of water, they came to a halt and there, out of nowhere, was a wall. It was the Homeric. It was so big and the visibility so poor

that all one could see was a section of the boat. The small boat pulled alongside of it. A rope ladder hung on its side. Sailors came down to assist those who needed assistance to climb the ladder. Chasia had to be practically carried up the ladder. Inside the ship was some confusion about the two passengers who were originally scheduled for the Olympic and had to be accommodated on the Homeric. The tickets called for second class which added to the problem. Abram and Chasia had to sit on the stairs for some time until a place was found for them. She was upset to be separated from him, but this was the way it had to be.

Her cabin mate, luckily, was an American of Polish descent and she could speak Polish, as could Chasia. Abram's cabin mate was a Swiss who spoke German and Yiddish and they made out language-wise.

Seasickness was very hard on Chasia, and it lasted through the entire voyage. Abram, too, had his share of it but not as bad. The Swiss buddy had a theory that if one kept on the go, he would not get seasick so the two of them would strike out walking. The only hitch was that the Swiss was very tall and Abram had to take one-and-a-half steps to each of his steps, which kept him half on the run. It must have been comical to see the two men racing over the deck. The dining room was the most disheartening of all. There was so much wonderful food and Abram could not touch any of it. Grapefruit was the only food he could keep in his stomach.

As soon as they neared land, the seasickness left as it came. Chasia could not understand what had happened when she woke up feeling wonderful and she ventured

onto the deck. A sailor brought some saltines and a salted broth which she enjoyed very much. The map showed that the ship would be in sight of New York within hours.

All passengers piled on the open deck to see the skyline of New York City, so well advertised in the brochures of the steamship company. Cheers went up at the sight of the Statue of Liberty, and tears flowed freely from people returning to America. At that, they were stunned at the displayed emotion of the passengers and they, too, had a lump in their throats, but could not fully realize the significance of the Lady in the Harbor. As the years went by, the lump always reappeared at the sight and memory of that first greeting of it.²⁸⁵

When the ship docked, Abram could not find Chasia anywhere, he became frantic. He covered the entire area but she was not to be seen. Strolling around the deck she had ventured into the First Class section, which had the gate open for some unknown reason. When she tried to get back to the Second Class, the gate was locked. Abram had to find someone to unlock the gate to reunite them.

The excitement of the arriving passengers was tremendous, their relatives there to greet them, the ramps busy with workers pushing carts loaded with baggage. Not many immigrants arrived second class, those who did not were taken back to Ellis Island for disembarkation and processing.²⁸⁶ Abram and Chasia were in a different category, being second class, and they were considered under some kind of different classification since

²⁸⁵ They arrived September 28, 1922. Abram Davidson is listed as 16 years old, but he was actually 19, as he was born in 1903. See the “Statue of Liberty- Ellis Island Foundation” online at libertyellisfoundation.org

²⁸⁶ For more information about Ellis Island, see Vincent J. Cannato, *American Passage: The History of Ellis Island* (New York: Harper, 2009).

they were supposed to come in 1914 and were held up because of the war. Then there was his brother, who was there ready to receive them. They came down the ramp and into the gate of admittance. Like all others, they had to fill out a form, containing many questions. They were told to declare all the money they had. Abram began to lay the millions of ruble denominations he had brought with him. “Why this is worthless,” the clerk indignantly announced.²⁸⁷ The person behind Abram volunteered to interpret for him. While Abram knew it was not worth much, he felt indignant at the man’s behavior. Louis, standing on the other side of the partition, heard all this, and called out to the man that he had whatever it took to get them off.

A medical form had to list all the contagious diseases they had. The interpreter turned to Abram, “Where did you come from?” Abram responded “Russia.” He turned around to the clerk, “They had everything.” The clerk checked off every possible disease.

Louis hailed a taxi and drove them to the Hotel Pennsylvania.²⁸⁸ Louis again tried to tell them they had nothing to fear now, they were free people. No one would check on them any more. Chasia repeated the words “No one will check on us any more.” She still thought this was the exaggeration of her lifetime.

²⁸⁷ By this time, the ruble was worthless due to hyperinflation. See Marks, “The Russian Experience of Money, 1914-1924,” in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22*, Book 2: *Political Culture, Identities, Mentalities, and Memory*.

²⁸⁸ 401 7th Avenue. When the Hotel Pennsylvania opened in 1919, it was the largest hotel in the world with 2,200 rooms. See “World’s Biggest Hotel Opens Today” in *New York Times*, January 25, 1919 online at query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9C00E7DC1039E13ABC4D51DFB7668382609EDE. See also www.hotelpenn.com.

PART IV: LIFE IN AMERICA

Sleeping berths on the Crescent Limited were quite different from individual rooms on the train of the international express from Riga to Paris.²⁸⁹ It was the last week in September, the weather was delightful. I watched through the large windows at the landscape as it passed by, it did not seem any different from the European landscape, with the exception that over there were still standing buildings shattered from the ravages of war.²⁹⁰ The crops were gathered and there were no workers in the fields. Trains did not linger at the stations as long as they did there, I could not understand how, in such a short time, people could get on and off without someone getting left behind.

When we got to Washington, I had enough time to go outside the railroad to see the dome of the Capitol. It gave me an uplift that here it was, and if I had had the time I could have gone in it and no one would want to know why.²⁹¹

When we were in Paris, Louis took us to the Moulin Rouge, a well known night spot.²⁹² We sat in the gallery, observing the dance floor. It was the first time I had seen a Negro. He was dancing with a white lady, this did not affect me any but he was so black against the white shirt he wore that I could not understand it. In the dining room of the Crescent Limited the waiters were also black and this was the first time I had been close to one. I just simply did not understand it.

²⁸⁹ The Crescent traveled from New York to New Orleans. Davidson's family disembarked in Greenville, SC.

²⁹⁰ At this point in the manuscript, Davidson ceases referring to himself in third person and begins to use first person. Perhaps, he viewed himself as a different person after moving to America.

²⁹¹ It was permissible to tour the Capitol building. This was not the case for the Tauride Palace, location of the pre-revolutionary Russian Parliament.

²⁹² The Moulin Rouge was a famous nightclub in Paris.

Ever since we had left Russia I observed customs and habits of people, especially table manners. We were glad, in Russia, to get something to eat, we had no time for manners. After lunch in the dining room, the waiter placed finger bowls in front of us.²⁹³ Louis was anxious to know how I would handle it. I saw a man at another table put his fingers in the bowl, slosh them around some and wipe them off on the napkin. Without any further ado I did the same thing. Louis said “How did you know what to do with this?” My answer to him, “We always used these.” Louis laughed, “Things sure have changed since I left.”

At the station in Greenville, South Carolina to meet us were Max (no longer Mordecai) and Sam (no longer Samuel or Shmuel) and many well-wishers, friends of the family. The railroad station in Greenville, a typical Southern small town station, resembled the station in Tolotchin and many other Russian stations.²⁹⁴ I was flabbergasted that every family who came to meet us had their own automobile. I could not understand how this was possible, but held the impression to myself.

Being separated all these years, they all looked forward to living under one roof. A bungalow type house was the going thing in those days and of course nothing but the best for their first house and he took me with him²⁹⁵; mother remained with a Jewish family who kept a Kosher home, of paramount importance to her. Louis and his bride stayed in a hotel.

²⁹³ This occurred on the Crescent Limited.

²⁹⁴ Greenville’s railroad station was a stop on a main railroad line running from New York to New Orleans. See Laura Smith Ebaugh, “A Social History,” in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, 18.

²⁹⁵ Davidson did not specify who he was referring to, but the most probable person was his brother Max.

Many adjustments took place in my life in the new land. Food waste was the most difficult to accept, this was so evident everywhere, in the homes where we were invited for meals, the boarding house where I lived temporarily, restaurants and anywhere food was involved. Max and Louis had an automobile tire store.²⁹⁶ It was located near a cotton mill, and I frequently watched workers come by with lint still on their clothes. Some traded in the store for tires, they had Ford Model T automobiles, because they were the supervisory force. I looked at them as lackeys of the capitalists who also traded in the store, they drove Cadillacs and were dressed well. Child labor was used then and I was very vocal about this practice. I vehemently objected to the long 12 hour day.²⁹⁷ It wasn't long until I was classed as a Communist, causing my brothers great anxiety.

Brother Sam, who was the first of the brothers to come at the age of fourteen and who was the one who made all the arrangements in 1914 to get us over here, he suffered the most disappointments. His family was on the verge of breaking up, his wife left him, she was not in Greenville when mother came here. She and her two children had gone to New York, awaiting a divorce, the first in the Davidson family, not a pleasant greeting for Chasia.

²⁹⁶ According to Jim McAllister, Max and Louis Davidson founded the Keystone Tire Co. in Greenville. See Jim McAllister, "Abe Davidson in Greenville for Opening of Art Museum," in *Greenville News*, March, 15, 1974.

²⁹⁷ Hardy Green writes, "Legal restrictions on child labor...came into force by the early 1930s. By 1931 all southern states had outlawed factory labor for those under age fourteen and restricted those under sixteen to working no more than an eight-hour day." See Hardy Green, *The Company Town: The Industrial Edens and Satanic Mills that Shaped the American Economy* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 100.

After settling in the house, Max looked into private tutorship for me, and Louis was interested in his bride learning English. Under normal circumstances this would have been difficult, but as luck would have it Camp Sevier, left over from World War I, was turned in to a rehabilitation center for gassed soldiers.²⁹⁸ Among the instructors was a Professor C. C. Bentheim, who was a friend of Woodrow Wilson and spoke ten languages. He was also a friend of Andrew Carnegie, the low-relief likeness of Carnegie in all of the Carnegie libraries was sculpted by him.²⁹⁹ He was engaged as our teacher, a marvelous gentleman. Because of my early training in the Government Art School in Vitebsk, Russia, he took a special interest in me and we developed quite a friendship. He came over to the back of the tire store, where I had a corner to do modeling, and he showed me how to cast in plaster of Paris, something we did not have in the Art School in Russia.

His method of teaching was by singing. It was a very effective way. A song has many words, and once you learn the melody the words stay with you. We also had Primer reading books. He taught us patriotic songs, at first much to my disliking, but his personality changed all that very soon. His translation was in Yiddish. I learned to speak fluently in no time. Plaster of Paris was not easy to obtain in any quantity. We had to buy

²⁹⁸ Camp Sevier was a World War I army training camp created in 1917. It was “turned over to the Public Health Service” in 1919. See Robert B. Roberts, *Encyclopedia of Historic Forts: The Military, Pioneer, and Trading Posts of the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1988), 721.

²⁹⁹ Andrew Carnegie was philanthropist and a successful businessman who owned an American steel company. Carnegie was a Scottish immigrant who began working in America as a bobbin boy but later became one of the richest men in the country. For more information, see David Nasaw, *Andrew Carnegie* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006).

it in the drug store, but this proved to be expensive and we'd to limit our purchases to small items.

Professor Bentheim insisted that we read aloud, his theory being that by hearing ourselves, our pronunciation would improve. I had a desk in the back of the store where I did my homework. I was pouring over nursery rhymes aloud one day. He had explained certain rules for pronunciation such as "ea" sounds "ee." "Th" is made by putting your tongue between your teeth; when the "h" sound come first, etc. I was reading the story of the Three Bears, and of course "ea" was to be pronounced a long "e" so naturally "Bears" I pronounced "Beers." Middle sized—I was not told that "e" in this case was skipped, I used it all and it sounded "Meedlesizad beer." I was not aware I had an audience listening to me and suddenly there was a roar of laughter from the persons in the store. This is still a joke with my children and grandchildren. I had a small dictionary, Russian-English and English-Russian, that I carried with me all the time. Louis took me on some of his trips out of town, and he introduced men as his "Kid Brother." My dictionary translated that to be a "young goat," not making me very happy to be called that.

I was told that Camp Sevier had gassed [i.e. burned] soldiers. Louis had some business there, and I went along with him. At the gate a sentry, who looked like a perfect health specimen, met us at the gate. After Louis stated his business there, he motioned for us to go on, in the meantime he turned aside and spit out a wad of something I had never seen before. "Louis," I said, "That man can not possibly live long." He wanted to know what made me think this. "Did you see what he coughed up?" Louis laughed, explaining that this was chewing tobacco, something I never knew existed.

Louis took me to a drug store to have a typical American drink. “A beer?” “No, not a beer, you have to taste it and decide for yourself what it is.” Later I found it was Coca Cola, a far cry from a German beer. In the boarding house I was asked whether I wanted tea or coffee, the tea had ice floating in it. It was a shock when I put my lips to it.

A memorial to a Confederate Soldier was erected in the middle of Main Street, which was not too wide, and it had an iron picket fence around it. The streetcar, getting by it, took the whole side of the street, not leaving any room for an automobile to get by or a cart for that matter. The United Daughters of the Confederacy would not hear of moving it to a more leisurely location further up the street, near the cemetery. It created a real problem, so one night concerned citizens dismantled it and moved it to the proposed site. I was left there dismantled for a long time, finally to be reassembled and put back on its pedestal where it is still.³⁰⁰

It was a disappointment to my brothers when I refused to take a job offered by a Jewish friend in a clothing store. It was offered to me in an act of kindness in the manner like so many immigrants got their start. I let it be known that working in a store was a bourgeois approach to life and that I would have none of it. I intended to make an honest living, by working with my hands. This attitude chilled our already strained relations.

Max was satisfied for me not to do anything but study, he didn't care whether I worked or not. Sam's attitude was different, he felt I should get a job and work just like

³⁰⁰ Laura Smith Ebaugh writes, “The Confederate Monument on Main Street was moved in 1924 after a long controversy ending in a lawsuit.” See Ebaugh, “A Social History,” in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, 23. The monument was relocated to Springwood Cemetery.

he did. He thought this would get my radical ideas out of me. He and I could not agree at all. He was not going to be a party to harboring a Communist. "Let him work and find out what it is like," he would say.

Louis was the most understanding of all because he was easy-going by nature and inherited all the tact mother had and he felt that time was the best adjuster. We had many conferences about what I really wanted to do. My ambition to be a sculptor never left me, but in Greenville this was impossible and Louis kept on insisting that I develop a trade before I ventured away from them. He mentioned many trades and I argued against most of them until we agreed on cabinet making. This appealed to him.

Mr. Romaine Barnes, a customer of theirs, happened to come by their place of business one day. He had heard about my sculpture in the back of the store, he was impressed with what he saw, and as the conversation progressed Louis explored the possibility of his taking me on as an apprentice, since I wanted to use my hands and could possibly make a good helper. Louis also mentioned that I would not expect any pay until I proved my worth. Mr. Barnes operated a mantle factory and cabinet shop, made-to-order work. Mr. Barnes graciously suggested that Louis bring me over and let me see the operation. When Louis took me over the mantle shop he reiterated that until I was useful I would work without pay. Mr. Barnes' reply: "Anyone who works is worth something, nobody works for nothing for me."

This kind of an answer from a capitalist employer made a terrific impression on me. Monday was the day for me to report for work so that by the end of the week I would have a full week's pay. I was assigned to a worker who was a handyman, and I later

found out he was a veteran trainee on the job. The government subsidized his pay for a certain length of time.

All the woodworking equipment—planers, joiner, band-saw, circular saw and all kinds of hand tools—this was all new to me. I was particularly warned about all the power tools. The foreman advised me what kind of hand tools to get: a hand saw, a claw hammer, various wood chisels, a plane, a brace, a small square and dividers. All of this I purchased a piece at a time. Everyone was very solicitous and most cooperative. Shop language had to be acquired.

Coveralls, a lunch box and a thermos bottle were the first acquisitions. Mother was not too impressed for me to go off on the streetcar with a prepared lunch and in work clothes. She would have like for me to be dressed like the other brothers, but she did not say anything.

The 52 hour week ended Saturday at noon and I was handed an envelope with the earnings for the week, \$10.40. “Gosh,” I said to myself, “that’s a lot to receive for learning a trade.” There was never a prouder person, when I unfolded the ten dollar bill and shook out the forty cents in change. I could not believe it, that I earned that much, for all I did was hang around the person I was assigned to.

Like all other workers I purchased work clothes and some hand tools from the list I was furnished by the foreman. I was also proud to give mother five dollars per week for my board. Gradually I was entrusted with individual work and felt I was making progress. All the workers went out of their way to help me with my English, and some I learned that I had to unlearn. I learned a song, the tune which intrigued me, it went

something like this: "If you don't like my fruit don't shake my tree." Louis called me aside, questioned me to see if I knew what I was singing, and advised me to be careful where I sang it.

The foreman was very kind to me. We were building cabs for White trucks, and my partner made me use an automatic screwdriver. I had never seen one before, we were working around windshields, the screwdriver slipped and cracked the glass. My partner gleefully reported it to the foreman. I knew my job was up. Mr. Carpenter, the foreman, came out, looked over the situation, questioned me on my version of the accident. He realized that this was a practical joke on me by my partner. He reprimanded him instead of me and assigned me to another worker who was a better mechanic, which was much to my advantage. Mr. Barnes, a former professor in mechanical engineering at Clemson, undertook to build a radio, the first anyone in our plant had seen. The antenna, copper wire wound on a diamond frame was to sit on top of the cabinet, built in the shop. With all due respect to the professor, no one believed it would work. The speaker looked like one taken off a gramophone, with funny looking bulbs that let off a slit of light. An ordinary automobile battery was to supply the power for it.

Next door to the factory was a fire station. The fire engines had just been automobile-mounted to replace the old time wagons drawn by horses. When this change took place, one of those horses was purchased by Mr. Barnes and was used as a dray horse to deliver and receive freight. When we delivered the radio cabinet to Mr. Barnes' house, I sat on the dray to hold the radio. It was placed in his living room. The next day he was telling us that he was in the tub upstairs with the door open, and could hear music

from Cincinnati on his set. We all looked at each other and, though nothing was said, doubt was written on the faces of everyone present.

After working four months, one Saturday my envelope was not among those of the other workers. Instead I was told by the office girl to come by the office. Well, I knew this was it, I could not understand what I did to be dismissed from the job. This thought weighed on me as I neared the office. Inside were Mr. Carpenter and Mr. Barnes, they cornered me to hand me the envelope. On the outside was written the amount of \$15.60. Before I could say anything, Mr. Carpenter lavishly praised my industry and how quickly I had caught on to the routine of the shop. They wanted me to know they appreciated it.

This was far from the capitalism I had been led to believe, and it left me confused. Just like the time when Louis threw his passport in the trash can, and when I called his attention to what he had done, he laughed and said “I don’t need it any more.” I protested, “But how will you prove who you are?” “Nobody cares who I am.” Here was another example of this strange country.

Leisurely I went window shopping, bought a pair of pajamas to be teased about, that capitalism was rubbing off on me.

It seemed everyone I knew was curious to see what reaction I would have to a baseball game. That Spring the Sally League was having their opening game in Greenville.³⁰¹ Most of the stores and some shops closed for half a day or made it possible for whoever wanted to attend the game. Our plant let the workers have half the day off.

³⁰¹ Davidson is referring to the South Atlantic League, which was and still is minor league baseball. See South Atlantic League online at www.milb.com/index.jsp?sid=1116.

We had good seats, near the front. The crowd was in a festive mood, the game had been publicized for some time, and interest was high. Prohibition was on, curved flasks to fit the hip pockets, camouflaged in newspaper, were very common in the crowd.³⁰² Coca Cola was doing a brisk business as well as peanuts and popcorn. Through a megaphone it was announced that the Governor would pitch the first ball.³⁰³ I was curious to see what an American Governor looked like. The crowd rose to applaud wildly as an ordinary looking man walked out onto the field, dressed like any other business man. He came to the mound, he took a ball from the pitcher and as the crowd whooped and hollered, he threw the ball. The Governor left the field, waving at the crowd. So, this was the Governor? It was not like anything I had been accustomed to seeing in Russia in the Tsarist time. This was just so simple that it was unreal. This whole thing so far left me cold, I wondered what all this excitement was about. Peanuts were offered me from every side, Coca Colas, too, more than I could drink.

Supposedly the game began, and as far as I was concerned, it just did not make any sense. A ball was thrown to a man dressed in a funny-looking outfit who seemed to rest on his heels, while another stood by him swinging a wooden object resembling a club and a third person, who acted authoritatively, swung his arm and the man dropped his club, dejectedly walked toward the stand where we sat, and disappeared. Every so often

³⁰² Prohibition banned the manufacture and sale of alcohol and lasted from 1920-1933. For more information on Prohibition, see, for example, Daniel Okrent, *Last Call: The Rise and Fall of Prohibition* (New York: Scribner, 2010).

³⁰³ Thomas Gordon McLeod was governor of South Carolina from 1923 to 1927. For more information on McLeod, see Walter Edgar, ed., *The South Carolina Encyclopedia Guide to the Governors of South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), 85.

the little ball was hit, to the excitement of everybody, while the hitter ran and fell on a cushion. The shouts and anger of the crowd were unreal. Bottles were thrown on the field at the person in authority.

“What did you think of the game?”, I was asked on the way home. They were disgusted when I told them how I marveled at the two players in the front who never dropped a ball, but always caught it. All through the game I had watched the fellows warming up in front of the pit. I simply could not follow the game in the field.

The Jewish population in Greenville was about 18 families of a merchant class, with one tailor and one shoemaker. A room, rented in an upstairs, housed a Torah and was used for services, infrequently held. For the High Holidays the W.O.W. Hall was rented and Jewish persons from the neighboring small towns joined in the service. A butcher shop, owned by a Jewish member of the congregation, accommodated the Shochet (one who supervises kosher meat). This same person also served as the Cantor for the services and was the Good Will man among the Jewish community.³⁰⁴

Greenville, a city of about twenty thousand population, boasted of being the Textile Center of The South and was a typical small southern town.³⁰⁵ Merchants kept

³⁰⁴ In 1927, 195 Jews lived in Greenville, which was one of six cities in South Carolina that had triple-digit Jewish communities. See Weissbach, “East European Immigrants and the Image of Jew in the Small-Town South,” in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, 115. For more information on Jews in Greenville, SC see “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities- Greenville, South Carolina,” online at www.isjl.org/south-carolina-greenville-encyclopedia.html.

³⁰⁵ The total population of Greenville was about 27,000 in 1927. See, Laura Smith Ebaugh, “A Social History,” in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, 24. See “Interview

long hours in their places of business, and there was very little to do except to play cards on Sunday, which did not interest me at all. Later when I tried my hand at it, I always got the long end of it by being a loser which I could not afford.

In summer the big deal was for everyone to meet in Hendersonville, North Carolina at a Jewish boarding house, where patrons from Florida came every summer to spend a month or so.³⁰⁶ Card games, again, were the main entertainment. I went along to be sociable, but it was far from enjoyable.

Roads were not paved, the dust was blinding, a duster coat had to be worn to protect whatever clothes one wore. Before ascending the mountain, cars stopped at a spring coming out of the side, to change the water in the radiators. Usually cars were backed up as far as the eye could see. This was quite a social event, to assist some who had difficulty undoing the radiator caps and other who forgot containers to get water. Some cars had difficulty making the steep mountain grade without changing into lower gear, frequently changing more than once to get to the top. Max had a Dodge touring car, considered a tough automobile. He bragged that he negotiated the mountain, changing gears only one time, and of course taking credit for his good driving ability. I went mostly to enjoy the beautiful scenery.

with Paul and Pauline Griffith, May 30, 1980” on growing up in Greenville, S.C. online at docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/playback.html?base_file=H-0247&duration=02:29:13.

³⁰⁶ Hendersonville was a popular vacation spot for Jews from Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina with five Jewish boarding houses, three of them kosher. See “Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities- Hendersonville, NC” online at www.isjl.org/north-carolina-hendersonville-encyclopedia.html. Hendersonville had a recorded Jewish population of 115 in 1927. See Lee Shai Weissbach, “East European Immigrants and the Image of Jew in the Small-Town South,” in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, 115.

The old adage, that mother-in-law and daughter-in-law just cannot live in the same house, began to emerge here too. All the daughter-in-law did was not pleasing to mother, and she felt taken advantage of in responsibility while the other was too domineering, as it is often with young people. Sam's wife, Tyna, left him with the two children. She never cared for the children, grossly neglecting the youngest, a little boy. Louis went to New York on business and he also visited his sister-in-law, Tyna. He took the oldest little girl which created additional problems between the in-laws—jealousy entered because most of the attention was showered on the little girl. I took sides, and it turned out to be the wrong thing to do.³⁰⁷

Jeanette was at an age when occasionally she showed defiance, especially to her aunt, by sticking her tongue out at her. To punish the child, she held her and sprinkled pepper on her tongue. This cruel act really triggered the situation from bad to worse and the decision was made to establish separate homes.

Sam, Jeanette and Max moved to a house and Louis established his own residence. I decided to move on too, and away from Greenville.

Nathan and Golda Mizell were our cousins whom I had seen in Truchnovichi, at Uncle Hillel's, in 1914 before they came to America.³⁰⁸ They had wanted to wait to travel with us but my father advised them to go on, and as a result they were at sea when the war broke out. They now lived in Atlanta, Georgia, and I decided to try their place,

³⁰⁷ Davidson is not clear on which side he took.

³⁰⁸ Nathan and Golda were Hillel's children.

especially since Gutzon Borglum was working on Stone Mountain, and I had hoped perhaps I could get some work with him.³⁰⁹

To leave Mother was not very easy for me to do, after going through so much together all those years, however, as always, she was very understanding and gave me her blessing. This was the first time I traveled on my own in America, it was quite a contrast from my travel in Russia. Here one takes a coach or a sleeper, in Russia in the old days there were: first class, second class, third class, fourth class. Russian trains had kerosene or candles for light, here there was electricity, and there was no comparison in the atmosphere.

The train arrived in Atlanta at daybreak. In front of the railroad station two streetcars were taking on passengers. The streetcar I needed was to take me near McDaniel Street. Golda lived somewhere on McDaniel Street, and I did not have her number but was determined to find her if I had to go from house to house. The motorman evidently realized that I was a stranger, so he offered to let me off at McDaniel, his streetcar crossed McDaniel. This was luck I thought.

³⁰⁹ Atlanta had a Jewish population of 11,000 in 1927. See Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jew in the Small-Town South," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, 111. Mark K. Bauman writes, "In Atlanta, they [East European Jews] tended to live together and to work as peddlers, small retail merchants (particularly of grocery stores in which they could also live), salesmen and tailors." See Mark K. Bauman, "Role Theory and History: The Illustration of Ethnic Brokerage in the Atlanta Jewish Community in an Era of Transition and Conflict," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, 239. Gutzon Borglum was a sculptor famous for overseeing the carving of both Stone Mountain and Mt. Rushmore. For more information, see Robert J. Casey and Mary Borglum, *Give the Man Room: The Story of Gutzon Borglum* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952).

When he let me off at McDaniel, I had to make a choice whether to go west or east. A person was on the opposite corner reading a newspaper, and I walked over to him for no particular reason, for he could not advise me where Golda lived. He raised his eyes from the paper, and said “Hello Mr. Davidson, what are you doing here so early in the morning?” this scared the daylight out of me. The secret police immediately crossed my mind. I had been followed, but why?³¹⁰ I could not understand. He further spoke to me “You don’t remember me, but I was in your brother’s place of business when you first came from Russia. You sure learned to speak English for you could not speak it all when I first saw you.” He went on, “Your brother, Louis, has been a friend of mine for many years.” I got up enough courage to ask if by chance he knew a cousin of ours who lived somewhere on this street. “As a matter of fact I do, I sell him coal.” This man was connected with a coal company in Atlanta, and they had a coal yard at the end of McDaniel Street. He walked me over to their place of business, which was a grocery store and meat market. I sat down to wait for him to open up, by then I had learned his name. In a short while a bread vendor came by to leave some bread and he pointed out the house where Sam Serlin and Golda lived.³¹¹ It was diagonally across the street. I sat in their porch swing waiting for them to get up.

Sam Serlin soon opened the front door to get the paper and was startled to see me sitting there, he thought I was Louis. Golda, who was now Gladys, remembered me as a little boy when we came by Uncle Hillel’s place nine years ago.

³¹⁰ This illustrates Davidson’s lingering fear of the Cheka.

³¹¹ Sam Serlin was probably Golda’s husband.

After being a guest for a few weeks I began to look for work, but in the meantime I helped Sam in his grocery store. Sam was not enthusiastic about my going to work on just any job, because he had other plans for me, not known to me.

One morning he called me over to ride with him. He had an Oakland car that he kept shined and polished to use for a short ride on Sunday, otherwise he never left the store.³¹² So his going somewhere in the middle of the week was out of the ordinary. When we drove to a grocery store in a black neighborhood, he unlocked the door and handed the keys to me.³¹³ “This is your store, I bought it for you and here are copies of the notes I signed for it, you can pay it off anyway to suit you, I will give you my credit so you can stock it with merchandise you will need for the store.” “What can one say to anyone who does this to you? In his mind he looked at it as a chance of a lifetime, and it was for anyone who wished to be engaged in this type of activity. But Sam could not perceive that his cousin was not interested in being a storekeeper. This was the way all immigrants got their start, by having a relative backing them in a business and they slaved in the place, often sleeping in the back until they accumulated enough capital to branch out.

Little did my cousin Serlin know what a shock it was for me to so suddenly find myself a capitalist. I watched him as he was going down the steps of the store, feeling proud of doing what he thought was a noble deed, for after all I was a cousin by marriage

³¹² The Oakland Car Company was owned by General Motors until the Oakland Car was discontinued in 1931.

³¹³ Lee Shai Weissbach writes, “In the South, the prospect of opening a store with very little capital was enhanced by the presence of a large African-American population that seemed to offer a ready customer base for Jewish entrepreneurs.” See Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History*, 100.

and he hardly knew me. As soon as he left, trucks began to pull up to unload groceries he had bought for the store. I closed the doors and sat on one of the counters to meditate. I could not walk out on him as was my first inclination. I was determined to see it through, to get him out of debt he made in my behalf. Then, I would take whatever action necessary to free myself of this dilemma.

The store was located in a black neighborhood. Soon customers began to come in, mostly from curiosity, and some purchased items. This place of business, from all indications, had been closed for some time. It needed much cleaning and rearranging which I began with a heavy heart. This heart was not in this venture at all.

Wholesalers came by to meet their new customer, to wish me well, and they all had very nice things to say about my cousin and tried to impress upon me how fortunate I was to have such kinfolks, willing to risk their credit to give me a start in business. They told stories of how hard they had to work almost for free just to have an opportunity to learn the business and later how they had to deprive themselves to accumulate enough money even to be able to rent a store. And here, everything was handed to me on a silver platter. Politely I smiled, but I could hardly wait for them to get out.

Among the well wishers was the one who sold my cousin the store. He hung around to be the last one to leave. His line was even stronger than the others, emphasizing my good fortune. I knew he had four notes signed that I was to pay out over a period of time, and that he had even reduced the interest in half to make it easier for me. This was the reason he remained after the others had left, to impress me with his generosity. He was also graciously suggesting how to rearrange the stock, giving me tips about this

merchandise and other slow moving goods. While he was doing all this, I had only one thought: how could I get hold of the notes my cousin signed? At the propitious moment I got up enough nerve to ask him if I could see the notes. "Of course, I had them here with me," and he handed them to me. There were all four notes properly signed and witnessed. I looked at them, and without any deliberation tore them in half, struck them in the coverall pocket, handed him the key and told him the deal was off. The merchandise that was delivered would be transferred to my cousin's store. I happily walked out of there, leaving him standing in the middle of the store.

My cousin was disgusted with my behavior, but was very sympathetic once he heard my side of the story. This ended my business career. He did not turn me out as I expected he would, instead, he offered to host me until I found a job and said for me to live with them if I so desired. He truly was a prince of a person.

Gutzom Borglum was in the process of promoting the Stone Mountain Confederate Memorial, and I had hoped to get something to do with him. I was willing to do common labor just to be around the project.

There was a streetcar attached to another that one rode to Stone Mountain. Full of hope I rode out, hoping to see the great sculptor, only to find out that he had offices in the Flat Iron Building in Atlanta. Nevertheless it was thrilling to see the rock where the proposed memorial was to be. All the common labor had been hired. He asked me to apply in a year, but I could not wait that long, because I needed a job.

Looking at the photographs of my work, he suggested that I apply at the Atlanta Terra Cotta Co.³¹⁴ Their office was located in the First National Bank Building. Mr. Borglum's secretary called Mr. Cary, the manager, on my behalf with a good word from Mr. Borglum which automatically gave me a job at 35 cents an hours. There were three modelers in the modeling room, all very nice persons to work with. I learned much in the short three months that I stayed there. I had to give up this kind of work, because the clay affected my skin.

After living in Greenville, with limited activity, Atlanta was a delightful place to live in. On Sundays, Piedmont Park Concerts were a highlight for me, along with Grant Park Zoo.³¹⁵ A night school class for foreign students also meant much to me.

There was a Workmen's Circle Organization. I knew some of the younger people, but I found them much too radical. This is when I realized that I am not a joiner of organizations and that capitalism had rubbed off on me more than I would admit. In my view the system still had many faults, such as exploitation of the working class, one of the main targets, the treatment of the black people as second-class citizens was abhorrent to me also too much like the treatment of Jewish people under the Tsarist government, where privileges were denied them.³¹⁶ Not too long before my brother, Aaron, was

³¹⁴ This plant opened in 1903 and closed down in 1943. See, "Downtown Flashback Feature: Atlanta Terra Cotta Company," online at www.downtowneastpoint.com/flashbackfeature/april2011/.

³¹⁵ Piedmont Park still boasts a variety of concerts every year. Also, Grant Park Zoo in Atlanta, which was originally a circus, opened in 1889. The name was changed to Zoo Atlanta in 1985 after new governance took over. See online at www.zooatlanta.org/home/history?ff_s=U-J1vE.

³¹⁶ Leonard Rogoff claims that "Jews and gentiles, both black and white, commonly drew parallels between the oppression of Russian Jews and Southern blacks." See Leonard

subjected to a quota system to complete a Gymnasium education. It was difficult for me to understand how some Jewish people were comfortable with the treatment of the black people in the South.³¹⁷ Frequent discussions were held by the Workmen's Circle Group, very Communistic in tone, which was old hat for me and was frowned upon by the establishment community.

Painful as it was, I had to give up the work at the Terra Cotta Plant to move to Savannah, Georgia. Max was established there in an automobile tire store. My hands soon cleared up when I kept them out of the wet clay. I helped Max in his place of business and continued modeling in plasteline, a composition with a glycerin base.

Savannah is a delightful city, and I soon made friends with whom I kept in touch for many years, I even joined a dance class, something I thought would be the last thing in my life's activity. Max encouraged me to participate in social events.

One morning a chauffeured Cadillac pulled up at the place, and in the back seat an elegantly dressed lady asked for the immigrant who was a sculptor. The lady, Mrs. Mills

Rogoff, "Is the Jew White?: The Racial Place of the Southern Jew," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, 411.

³¹⁷ Albert Vorspan points out that segregation presented a quandary for Jews in the South. Many Jews wanted to be accepted in the South but were aware that if they criticized racism and segregation, they might be ostracized themselves. There was a greater chance of acceptance if they simply kept silent. See Albert Vorspan, "The Dilemma of the Southern Jew," in *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 334-335. See, also, Clive Webb, "A Tangled Web: Black-Jewish Relations in the Twentieth-Century South," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*.

B. Lane, was president of the Telfair Academy where they had art classes.³¹⁸ She asked for me to come by her home for a talk. We made an appointment to see her at her home.

A porter in a white coat met me at the door. After identifying myself, I was asked to enter and wait while he went inside to announce that I had come. When he returned he pointed to my overcoat. I was slow to understand what he wanted, and impatiently he took the overcoat off my back and through the door he went. I had just paid sixteen dollars for the coat, where was he taking it?

Mrs. Lane was a charming southern lady and soon made me feel at ease. I was pleasantly surprised at how easy it was for me to communicate with her. She arranged for me to have the use of the facilities of the school which was located on the second floor in the rear of the museum. I made some use of the studio, but my working hours conflicted with the group working there. However, it was a marvelous experience to work with some of the people there.

Working in the store gave me my first experience in dealing with black people. Many customers paid on the installment plan, a new approach to me. It was my duty to collect when they failed to meet their payment, a common occurrence. Not being able to drive, a black person drove me around in one of the company pick-up trucks. Frequently I knocked at the proper address, only to have the person who answered the door tell me he had no knowledge of the person I was looking for, that he did not live there. When I returned to the truck, the driver informed me that I had spoken to the person in question.

³¹⁸ Mary Comer Lane held the first Savannah Art Club meeting in her home. See “Hello from the Savannah Art Association!: The Oldest Art Association in Georgia,” online at www.savannahartassociation.com/aboutus.html.

For a long period of time I could not distinguish one black person from another. As a collector I was dismal failure.

One of the boys who worked with the company was kind enough to take me out every now and then to give me driving lessons, all this was done unbeknown to Max.

One Sunday afternoon Max told me he would teach me how to drive a car. "It is time you learned how to drive." On a deserted road, he carefully explained about the gear shifts and instructed me in many other points. I backed the car, drove forward at various speeds, and practiced parking. When he was satisfied that I handled the car to his expectation, he ordered me to drive it home. My protests were to no avail. "If you are going to have a wreck, now is the time to have it, drive on," he commanded.

Sunday afternoon traffic was heavy. I broke out in a sweat. When I got home there was not a dry shred on me, but I had learned to drive. The sense of pride it gave me was indescribable, to be able to operate an automobile, a machine I had only laid eyes on just a few short years ago. I did not question any longer where the wheels were going.

Friends took me to Tybee Beach, the playground of Savannah, and I stood watching toward the East across the ocean, thinking: "Did I cross this body of water a year or so ago?"³¹⁹ I stood there listening to the unique noise only an ocean makes, the waves raced endlessly after each other, breaking up, others forming with greater force, retreating only to come back again, seemingly much stronger than before. How infinitely small is man in the face of such a phenomenon.

³¹⁹ Tybee Beach is an island also known as Savannah Beach. It can be assumed that Davidson went in 1923 or 1924.

From the bridgework we observed a car, driving on the sand, get stuck as the tide was coming in. The occupants frantically saved whatever was portable in it before it was completely engulfed. The next day I saw the Studebaker in the city getting a thorough washing out.

Fishing, like going to a baseball game in Greenville, was a must for a newcomer to Savannah, especially an immigrant. I had never fished. As a small boy I never could hold a worm (I still can't). After my line was baited and lowered into the river, something was tugging at it. I pulled up the ugliest creature I had ever laid eyes on. It shook off my line and started toward me. This critter went back into the river. It was the first crab I ever saw.

The party I was with suggested we have some hot dogs before we went home. Looking it up in my dictionary, I did not appreciate being invited to eat a hot dog. "I don't eat dogs, hot or cold." They all had a good laugh at my reaction, we decided to have a weiner instead.

Sam opened a store in a small town near Greenville. He invited me to stay with him until he got going with his business. After eighteen months in America, I began to plan how to get to New York to join an art school or at least be able to study on my own by attending museums and galleries.³²⁰ Working with Sam, I thought, would be a stepping stone to my ambition. He needed someone to build shelves and generally arrange stock, paint signs, a job I could easily fill.

³²⁰ Davidson writes that he lived in New York from 1924 to 1926. See, A. Wolfe Davidson, Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

To live in a country boarding house had an appeal to me, because I was anxious to learn as much as possible about the American way of life. Boarding-house-style food was something new to me. There was steak for breakfast, fried chicken in addition to other Southern dishes, grits and biscuits, rabbit which was passed off on me for chicken without my knowing it, tomatoes that were the hardest to get accustomed to, and chicken pie which I could not understand. How could chickens be used in pie?

It was here that I was exposed to American politics. Cole Blease ran in the Senate race.³²¹ He spoke against the town folks. Later I heard him speak in Greenville and, to my disgust, his speech was a turnabout. This time the people were the most important. When I asked Sam to explain this to me he laughed it off with the comment, "This is politics." It took me the longest time to understand that in politics you say things people like to hear whether you believe them or not.

Of the many curiosities I ran into, the mule was a puzzle to me. It was not a horse and was bigger than a donkey. In the part of Russia where I came from we used horses only.

Like every other community we had an odd character, who every now and then would stray off and be gone several months, and no one knew where he had been or what he was doing during that time. His name was Ossip. Once when he came back, he brought a pair of donkeys. They were a curiosity to all the children in our village and in the surrounding villages. He tried to work the donkeys in the field, but when one got tired

³²¹ Coleman Livingston Blease was a South Carolina governor from 1911 to 1915 and US senator from 1925 to 1931. See Walter B. Edgar, *The South Carolina Encyclopedia Guide to the Governors of South Carolina*, 17-19.

it would lie down and nothing could induce it to get up. Without any reason they brayed and would upset the horses. The villagers got together to put pressure on Ossip to get rid of the donkeys.³²²

Peaches, corn, sweet potatoes were altogether new to me along with watermelon which was shipped in. Peanuts, too, I never saw how they grew. I heard a farmer say he was going to dig peanuts, and a short time later I heard several other farmers say the same thing. This made me wonder if this was the time of the year to transplant peanut trees, only to find out that peanuts did not grow on trees.

Every place I resided gave me an opportunity to learn the ways of life in my adopted country and now I was about to take the biggest step of all, which I looked forward to with anticipation and much apprehension, going to New York. I decided that if I was ever to make a move, now was the time. I was going to study sculpture, a dream from childhood.

When Sam lived in New York he had a job as an assistant steward in the Hotel Gotham. Mr. Mendelsohn, the steward now, was a friend to whom Sam sent me as a connection. I would need work while trying to go to art school. A friend who had just come from Latvia invited me to share a room with him.

Harry Rosenberg worked in a speakeasy and was off on Friday.³²³ I managed to arrive at Pennsylvania Station on a Friday, to be met by him.

³²² This is a memory of life in Russia.

³²³ A speakeasy is an establishment that illegally sold alcohol during Prohibition.

The “Speakeasy” was a flourishing business during the Prohibition days, located on Madison Avenue at 110th Street. A restaurant sign was across the windows, tables were on the inside, the windows had every sign of an abandoned store room. The inside was not very large, as one entered, and there was no activity of any kind. A partition divided the store room and behind the partition was a typical saloon counter with square tables showing considerable wear. A grill for light cooking was against the wall, behind the bar. The wall, covered with mirrors, had elaborate carvings. Empty bottles were arranged like in old times. The bottles the waiters poured from were kept under the counter.

Harry, a very personable individual, got along well with his employers as well as the clients. One of the owners, a Mr. Max, was a six footer, tough as they came. His partner, Moe, also a big jovial fellow, was quite a contrast to Max, who acted as the bully [bouncer]. The customers, mostly working men, were painters, carpenters, plumbers, and some business men. The beverages served were from a reputable foreign distillery. The operation was well protected by bribes, and they had no fear of raids, confiscation, or closing them down for an illegal operation. While card games of all kinds went on among the clients, the establishment was only interested in selling whiskey so no rake-off for games was taken out.

The Beaux Arts School was not exactly what I had expected it to be, I never could quite get adjusted to it, perhaps it was due to my bad schedule as a bus boy at the Gotham

Hotel.³²⁴ I had to take the only job available and that was to take a split shift. One morning I had to report at seven-thirty, work until eleven and come back at five-thirty to work until eleven; the next day to report at eleven-thirty in the morning until five in the afternoon. I tried to attend school during the days when I had the afternoon off, but this whole schedule was wrecking my health and I was forced to look for other work.

It was a great experience to work in the dining room, because we had very special guests stop there. Paderewski was one of the crankiest they had stay there.³²⁵ A waiter of Polish extraction, a Mr. Bernadcheck, was the only one to wait on him. They told me that if Bernadcheck was not there, he refused to register until they found him, and Bernadcheck was just as cranky as Paderewski.

Three gentlemen carried on a conversation, at a table, in a language that sounded like Russian but was not quite Russian. Listening very carefully I recognized it as one of the Slavic languages. The next day the New York Times had a picture of Ivan Mestrovic, the sculptor, who had an exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum.³²⁶ Another time an elderly gentleman, with two elderly women, sat late at dinner every time he ate there. At one of the Metropolitan Museum concerts sponsored by the Rockefeller family, something

³²⁴ Davidson is referring to the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design. The Gotham Hotel is now a boutique hotel located at Fifth Avenue and 55th Street. It opened in 1905 across from the St. Regis Hotel. See Christopher Gray, "Streetscapes/ The Old Gotham Hotel, Now the Peninsula New York; A History Shaped, in Part, by State Liquor Laws," in *New York Times* (January 3, 1999) online at www.nytimes.com/1999/01/03/realestate/streetscapes-old-gotham-hotel-now-peninsula-new-york-history-shaped-part-state.html.

³²⁵ Ignacy Jan Paderewski was a Polish pianist and composer and served as the Prime Minister of Poland in 1919. For more information, see Anita Prazmowska, *Makers of the Modern World: Ignacy Paderewski, Poland* (London: Haus Publishing, 2009).

³²⁶ Ivan Mestrovic was a Croatian sculptor and architect who lived from 1883 to 1962. For more information, see, Ivan Mestrovic, *The Sculpture of Ivan Mestrovic* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1948).

happened to the conductor, who could not appear, and this little man with the long hair stepped out from the audience to conduct the orchestra. Douglas Fairbanks was another of the celebrities to stay there.³²⁷

An elderly lady came in for breakfast by herself, and somehow one of the waiters told her I was from Russia. She called me over to talk about Russia and from then on she always motioned for me to wait on her. It turned out she was a Russian married to an American, in the West. She offered me a cigarette, I was embarrassed and besides I did not smoke, but she insisted I take it and unravel it. We were forbidden to get too friendly with guests, I did not know how to act but she forced it on me. It contained a twenty dollar bill in it.

The night of the Presidential returns in November, when John W. Davis ran against Calvin Coolidge, a screen was set up in the dining room for the returns to be flashed by a projector—my first exposure to an American Presidential election.³²⁸

Getting a job after leaving the Gotham Hotel was very difficult. The only work I could get was in a cafeteria to carry dishes from eleven to three. It gave me a meal before work and a meal after work, plus a dollar. I spent the rest of the afternoon in the library and accumulated enough for a meal over the weekend. In the meantime I looked for work before eleven in the morning. Not having a job, the situation was getting desperate. After calling on many prospective employers I came to a sixteen-story building on Seventh

³²⁷ Douglas Fairbanks was an American actor who lived from 1883 to 1939. For more information, see Jeffrey Vance, *Douglas Fairbanks* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

³²⁸ Davidson is referring to the 1924 presidential election, in which Calvin Coolidge was reelected for a second term.

Avenue housing the National Cloak and Suit Co., a mail-order house, third in size to Sears and Montgomery Ward. I picked up a blank in the employment office and filled it out the best I could, I handed it to the employment officer, who informed me, never raising his eyes “nothing available,” and went on fiddling around with his papers, leaving me standing there dumbfounded. In a partitioned office behind glass was the office of the employment manager, a Mr. Solomon. Without being announced, I barged into his office. Before he had a chance to say anything to order me out, I insisted that I was desperate for work and would refuse to leave until I could get some work. My folks were in the South and I had no one to help me, I did not care what kind of work it was as long as it was work. He was taken aback by such impudence but did not turn me out. “Sit down, we will see what we can do.” As I was sitting there an order came through for checkers. “Can you check?” he asked, “Yes sir,” I quickly replied, hoping he would not ask me to explain it. “Take this order to Mr. Kelley on the sixth floor, and if you can sell yourself to him you have a job.”

Mr. Kelly, a typical Irishman, looked me over and said: “Young man we have many girls on this floor. They are to be left alone.” Whether he was serious or joking or just making fun of me puzzled me. The foreman, Mr. Keene, another Irishman, paired me with a Jon Meulancamp, a Dutchman. We were like Mutt and Jeff in the cartoon.³²⁹ He was a bully of a man, an ex-sailor, who, I found out later, had left Holland because of being in love with a Catholic girl whose parents objected to the match. She chose to obey their will.

³²⁹ “Mutt and Jeff” was an American comic strip popular during this time period featuring a tall man named Mutt and a short man named Jeff.

We had to check merchandise in cases against invoices to be sure the amounts and numbers corresponded. If it were not for Jon I could not have handled the job, because the cases were far too heavy. We worked five days a week and this give me weekends to visit museums and galleries, to take notes and do many sketches, and also to visit the Library on 42nd Street, a tremendous help to me.³³⁰ Occasionally after work I visited Harry, in the saloon, to observe characters, and characters they were.

A Chinese customer who was there every time I came around, he aroused my curiosity. Harry told me was a dishwasher, would save his money and come to the saloon to stay there until it was all gone. He would go back to his job then, to work to accumulate money for another spree.

Every drunk usually has a buddy and the Chinese was no exception. His buddy was an Irish construction worker twice his size. It was amusing, watching the two sitting across the square table drinking, each paying for his own drinks. In a jovial mood the Irishman laughed in his booming voice while the Chinese giggled in a squeaky, suppressed chuckle. The Irishman leaned back, looking down on his friend, and came out with: "You damned little Chink." Like a squirrel he jumped over the table and landing in the Irishman's lap, and grabbing his nose between his knuckles, asked "Who, me Chink?" The big Irishman could not shake him off, all he could do was holler in his muffled voice. The rest of the customers separated them. It was hilarious. Before long it was all forgotten, and a round of drinks healed everything.

³³⁰ Davidson is referring to the Stephan A. Schwarzman Building, a branch of the New York Public Library.

During the big snow that frequently covered New York City, the snow had to be hauled away. One of the characters who frequented the saloon had a defective arm, but he evidently had some political clout with the city government, for he had charge of keeping track of who got how many loads. After every snow he was flushed financially. This was a way of life in New York I learned.

New York is a varied city, its winters are severe, yet delightful, and its spring has its unpleasantness but it soon gives way for summer to emerge soon with all the parks, the ocean and many recreational activities. Fall with its brisk weather, the turning of the leaves, the return of opened schools, all give a feeling of settling down after all the frolicking during the summer.

Concerts by the Goldman Band at the Mall in Central Park were occasions looked forward to until mayor Hylan began to play politics by refusing the Mall unless the band played in the various boroughs.³³¹ The Guggenheims, who sponsored the band, resented the idea of the Mayor acting so autocratic about it and made a deal with New York University to use a place they owned past Fordham University, which was quite a distance from the center of the city. However, music lovers filled the place to capacity. Before this, a few concerts were given from a rooftop in Central Park West.

Harry had a wonderful sense of humor and liked to play practical jokes. As we were leaving a concert one time he stopped and pointed his finger to the top of a building,

³³¹ The Goldman Band was a large concert band, which disbanded in 2007. See Ben Sisario, "Arts, Briefly; Goldman Band Closes Down," in *New York Times* (May 27, 2005) online at query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9A06E1D81039F934A15756C0A9639C8B63. John Francis Hylan was mayor of New York City from 1918 to 1925.

soon a crowd was looking in the same direction, blocking the whole street. We left and they were still looking.

Once in awhile, on Sunday morning, we would get off the train when the most people got off, to follow them not knowing where they would lead us. One time we saw an International Hockey game at Ebbets Field not having any idea beforehand that they would take us there.³³²

We enjoyed going to a Jewish Theater. Harry was a great mimicker, and it was a show in itself to have him mimic what had taken place in the audience.

At the mail-order house, from a checker I advanced to a silk examiner, a job that had some responsibility. Silk that came in had to be checked against the description in the catalogue, but it also had to be of a certain count of the weft and the warp as well as the right color. All this was done with a magnifying glass.

Mr. Keene, the foreman on the floor, was always up to some practical joke. At three o'clock the bell rang for a 15-minute rest break. Each person relaxed in his own way. Mr. Keene had asked me to go across the street to get a lemon. When the bell rang and everyone stretched out to rest, he began to roll the lemon between the palms of his hands. The reaction to the lemon was hilarious. Everyone's mouth began to water, and when he cut it and started licking on it, some had to go away. He ruined everyone's rest period. The garment industry was located on Sixth Avenue. One lunch period Mr. Keene invited several of us to walk over to the next block, because he was going to show us something. He got up on a trash can, near a light pole, wrapped his arms around the pole

³³² Ebbets Field was a stadium in Brooklyn, New York City.

and at the top of his voice he yelled; “Hey Cohen,” a common name in the Jewish community. It was amazing how many persons turned to the call.

Harry and I had a room with an Austrian, a Mr. Seiner, a widower who made a home for a teenage daughter and a tom cat. He was very fond of his tom cat, and it disturbed him when the cat began to stray off. Coming home one day I met Mr. Seiner with a box full of holes “What have you here, Mr. Seiner?” I inquired. “Oh, it’s dot Tom,” he replied, “I take him to fix so he stay home,” he explained. “Now Mr. Seiner, this is a cruel thing to do. You wouldn’t like this done to you?” I said jokingly, it never entering my mind he would take this remark seriously. “Dot’s right Mr. Davidson,” he turned around to come home with me. He never forgave me for comparing him to his tom cat. He complained to Harry. He did not want us to live there any more, and we had to move.

We moved not too far from the Brooklyn Museum which I enjoyed very much. Prospect Park had a nice lake and we boated a good deal, and we were much closer to the beach. My art enthusiasm had to be put aside for awhile. I went through an ambivalent period. Inwardly I wanted to pursue my art work, but practically it seemed impossible unless I compromised my pride to appeal for help from the family who were not sympathetic to the arts. To be a typical New Yorker: go to work daily, and playing on the weekend did not appeal to me at all. Just to exist like all the people I was thrown in contact with bored me to the bone. I decided to get out of this rut.

After much deliberation, I arrived at the conclusion that my early sentiments were not too far from wrong, that America was not for me. Paris, France was very attractive,

and perhaps I should take passage on a freighter to get across the ocean and settle in Paris.³³³ Somehow I did not want to give up the right to be able to come back to America and there was this possibility, that not being a citizen I would have to come again under the category of an immigrant. This I did not want to happen. Looking into it I found that citizenship was the only answer to securing this privilege.

Naturalization required a continuous five year residence in the United States. The first papers, or Declaration of Intention to become a citizen, can be taken out after a couple of years and then three years later naturalization papers are awarded. One had to renounce allegiance to the native country which was no problem to me for I had no intention of ever going back to a Communist system which claimed so many false accusations against capitalism. The promise of free education was much simpler here. Freedom of speech was the most flagrant claim (there was a saying in Russia you can have all the free speech you want as long as you can keep your tongue behind your teeth). No one needed identification here while over there it was dangerous to step out of your house without identification. Here, in spite of difficulty in getting work, one had a choice of the kind of work he wanted to do. All in all, I applied for the Declaration of Intention and shortly after that decided to go back down South.³³⁴

Back in Greenville, the family split up. Mother had the house to herself, Max moved back to Greenville. The house was next to a Jewish family so Mother did not feel

³³³ Davidson visited Paris again later in life but never moved there.

³³⁴ Davidson moved back to Greenville in 1927. See Sterling Eisiminger, "Abe Davidson: Survival by Craft," in *Clemson World*, 40, no. 2 (May 1987).

so alone. I adapted to managing a used tire store, that I was quite successful at, and even opened a bank account. What a change in just a few years! On weekends I converted a pick-up truck to a roadster, giving me mobility on Sundays.³³⁵ With a car, so called friends were not hard to get.

One Sunday morning I traveled to the next town, this was during the dirt roads period. A Hudson, considered a big car, was behind me and he wanted to pass me but I stayed in the middle of the road and opened the gas feed wide open. The road was narrow, I was determined not to eat his dust. The next morning I opened the place of business, while the phone rang and someone called for Mr. Davidson. The party wanted to report about the truck going so fast he could not pass it in his Hudson. He was concerned someone would get killed going so fast. I assured him that proper steps would be taken for this not to happen again. Was I glad that I answered the phone instead of Max, for this would have deprived me from further use of the truck for my personal use.

To get Americanized I joined the Y.M.C.A. to take part in basketball playing. I had difficulty catching the ball. "Take it, don't try to grab it," I was instructed. In spite of all the coaching, the tips of my fingers stayed sore after every practice.

As time went on, more from sympathy than need, I was included in a team. I played guard, because I thought in this position I could do less damage to the game. In one of the games somehow I got the ball, and everyone yelled: "Abe pass it here, pass it here," which confused me. I looked up at the basket behind me and shot at it to score.

³³⁵ A roadster is a two-seat, open-air vehicle.

When everyone rose to their feet, I thought I was doing well only to find out that I made two points for the opposing team. Needless to say this ended my basketball career.

Gambling was the popular recreation. It seemed very silly to me to watch grown persons on their knees in a circle, on the floor in the hotel, with stacks of money in front of them, throwing a couple of square little blocks with dots on them after shaking them in a small container and throwing them on the floor, anxiously watching as they came to a stop. Sometimes each would pile more money in the circle, other times someone would rake it all in. I was asked if I had any money I would like to risk. Just to see what it was all about, I handed one of the players some money and to my surprise it was tripled in no time. “How do you like the crap game,” I was asked. I was considered a poor sport, I took my winnings and left.

Mother was a great hostess and always had some wine or whiskey or brandy on hand when someone came to visit her. “Here in America,” she complained to me, “all you can get is some wine permitted for Passover, but I’d like to make some Schlivo if you can get some whiskey.”³³⁶ Max was a law-abiding citizen and would not hear of getting anything that was against the law. Louis cooperated and got hold of some bootleg corn whiskey. Mother and I put the necessary ingredients in it, and hid it under the house to let it age. From time to time we sampled it.

³³⁶ Davidson is referring to slivovitz or slivovitsa, a distilled spirit made from plums. Prohibition prevented the production and sale of alcohol in the US during this time. Alcohol could be procured illegally, however. Jews could use wine for religious purposes. For more information, see Marni Davis, *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition* (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

A party was given at the house, a couple of card tables were set up, and while the game was in progress, one of the players came over to Mother. In his faltering Yiddish he said to her: "Mrs. Davidson, I heard that you always have a schnapps tucked away somewhere. What are the chances to have some?" I fetched a half-gallon from the hiding place for Mother to serve, proudly, her concoction. Others joined in the kitchen to partake of the brandy. One of the guests did not fare too well from the drink, he just plain passed out. The game stopped, and everyone was anxious about what happened, but no one else was affected by the drink. Max took one whiff at the jar and realize that it was not wine as he thought it was. Excitedly he proceeded to empty the brandy into the sink, all the time admonishing me for having bootleg whiskey in the house. Mother was behind him, telling him that just because his friend was such a weakling that he could not take a man's drink, there was no reason for him to throw away such a good drink.

Mother accepted the way of life in a small Jewish community, adopting her own routine. Kosher food, mainly meat products, was delivered to her by the local Jewish butcher. She was given a weekly allowance, so she could buy produce from the peddler who came around twice a week. She learned the name of potatoes and cabbage and mostly she pointed to whatever she needed. As time went on, and she learned the denominations of money, as was customary in Russia she bargained him down some, and when that happened they both had a good laugh over it.

The Sabbath she observed the way she did in Belytze by baking twists and having gefilte fish, lighting the candles, spending the entire morning reciting the prayers. Food was prepared on Friday for both days. Saturday she would not light the oven or turn on a

light. She told us on many occasions, "Children, what you do on the outside is your affair, as long as you observe my wishes at home." This we respected to the letter.

On holidays like Passover a list was presented to her to select what she wanted and this was ordered. I helped convert the house to the Ritualistic Guides, from everyday use to strictly Passover week.

On High Holy Days we walked to the hall the congregation rented from the W.O.W. for the services. Many of the Jews from small towns around Greenville came in to form a sizable crowd. Mother was the oldest of the Jewish people in the area and she was given the proper respect elderly persons command.

A hotly contested race for Sheriff resulted in electing a different type from the previous Sheriff, who had succeeded a brother who was shot down as a result of a feud. Mr. Sam, as the new Sheriff was known, was a clean-cut gentleman and had great appeal to the ladies in the county, who played a deciding part in electing him.

Mr. Sheriff Sam lived next door to Mother, he was a fine family man, a good neighbor, and his oldest little girl was the same age as my niece Jeanette. They played together, visiting each other's house, as was normal among children. Mr. Willis drove a Cadillac, and his wife drove a small two-door sedan, a Maxwell. I heard him every night when he drove his car in the driveway on the side where our bedrooms were located, because he had a habit of racing his motor before turning it off.

Customarily on Saturday night I browsed around town, visiting places, getting groceries, to come home rather late. The Ford pickup truck I brought home on weekends

did not have a battery, but as long as the motor ran the lights burned. When the motor stopped the lights went out. It was a nice warm May night and I drove home the truck, turned it to face the Willis garage, leaving the motor running to give me light to unload the groceries. Putting the groceries away I checked on Mother who still had her light on, in bed reading, but Jeanette was sound asleep. As I started toward our bedroom, facing the Willis house, I got about half way when I heard a car drive in the driveway, the motor race, the switch turned off, what sounded like a car door slam shut, and then I heard three shots and heavy hurried steps come by the window. I ran to the back porch and turned on the light, but I didn't hear anything. I ran out to the front and into the street. Some other boys also heard the shots and came to investigate. We went into the driveway, to see Mrs. Willis was coming out of the house. "This is Sam's car, where is Sam?" We found him dead, lying alongside his car with the door to the car shut. From that hour on the quiet street was not the same. It seemed that all night long people came to see the place where the Sheriff had been assassinated. They walked all over the yards, peeped in the windows, looked in the parked Maxwell Sedan in the garage, and walked all around the garage. If there was any evidence of the assassin, it surely was destroyed by the curious crowd. The surprising part of it all was that the enforcement officers did not rope any part of it off.³³⁷

Governor John Gardiner Richards appointed the ex-Sheriff to act as Sheriff until an election could be held, and he also sent his chief investigator to work with the

³³⁷ Sheriff Samuel D. Willis was murdered on June 11, 1927. Former Sheriff Carlos Rector hired a hitman to kill Willis. See "Fallen Heroes: Greenville County's Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Page" in Greenville County Sheriff's Office online at www.gcsso.org/fallen-heroes.php.

Sheriff.³³⁸ They found the assassin had pried loose one of the boards in the back wall of the garage and there was evidence that he must have sat there in a knee-bent position, because his toes were deeply imbedded in the soft ground. There was evidence that many cigarettes were smoked while he waited for the Sheriff. A block away they found marks of new tires. The threads showed very little wear and belonged to a big car, perhaps in the Cadillac class.

The Greenville News, a local paper, in its headline intimated that Mrs. Willis was in the Maxwell with a lover and the Sheriff came upon them resulting in the lover killing him. They ran an artist sketch showing the theory. They later were sued and settled for a high amount.

The State investigator, with a couple of deputies, called me to follow them to the back of the place where I worked. He unfolded a handkerchief with my laundry mark on it. They had found it in the Sheriff's garage and needed an explanation. Needless to say, it scared me out of my wits. My first reaction: "I don't know how it got there." They realized how this frightened me and asked me to sit down to think about it. "Yes, I said, "I can explain how it got there. My niece, who is the same age as Virginia Willis, the daughter of the Sheriff, frequently played in the garage. My niece liked to take my handkerchief and she lost many of them." They verified this with the Sheriff's daughter and returned it to me, much to my relief. This episode took me back to the years in

³³⁸ John Gardiner Richards was the governor of South Carolina from 1927 to 1931. See Walter B. Edgar, *The South Carolina Encyclopedia Guide to the Governors of South Carolina*, 113-114.

Russia, and it flashed in front of me—comparing what would have happened to me when such evidence as a handkerchief was found at the scene of a murder.

Mrs. Willis and a Deputy Townsend were indicted for the murder. The defense attorneys, Dean and Wyche, represented the accused. It turned out that I was the star witness, since I was one of the three who first got to the Sheriff's body. My testimony of hearing the Sheriff come in, hearing the shots, hearing the car door slam after turning off the ignition and the shots following was all contrary to the theory of the State that the door was slammed after the shots, intimating that Mrs. Willis ran into the house after the shots.

The investigators were not at all interested in getting at the truth of the assassination as was later proven when a black man confessed to the slaying, accusing the acting Sheriff of hiring him to kill Sam. All of the evidence was earlier known, such as the treads of the tires, the cigarette butts behind the garage, the board he pried loose to watch for the Sheriff to come in. He took them to the place where they had taken him in their Cadillac to drop the revolver in a creek which was later recovered. The acting Sheriff was indicted, tried and given ten years in prison for the crime. I was a witness again, for the State this time. My evidence was not needed much this time, but was held in reserve should they need it.

While shaving one morning, my face appeared bloated, and not being one to pay attention to trivial matters I thought it would go away. Walking to work, a distance of

over a mile, I met several friends who made remarks that I should consult a doctor. My face appeared abnormally puffed.

When I described the symptoms to the physician over the phone and of course wound up in his office for a lengthy examination, he diagnosed it as nephritis, with the assurance that at my age given some time on a careful diet it could be corrected.³³⁹ My diet was harder on Mother than it was on me. Not to be able to partake in any of her cooking and to watch the quantity, to be on a salt-free diet, sugar-free diet, spice-free diet—in her view there was nothing much left for anyone to exist on. She soon blamed it all on America, remembering when she was taken to a dentist for the first time when she was 59 years old to have some bad teeth extracted, and when glasses were prescribed for her. Like then, she questioned now: “What’s the matter with America?”

Religiously I followed the doctor’s instructions, but seemingly I was getting worse. Neighbors and friends insisted that I change doctors. After much consultation, we chose Dr. R. C. Bruce, and he turned out to be not only a doctor but a close friend for many years to come. I went back to the hospital for more tests and observation. Thirteen weeks had gone by and there still was not any visible improvement. It was very disheartening. The funds I had saved with the hopes of entering Clemson College faded and still there was no promise of recovery.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Nephritis is inflammation of the kidneys. Davidson became ill as a result of poor nutrition during the famine in Russia and remained sick for eight years. See, Biographical Data on A. Wolfe Davidson, June 14, 1971, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

³⁴⁰ Clemson College, now Clemson University, is located in Clemson, SC.

Dr. Bruce, a very conscientious person, invited other doctors for a conference in my room one Sunday morning. This of course was with the consent of the family, who were present at the conference. “I studied this case the entire weekend, consulted medical books, to find that this case is like a shoe that does not fit the foot,” Dr. Bruce said. Dr. Sharpe, a urologist, looked at Dr. Bruce, sarcastically remarking: “Bruce, can’t you see a pure and simple case of kidney malfunction as nephritis?” He looked in the direction of Dr. C. O. Bates, who was a surgeon, but called in as being a friend of the family. “I am sorry boys,” Dr. Bruce replied. In his research he ran across a description by Dr. Epstein in Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York who wrote an article of a similar case.³⁴¹

“Let’s call Dr. Epstein,” Louis suggested. Dr. Bruce left the room to put in a call to Dr. Epstein, who was in Europe at that time, but his assistant, when advised of the case in question, said that a doctor in Munich, with whom Dr. Epstein collaborated, was available.

Max’s response was to make arrangements to have me taken to Munich. Dr. Bates spoke up: “He is your brother and you can do what you think is best, but let me put in my ten cents worth of advice. You can take him to Munich no doubt he will get the best medical treatment available, but there is a psychological element that should not be overlooked. Munich is in a strange land, a long way from the family and friends. Loneliness can undo all the other gains. Last year I attended a medical convention in Atlantic City and heard a paper on diagnostics by a Dr. Stewart R. Roberts from Emory

³⁴¹ Mount Sinai Hospital was created in 1855 to provide care for Jews in New York City. For more information, see “The History of Mount Sinai,” online at www.mountsinai.org/about-us/who-we-are/history.

University in Atlanta. He has a private practice, besides teaching at Emory. My guess is he can get to the bottom of your brother's case."

An appointment was made and I was taken to Dr. Roberts. Louis went with me to enter me in the Emory Hospital where I remained for some four months for various experiments.

Edema was all over me, and to press any part of my body left an impression as though it was dough.³⁴² The albumen registered four plus in my specimen, eliminating capacity was practically nil, all fluid lodged between my tissues.³⁴³ My past history showed that during the famine in Russia, when I lived in Vitebsk, I was on a near starvation diet and the ordinary food was mostly potatoes and bread.

Dr. Roberts diagnosed this case a dietary case. Experiments began on me to arrive at what kind of a diet would be suitable. With every new approach I responded for a short period only, then other approaches had to be tried. Perspiring was one of the problems. No matter what they tried, it was to no avail. A theory that hot baths might get results was tried. An orderly was assigned to be with me while in the tub, because confinement in bed made me lose strength. The orderly with me was a ministerial student, and I made the mistake of asking him what he was going to preach the next Sunday. "Isaiah," he replied and without further ado began to preach. He got so carried away with his sermon that I began to fear drowning in the tub before I got his attention. We never talked about his sermons after this experience.

³⁴² Edema occurs when a body has an excess of fluid, producing swelling.

³⁴³ Albumen in urine can mean possible kidney-related issues.

Sun bathing was another of the experimental treatments I had to take. In a wheel chair I was rolled to the top of the roof where other patients spent some of their time. Thirty minutes for the chest, then I was turned on the front to expose the back for thirty minutes. Many of the patients on the deck were at a loss to understand how anyone in my shape had such fine spirits. One of the ladies in the next chair asked me: "How in the world can you be so cheerful, the shape you are in?" My answer to her was very upsetting to her. "It doesn't matter, I am ready for the reaper whenever he comes." She had to be rolled inside, it unnerved her so.

A young lady in her early twenties was taken on a walk, She had to be strapped on to two nurses, and every now and then she would scream such weird-sounding screams. There were many walking-around patients and many had strange fixations. I felt so lucky, at least I was sane and was not in any pain.

Experimenting with many diet combinations, Dr. Roberts came up with a diet consisting of fifty grams of fat, fifty grams of protein and seventy-five grams of carbohydrate. I was under observation for a short period after that.

A few days before releasing me from the hospital, Dr. Roberts had me propped in a sitting position and made four incisions on top of my feet, just above the toes, and an incision on the side of each ankle. Water from under the tissues began to ooze out getting into a trickle. In twenty-four hours I lost twenty pounds. A couple of days later I was dismissed from the hospital, to go home to stay on the diet treatment of the strictly allocated quantity, plus salt-free, and spice-free. While in the hospital, the Fulton County Medical Association held a meeting and all came to hear Dr. Roberts' lecture on this

case. He had a theory that when I was going through the famine period the kidneys did not get a chance to develop and when I came to this country I had an avaricious appetite. It overloaded the kidneys resulting in a complete breakdown. Given a chance the body would grow an additional kidney. I was in a wheel chair with a nurse on the side while Dr. Roberts pointed to charts and to me from time to time. When I was back in my room, the doctors came in to closely examine me. Some were not very tactful with their comments. One doctor remarked: "I don't see how this young man can possibly last long in this condition." I raised my head, looking in his direction and said "I assure you I will outlive many of you."

Louis came to see me back to Greenville. At the railroad station, Mother and friends came to meet me almost like it was when I first arrived in this country. Mother was not happy at the small amount I was allowed to eat and could not quite understand my not being able to drink any water. Fruit was the only source for my liquids. This waterless deal lasted over three years.

Like many other Americans, I had taken out an insurance policy with a disability clause which paid twenty dollars a month. While twenty dollars a month was not a big amount, it relieved my feeling of being a complete burden to the family, and I am sure it helped a great deal toward my recovery. Exposure to the sun was continued through the entire winter whenever the sun was out. Gradually my strength came back so that I started to walk to town, and my rest periods decreased as time went on. Being disabled had other advantages—I read and studied the English language.

When Spring came around a neighbor plowed a garden spot for us when he had his plowed. On a low stool I moved around from plant to plant to cultivate and weed the rows of vegetables.

Visits to Dr. Bruce's office still showed heavy albumen in my specimen, but generally he was encouraging. His wife, a cultured person widely traveled in Europe whom I visited frequently, was very helpful in suggesting books and we had a chance to exchange views.

Gradually my strength came back to the point that I could walk to town, resting only twice. As my health improved I resumed modeling and built a shop in the back of the garage, doing heads of anyone who consented to pose for me.

During the Roosevelt administration, part of the Works Progress Administration commissioned artists all over America to do work in their respective fields.³⁴⁴ I was fortunate to do a bust of Andrew Jackson and Dr. Marion Simms for their birthplace, Lancaster, South Carolina.³⁴⁵ A set fee per bust went to the artist, materials were to be

³⁴⁴ Davidson is referring to the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) which emerged in South Carolina in late 1935. See Lise C. Swensson and Nancy M. Higgins, eds., *New Deal Art in South Carolina: Government-supported Images from the Great Depression*, 10. See, also, Nick Taylor, *American-Made: The Enduring Legacy of the WPA: When FDR Put the Nation to Work* and Francis V. O'Connor, ed., *Art for the Millions: Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*.

³⁴⁵ Andrew Jackson was president of the US from 1829 to 1837. For more information, see Jon Meacham, *American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House* (New York: Random House, 2008). Dr. J. Marion Sims was a famous physician. For more information, see, for example, Seale Harris, *Woman's Surgeon: The Life Story of J. Marion Sims* (New York: Macmillan, 1950). Davidson completed these two statues in

furnished by the recipient or sponsor. Times were hard and money was scarce, all we could afford for material at that time was Plaster of Paris soaked in Miniwax, a new preservative in those days. I had to pay for the plasteline, far too much for someone unemployed. But I did it. A bust of Thomas Parker, who was responsible for the founding of the Greenville Public Library, was also done in Plaster of Paris and treated in Miniwax.³⁴⁶ This encouragement led to other works.

George Chaplin, a rising junior at Clemson College posed for a bust in his uniform.³⁴⁷ While working, our conversation drifted from one subject to another, and it finally led up to the idea of my doing a statue of Thomas G. Clemson, founder of the school.³⁴⁸ This idea appealed to me, perhaps a deal could be worked out for an exchange of room, board and tuition for doing the statue. This was such a far-fetched scheme I did not dare to entertain it too seriously. However, it was not completely dismissed, and the more I thought about it the more reasonable it appeared. Morris Campbell, a Clemson graduate, agreed that it would be a great idea to work out such a deal, and he offered to take me to Clemson to introduce me to the proper person who would give an honest opinion if such a deal could be worked out. Mr. J. C. Littlejohn, the business manager, a tall quiet man, not very talkative, listened to the proposition, and whole heartedly

plaster in 1937. See A. Wolfe Davidson, Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

³⁴⁶ Thomas F. Parker aided in the creation of the Greenville Library in Greenville, SC in 1921. See "Hughes Main Library History" in Greenville County Library System online at www.greenvillelibrary.org/index.php/about/locations-hours/hughes-main-library.

³⁴⁷ George Chaplin was a student journalist for Clemson College's *The Tiger* and went on to become a successful newspaper editor. See Wright Bryan, *Clemson: An Informal History of the University, 1889-1979*, 187.

³⁴⁸ For information on Thomas Green Clemson, see Alma Bennett, ed., *Thomas Green Clemson* (Clemson, S.C., 2009).

approved it.³⁴⁹ We went to see Dr. E. W. Sikes, the president of the college, a big, fatherly type with a gruff voice, who listened to my proposal. He turned to Mr. Littlejohn, “Jim, I think we ought to do it, see how you can work it out.” We went to his office to work out particulars, and by this time I became “Mr. Abe.” We talked in generalities, for I at this time did not have any concrete plans.³⁵⁰

“Now, Mr. Abe, you just make your plans to come over this fall, and we will get the ball rolling.” I gathered my photographs of my work and could hardly believe this had happened, it was so simple. I touched on my diet, but this seemed not to have created any problem. Since Architecture was the school I asked to be attached to, I had to see Professor Rudolph E. Lee, the head of the Architecture Department, to get his endorsement and to provide me room for a studio.³⁵¹

My past history of disappointments conditioned me to believe the worst, so in this case, in spite of the assurance of Morris Campbell and George Chaplin, I still had my reservations that this would come to pass.

³⁴⁹ James C. Littlejohn was the business manager at Clemson College for almost thirty years. He was responsible for procuring room, board, and tuition for Davidson in return for the creation of a Thomas G. Clemson statue. Davidson was backed by the Blue Key fraternity. See, Wright Bryan, *Clemson: An Informal History of the University, 1889-1975*, 133, 237.

³⁵⁰ Enoch Walter Sikes was president of Clemson College from 1925-1940. For more information about Dr. E. W. Sikes see Wright Bryan, “The Sikes Administration” in *Clemson: An Informal History of the University, 1889-1975*, 112-117. See, also, Donald M. McKale, ed., *Tradition: A History of the Presidency of Clemson University* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1988).

³⁵¹ Davidson is referring to Rudolph E. “Pop” Lee, an architecture professor. *Ibid.*, 124, 115.

My shop in the back of the garage was located in a new development (now this location is the Sears store in Greenville).³⁵² Beyond the development was a black community and whenever I needed manual help, such as lifting or generally moving molds, I waited until someone came along on the way to the town and would engage them to do the odd jobs for me.

One of these mornings I was casting the Chaplin bust. I needed someone to help for me to turn it and lift it. A black boy of about fifteen years of age was strolling to town, and I hired him to help for a couple of hours. All the heads sitting around on the shelves puzzled him, “Mister, don’t them things come alive?” he asked, his eyes wide open, curiously taking it all in. Jokingly, I replied: “Sometimes they do,” which puzzled him the more. I had just filled the mold with Plaster of Paris when I was called to the telephone. I asked him to hold the mold until I got back. When I returned, the boy was in the back yard, suspiciously watching the door to the shop. The mold was on the floor—in the nature of plaster of paris, it generates some warmth when it begins to set. “Why did you drop the mold?” I asked him. “That thing done got warm and coming to life, I ain’t ‘bout to be dere wid it.”

September came around to keep me busy preparing to leave the security of Mother’s care, and the diet, to step into an adventure I was not sure I would be able to handle physically.³⁵³

To live in the Barracks at Clemson a student had to be in the R.O.T.C. program. The Y.M.C.A. was the only place to accommodate day students.³⁵⁴ Luckily it had one

³⁵² The Sears store is now located on Haywood Rd.

³⁵³ Davidson moved to Clemson in September 1934 and remained there until 1936.

vacancy to share with another special student. The biggest hurdle to overcome was my diet. Mr. Littlejohn listened patiently and sympathetically to the diet problem. A call to Mrs. Freeman, operator of the Clemson Boarding House for faculty and employees, a motherly type person, revealed that the diet was no problem to her, and she was delighted to be of help.³⁵⁵ To partition a room for a studio was the next problem.

Professor Lee—Pop—as he was known, gave me a long tale about how difficult it was to get anything done around Clemson. It took months to get the paper work approved and then it took forever to have the workmen come to do the job. Professor Lee issued the order to have it approved by Professor Sam Earle, head of the Engineering School, in whose building we were located.³⁵⁶ After his approval it was to be sent to Mr. Littlejohn, to be sent to the shop which would have the work done when the turn came around.

I did not wait for the order to be sent through regular channels, I took it around. After Professor Earle gave his blessing I took it to the shop, and they in turn were flattered that it came to them before it had the Business Manager's approval, assuring me that as soon as this was done they would get right on it. Of course I had no difficulty in

³⁵⁴ The Y.M.C.A. was located in the Holtzendorff building. Holtzendorff Hall was built in 1916 and operated as a student union. The building had a gymnasium, auditorium, swimming pool, locker rooms, and game rooms. See Wright Bryan, *Clemson: An Informal History of the University, 1889-1979*, 88.

³⁵⁵ The boarding house in Clemson was called the Clemson Club Hotel. Clemson House now stands on this location. See Wright Bryan, *Clemson: An Informal History of the University, 1889-1979*, 82.

³⁵⁶ Davidson is referring to Samuel Broadus Earle. Earle was the Dean of Engineering and became "Acting President when Dr. Riggs died in January 1924" and served until Enoch Walter Sikes took over in Fall 1925. See Wright Bryan, *Clemson: An Informal History of the University, 1889-1979*, 106-107, 112.

the Business Office. The only obstacle was a Professor Little who had to give up part of the freshman drawing room. I soon learned the best way to get along was to ignore him.

All the material I had on Thomas G. Clemson was a small photograph of his head, the rest had to be done through research. The logical places were the Library and the History Department. Dr. Holmes, head of the History Department, not one of the most charming personalities and who was known as “Misery Holmes,” was not too helpful.³⁵⁷ His wife was on some historical committee and was not interested in giving any information. She wondered who had authorized the deal of having a statue of Clemson built without consulting her, or anyone. Not only was she of very little assistance but at one time she almost blocked the whole effort. When I related to Mr. Littlejohn all the opposition I encountered here and there, in his mild manner he chuckled and told me, “Mr. Abe, you just go right ahead and do not worry about a thing.”

In my investigations, I found in his background that Clemson was a melancholy person who often gave in to moods. I also found a black man who was his coach-driver and remembered him well.³⁵⁸ “The Masser was a big tall man, about six and a half feet,

³⁵⁷ Alester G. Holmes was a history professor at Clemson and wrote a biography of Thomas Green Clemson in 1937. See Alester G. Holmes and George R. Sherrill, *Thomas Green Clemson: His Life and Work* (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1937). Holmes’s nickname was “Misery” Holmes. See, Wright Bryan, *Clemson: An Informal History of the University, 1889-1979*, 200.

³⁵⁸ Davidson is referring to William Greenlee, Clemson’s African-American coach driver. See Interview with William Uncle Bill Greenlee, early 1950’s, J.C. Littlejohn Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

he kept his head down most of de time. He had big feet, ‘bout size sixteen, and when he say in the carriage stretched out, his toes almost touched my seat.”³⁵⁹

When I completed my first study I brought him back to see it. His comments were precious about the tall “Masser.” The clay model completed, I brought the black man again to look at it, when his face lit up, he put his cap on his chest. I knew I had the feeling of Thomas G. Clemson.³⁶⁰

It was frustrating for awhile until I realized that the far too many divergent opinions and advice of the many interested people had to be set aside and that I needed to follow my own judgment.

Professor Logan Marshall, in charge of the wood shop, gave me complete run of the shop.³⁶¹ He was a quiet, solid person and we became very good friends. I needed the shop to make the chair to use as the basis for the clay. I also needed a faculty member to be in on the final plan because I refused to let anyone else meddle or even come near the

³⁵⁹ Wright Bryan writes that Thomas Green Clemson was “six feet six inches tall, weighing more than two hundred pounds, wearing a size fourteen shoe...” See, Wright Bryan, *Clemson: An Informal History of the University, 1889-1979*, 3.

³⁶⁰ Davidson attempted to capture Thomas Green Clemson’s personality in the sculpture. During an interview, Davidson said, “I had Mr. Clemson’s hands clasped because of his melancholy nature. Hands are most expressive. They may show anxiety, relaxation, or anger. The look on his face contemplates the future, a desire to establish a college here.” See Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, July 7, 1966, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections. Davidson also created a bust of Clemson’s coach driver in 1935. See A. Wolfe Davidson, Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

³⁶¹ John Logan Marshall was a woodworking professor for the Engineering Department and helped create the Tiger Brotherhood in 1926. See Wright Bryan, *Clemson: An Informal History of the University, 1889-1979*, 188-189.

project. It was important to eliminate all obstructive critics until it was ready to be viewed. I was conscious of the fact that here I was in the second year, and no statue.

The Citadel Alumni in Columbia, South Carolina wanted a bust of General Summerall, President of the Citadel.³⁶² Mr. Alec Salley, Secretary of the State Historical Society, asked me about the possibility of doing a bust of the General and the cost involved. I was anxious to do it but had no idea how much to charge for it. I agreed to do it if they would pay my expenses for transportation and my staying in Charleston. An appointment was made for me to go down to Charleston during the Christmas Holidays for him to post for me.

It was a brisk December day. The sun was shining but it was cold. The General's office was in the corner of the building, letting the sun in for a long time. While I was busy working, the General relaxed and dozed off. Somewhat embarrassed, he straightened up, "Let's talk," he said, and he began telling of some of his experiences when he was Chief of Staff. He never liked the dough-boy uniform of the World War One servicemen, it was always a source of embarrassment to him when compared to the uniforms of the European soldiers. The problem was to scrap all the uniforms on hand, but he was determined to do it, resulting in the open collar our military enjoy now. I tried to get him to talk about the suppression of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, but this he

³⁶² Charles Pelot Summerall was president of the Citadel from 1931 to 1953. For more information on General Charles P. Summerall, see W. Gary Nichols, *American Leader in War and Peace: The Life and Times of WWI Soldier, Army Chief of Staff and Citadel President General Charles P. Summerall* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 2011). Davidson completed the statue of General Summerall in 1936.

refused to talk about.³⁶³ I wanted to put the Croix de Guerre medal on the bust, which he obligingly wore.³⁶⁴ I needed to take it with me to do a reproduction of it but hesitated to ask him. I was pleased at his willingness to lend it to me for a certain period of time. I knew I had to be specific about the time. I made sure to mail it on that day, but he evidently thought it would reach him on that specific day, so, I received a reminder that he did not receive it. A couple of days later a letter came from him stating: “Medal duly received.”

While in Charleston I made friends with Judge Joseph Fromberg who got much notoriety for conducting his court, City Court, based on Talmud.³⁶⁵

Dr. Banov, the Health Department director Charleston, asked me if I would like to have a skeleton that was in the basement of the building. The janitor refused to go down there to clean up as long as it was there. We folded it up, the legs against the rib-cage, fitted it into a potato burlap sack and took it to the bus station.

I tipped off the bus driver as to what I had in the bag, he felt around until he located the fingers, took his pocket knife and cut a slit in the bag, then threw it to the porter who was on top of the bus arranging the baggage. When the porter shook the bag

³⁶³ The Boxer Rebellion in China began in 1900 and ended in 1901. The Boxers attempted to purge China of all Western and Japanese influences but were defeated by an international force. For more information, see David J. Silbey, *The Boxer Rebellion and the Great Game in China* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

³⁶⁴ A Croix de Guerre is a French military metal.

³⁶⁵ Judge Joseph Fromberg was later appointed as the assistant to United States Attorney General Homer S. Cummings. See “Fromberg is Named to Justice Dep’t,” in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (April 9, 1935) online at www.jta.org/1935/04/09/archive/fromberg-is-named-to-justice-dept.

the hand came out through the slot. He jumped off the bus and disappeared. The bus driver and I had to complete loading the rest of the luggage.

Mr. Salley promoted me to do a bust of Governor Ira C. Blackwood.³⁶⁶ All the recognition I got, away from Clemson, proved a tremendous help to overcome some opposition of the obstructionists to the statue. While working on the Governor I did a bust of Mr. Salley, and the children of the Governor's secretary, Charles Gerald. Mr. Gerald showed interest in the Clemson project and questioned me at length about it. One day he came to me with a suggestion. "In the basement of the Capitol there are some Civil War cannons, would you like to have these cannons to use for the casting of the Clemson statue? If you don't get them something will happen to them and they will get lost." Of course, I gladly accepted them for the College. As time went on I forgot all about the cannons, I dismissed it as just an offer in chit-chat and never mentioned it to anyone.

During the Spring holidays we happened to have a snow and I thought it better to remain in Clemson to work rather than go to Greenville. An urgent telephone call came through for me. My brother Max was on the line, very excited, "What in the hell are you doing bringing cannons to my back yard. A highway truck is here with two cannons, get them out of here as soon as you can, I don't want any cannons laying around here." Instead of shipping the cannons to Clemson, Mr. Gerald had sent them to me. I instructed the driver to bring them to Clemson. I made arrangements with Mr. Ed Freeman, in

³⁶⁶ Ibra Charles Blackwood was Governor of South Carolina from 1931-1935. See Walter B. Edgar, *The South Carolina Encyclopedia Guide to the Governors of South Carolina*, 14-15. This sculpture is located at the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room and Museum World War Memorial Building.

charge of the machine shop, to have the cannons unloaded in his shop since he had a large door to accommodate unloading them.³⁶⁷

In time, after I left Clemson, the cannons got covered up with litter and they were forgotten about. After the second World War, Clemson built a new shop and got much surplus machinery. In the process of clearing the place the cannons were discovered, but by then no one knew how they got there. They are now resting, mounted, in front of Tillman Hall which used to be the President's office.³⁶⁸

Mr. Littlejohn called me in the office one day. "Mr. Abe," in his quiet voice looking down on me (he was tall), "I have been thinking, you should have some spending money. Will twenty dollars per month be all right?" I had thirty dollars a month from my insurance disability policy. The insurance company considered my sojourn at Clemson as part of my recovery program, for I was still under medical care. This increase gave me a tremendous boost and was of much therapeutic value.

The work on the statue progressed to the point of having the Board of Trustees and the administration ready for a viewing. The model was whole-heartedly approved and was ready to be cast in plaster. Plaster of Paris in those days was an item not carried in stock, and it had to be specially ordered from Greenville. The driver of the truck had to carry it up to the third floor. Loading two sacks on one shoulder, when he got to the third floor he was still in a bent position, "Boss man, where do you want it," he asked me. I

³⁶⁷ See Jerome R. Reel, *The High Seminary: Volume 1: A History of the Clemson Agricultural College of South Carolina, 1889-1964*, 336.

³⁶⁸ These cannons are still located in front of Tillman Hall. The cannons were found in 1951 and "John D. Jones Sr., Clemson 1915, contributed to a fund to mount them on Bowman Field." Jerome V. Reel writes that "students call the cannons 'Tom and Jerry.'" See *ibid.*, 336.

showed him a corner where the skeleton was hanging. He dropped his bags and looked up, getting a glance of the skeleton, he backed out without straightening up. This thing won't bother you," I said. He replied, "No sir, boss, I ain't it either."

Dr. E. C. McCants from Anderson, South Carolina came over to pose for a bust to go to the junior high school.³⁶⁹ We discussed school teachers and the trend of education in the schools, about educating the child and not just offering a course. By then I was engaged by the Greenville School System to go there one day a week to sell an Art Program.³⁷⁰ He related an interesting story. A next door neighbor's little girl practically grew up in his house. She was a precious child. They saw little Mary enter elementary school, watched her graduate from high school and were proud to see her go to college.

He was very pleased when Mary came to him to apply for a job to teach in his system. It was painful for Dr. McCants to later tell her that she was not cut out to be a teacher and he advised her to enter a different field of endeavor. Good naturedly she thanked him, resigned her teaching position and went back to school to get her Master's. Then she applied to teach in high school. He gave her another chance to teach in High school. A couple of years later he had to tell her the same thing and advised her again to pursue a different field. Graciously she resigned, went back to school to receive her Ph.D. and now she teaches teachers. As he said, we have many Marys all over the system.

³⁶⁹ Dr. Elliott Crayton McCants was the Superintendent of the City Schools in South Carolina. McCants Middle School located in Anderson, SC is named after him. See "History of McCants," online at www.anderson5.net/Page/9834.

³⁷⁰ Davidson taught an art class at Greenville High School from 1936 to 1943. See "Davidson, Artist, Succumbs," in *Greenville News*, October 28, 1981.

My last year at Clemson involved me in all kind of things. A radio station in Greenville asked me if I would be interested in a 15-minute program on “The World of Art.” Bevo Whitmire, manager of WFBC, assured me that it would be very simple to do such a program.³⁷¹ I used the New York Times art page by Alden Jewel and Art Digest as my sources of information.³⁷² It was fifteen minutes every Sunday morning. It was quite an experience, not having had any training to speak into a microphone, which was quite different from speaking to a live audience. I was nervous, frightened and must confess I shook all over. I did this for about three months until the radio station was able to fill the time with other programs, then I asked to be released.

Dr. J. L. Mann, superintendent of the Greenville School System, called me into his office to discuss the possibility of introducing an Art Program in the schools.³⁷³ There was no program at all in the elementary nor high school levels. The budget for the year did not include Art, however, he felt if a need could be proven, he could sway the board to go along with some sort of remuneration. He suggested we try one day a week for second semester in the high school. He pointed out it would have to be after school from three to five. Mr. Parkhurst, the principal, was all for it. But he had doubts that enough interest could be created to justify a class after school hours.

³⁷¹ WFBC was the only radio station in Greenville during the 1930s. See Judy Bainbridge, “Numbers tell the story of Greenville in the late 1930s,” in *Greenville Online*, January 15, 2014, online at www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/greenville/city-people/2014/01/15/numbers-tell-the-story-of-greenville-in-the-late-1930s/4494829/.

³⁷² Edward Alden Jewell was an American art critic who wrote for the *New York Times*.

³⁷³ James Lewis Mann was the superintendent of Greenville School System from 1916 to 1940. J.L. Mann High School in Greenville was named after him. See “J.L. Mann History” online at www.greenville.k12.sc.us/jlmann/main.asp?titleid=history.

The program period was given to me any way I wanted to handle it. This was another first for me; I had never spoken to students. I chose to give a demonstration of doing a head. A model from the audience posed for the head. It was very successful, thirteen students signed up to take art after school. It was arranged for the class to meet on Monday afternoon, to be a non-credit course. I was paid two hundred dollars for the semester. The important part of it was that enough interest was generated to Dr. Mann to go to the Board to have Art in the curriculum the next year. The two hundred dollars was enough to cover my expenses and give me my first step in teaching.³⁷⁴

The work on the statue of Clemson attracted quite a bit of attention in the schools of the area. Teachers brought classes in to see the process of making a statue, a novelty in this area. I found myself giving many talks to groups and answering questions. Much interest was shown in how long it would take to complete. Children pinched off small pieces of clay as souvenirs. I was disturbed at the loss of the clay, because plasteline was expensive. Mr. Littlejohn assured me that we should feel complimented that the children were interested enough to take some clay as a souvenir, not to worry about it just to let him know what additional plasteline I would need. The cadets also showed much interest in the statue as it progressed.

The Athletic Department sent in a football player who had flat feet for me to make a plaster cast of his feet to prove that flat feet would not be a handicap in playing football. Placed on a table, the six-foot six-inches athlete watched every move in the process of making the cast. As a separator I used Vaseline and rolled some clay to make a

³⁷⁴ Davidson taught at Greenville High School from 1936 to 1943. See "Abe Davidson in Greenville for Opening of Art Museum," in *Greenville News*, March 15, 1971.

band for partitioning the sections. It was to have three sections on top and one on the bottom of his foot. When I began to apply the Plaster of Paris to one section of each foot, he asked me to stop. He turned pale and informed me that he was about to faint. We waited awhile to try it again and he had the same reaction. We had to give up on it. To this day I am at a loss to understand what made this 200-pound perfect specimen react to applying plaster to his feet. We agreed not to mention it to anyone. He did not want his buddies to know about this.

My memories of the Clemson days have always remained the happiest in my life. Here I was, an immigrant, limited health-wise to many activities, yet I was accepted without any reservations by all the students and felt no discrimination of any kind. When I tried to hitch-hike a ride to Greenville, the cadets in uniform would solicit the ride and pile me in amongst them. When a student ball was on, I remained in the room at the Y.M.C.A., not having a tuxedo to wear and afraid to dance due to my physical condition. The students got a tuxedo to fit me and made me go to the dance. I tried to beg off for fear of exertion, and they promised not to leave me on the floor too long. They broke in on me before I tired.

An architectural student from Highlands, North Carolina, invited me one spring morning to go with him to visit his hometown.³⁷⁵ We met in the parking lot where he had his car. It was a Model A stripdown, no top, no windshield, no door, just seats in front and in the back. Seeing the mode of transportation, my enthusiasm was at a low ebb, but in Clemson one does not back out from a commitment, I had said I would go. He seemed

³⁷⁵ Highlands, NC is located in the Blue Ridge Mountains, about 46 miles from Clemson.

to be going faster than he actually was, and my eyes watered so I could not keep them open. I wound up sitting on the floor where I had some shelter. Fruit trees in Clemson were beginning to open up, but in Highlands there was no sign of any blossoms. Whenever he slowed down around a curve I enjoyed the mountains, and the wind seemed not so strong. There was a delightful freshness in the air.

He gave me the tour of the surrounding area. He attended to whatever business he had. It was getting toward evening as we started back to Clemson, and we had hardly gone two miles when the lights in the car went out. The road was so narrow he backed all the way into town to a garage operated by his cousin. The lights repaired we started out again. Everything was going along fine, the calm of the forest was around us with an occasional shimmer of the current in a stream nearby, screech owls were heard on occasion above the sound of the purr of the motor as we coasted down the mountain.

Between North Carolina and South Carolina is a short span of Georgia which we had to cross. The road in North Carolina was paved, as well as in South Carolina, but Georgia did not have it paved, and it was very rough. By the time we bumped over to the South Carolina side, our lights went out again. Louis Edwards tried to get them going, to no avail, they just would not go on. "We'll just have to wait until morning," he said. We had a couple of Army blankets under the seat. I got in the back seat and curled up in the blanket as best I could. He was in the front seat with his blanket. Sleep was out of the question for me, I visualized bobcats around us or brownies sniffing at what was in this

strange contraption alongside the road.³⁷⁶ One consolation I had, it was still too cold for snakes. We twisted and turned trying to get comfortable.

“Are you asleep?” Louis asked. “Heck no,” I answered. We got out to size up the situation, by this time we could see in the dark. “Let me give you a box of matches. You get on the hood and straddle it, I’ll drive in the middle of the road, and if I get too far to the right you wave your right arm, if a car comes you strike matches and I’ll stop the car. This will let them know we are here, I believe I can make it down the mountain without any problems.”

On level ground the road did not have any sharp curves, making our driving much simpler. We passed by a country store operated under a kerosene lamp, and we could see the flicker of the lamp, and heard people on the porch of the store, and could see the silhouettes of people moving around in there. We had to cross a small stream across the road, but we also met a car at the same time. I began to strike matches to let the oncoming car know. Our car died completely when we crossed the stream. There was nothing to do but wait for daybreak.

As we pondered what next step to take, we heard a car coming toward us, it pulled behind our car, and two drunk men argued, “I told you I saw something pass the store. You didn’t believe me, did you?” “I thought it was a ghost,” the other drunk said. “We got him didn’t we? Them is Clemson boys, can’t you see?” And the argument went on. The story unraveled: they saw something like a shadow making a noise fly by. It had to be a ghost, so they decided to chase it as drunks would. We had a time with them, when

³⁷⁶ Davidson is probably referring to brown bears when he uses the term “brownies.”

they pulled out a half gallon of moonshine whiskey and with the generosity of drunks insisted we partake of it with them. After much begging and persuading them we finally convinced them that as students we could be expelled if whiskey was detected on our breath. They pushed us into Walhalla, SC to a garage.³⁷⁷ A complete new set of wiring harness had to be replaced to get us back in time for Edwards to be at reveille.

A chauffeur-driven limousine stopped me one day as I was on the way to lunch at the boarding house. The passengers inquired for a good place to eat. I directed them to the boarding house dining room. The place had a large porch where the guests gathered and waited for the bell. In the meantime there was an air of comradeship. The gentleman [sic] fitted right into the group and had friendly conversation with whomever he came in contact. It was not the case with the lady. She was stand-offish to the point of being uncomfortable. Although she was bedecked with diamonds, the other ladies made every effort to make her comfortable. When the awaited bell rang, they were directed to the table where I sat. The food was passed around, but when it came to her, she could not manage to serve herself and to pass it along, so the various foods accumulated in front of her. The gentleman came to her aid, and to pass up her embarrassment she felt she had to say something so she remarked she could not understand why they had so many different kinds of beans. She could not understand why I had my food prepared separately in small dishes. The maid, Corrine, tactfully explained to her that my food had to be without salt so she managed to take it off before it was seasoned. She was somewhat humiliated, but

³⁷⁷ Walhalla is a city about 19 miles from Clemson University.

Professor Stephen who sat at the end of the table laughed it off, but he could not pass off the remark about the different kinds of beans. In his deep southern drawl he asked for attention for a tale he had to tell: Everyone at the table stopped eating to hear what Stephens had to tell. “A farmer had a blind mule, and to sell him he doped him up, making him frisky when he went to the market. The next day the purchaser brought the mule back, complaining that the mule was blind. ‘How do you know the mule is blind,’ the previous owner asked. ‘Why, he walked into the fence,’ the purchaser replied. ‘He is not blind,’ retorted the previous owner. ‘He just doesn’t give a damn,’ and so are we about our two kinds of beans, it does not bother us.” Her husband seemed to have enjoyed her dilemma, evidently she was accustomed to having servants wait on her hand and foot. No one around the table laughed at the joke, so as not to humiliate the lady.

I was asked to contact the business office for some important message. The Columbia Chamber of Commerce Sesqui-Centennial Committee of South Carolina was interested in having a half-dollar struck to commemorate the celebration and would like for me to design it.³⁷⁸

The committee met in the Chamber of Commerce with Senator James H. Hammond as chairman. No one knew what should go on the design of the coin. Many suggestions were made and it was finally left for me to come up with some design for their approval. During the many suggestions, out of a clear sky someone asked, “How much will it cost?” Before I had a chance to give an answer, “We don’t have any

³⁷⁸ Davidson created this half-dollar in 1936.

money,” they commented. My answer to them: “It won’t cost you anything.” They looked at each other to protest to this sort of agreement. My argument was if you don’t have any money how can you pay for anything? I pointed out that since I lived in South Carolina, I would be honored to have a part, to contribute my know-how in helping out. If they would take care of the expense that would be all I would expect. Mrs. Henning, the historian, had certain ideas what a coin of this kind should have on it. She and I worked out an agreement with a number of representative things to go on it. I took it from there.

We had some difficulty obtaining specifications for the design of the coin. Senator Hammond wrote a letter, the essence of which was that South Carolina caused a war one time and it could cause another if it needed to. This was just Senator Hammond’s manner of speaking, nothing more. It certainly brought quick results.

Coins of course had to be approved by the Senate. Senator James F. Byrnes went to work to have the 25,000 issue approved.³⁷⁹ All that was left was for the design to be approved by the Fine Arts Commission. I was anxious to have as much history incorporated on the coin as possible. There was a justice, a palmetto, the old and new Capitol, the sand dunes, thirteen stars and the legend of the Sesqui-Centennial around the coin.

The Committee was pleased with the design, and all I had to do was work out the technical problems such as depth and general workmanship. The Capitol of South

³⁷⁹ Davidson created a bronze bust of James F. Byrnes for Clemson University in 1965. James F. Byrnes was a US Senator from 1911 to 1925 and later governor of South Carolina from 1951 to 1955. For more information, see David Robertson, *Sly and Able: A Political Biography James F. Byrnes* (New York: Norton, 1994).

Carolina was moved from Charleston in 1786, so I put the old Capitol on the left and the present Capitol on the right, designating the dates. The justice figure, part of the State seal, was in the center with the legend of the Sesquicentennial Celebration of the Capital, Columbia, South Carolina. The word “Liberty,” a must on all coins, was on it and I took the liberty of not blinding Justice. I cannot see Justice to be blind in spite of the concept that it is impartial. The reverse side had the denomination of the coin, Half Dollar, United States of America, In God We Trust, the palmetto tree, with thirteen leaves, also there were thirteen stars representing the thirteen colonies. At the bottom of the palmetto was a broken oak cluster with acorns signifying the British Oak Fleet that fell before the barricades made from the palmettos. Bundles of spears tied to the base of the palmetto represented the dunes.

Sculptor Lee Lawrie, chairman of the Fine Arts Commission, whom I had known in New York, looked at my model for suggestions before submitting it to the Commission.³⁸⁰ He was very complimentary of the concept and the design and thought it would be approved easily. It was approved.

The coin was struck in three mints, in Philadelphia, Denver, and San Francisco. Each coin had the mint initial on it. When the coins were shipped back, the Denver Mint was 500 coins short, because the die cracked before the number was completed. This upset the Centennial Committee, who were anxious to distribute the coins. When the mint was slow in getting them out, the Committee used all kinds of pressure to get it done.

³⁸⁰ Lee Oscar Lawrie was a famous architectural sculptor. For information on Lee Lawrie, see Paul D. Nelson, “Lee Lawrie, Courthouse Sculptor” in Staff Publications at Macalester College, 2009, online at digitalcommons.macalester.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=igcstaffpub.

When they went to get the balance of the coins, the director of the mint told their representative that he tried to do them a big favor but could not come out and say it, for it would have been considered conspiracy. Had they delayed the striking of the coin until 1937, it would have that year's marking on it, making an issue of only 500 which would have been worth a hundred dollars per coin to collectors.

The coins were sold for two dollars and fifteen cents each in issues of three coins per set. The Sesquicentennial Committee raised enough money to have a park with that name. The Committee was very generous in remunerating me for my work.

The beginning of the public library [Greenville] was in a small store on a side street on East Coffee Street just off of Main Street. Thomas Parker, a textile executive, had the vision that Greenville needed a public library and started with a contribution.³⁸¹ It soon outgrew its quarters to move to a building on Main Street that was being built as a doctors' office building. The library was located in the rear of the building with a hall for meeting upstairs, the first of its kind in Greenville except for the Textile Hall which was for commercial use. There was an ante-room before entering the main hall. In the 20's, the Lions Club in Greenville had an idea of starting a museum. Mr. L. O. Patterson went to Europe and came back with three heroic size statues in plaster: Venus, Apollo, and Diana Hunting. A ministerial group was outraged at the nude statues displayed in the hall. A skirt was made for Apollo to drape around the waist. I approached Miss Fannie Tabor,

³⁸¹ Thomas F. Parker was the president of Monaghan Mill in Greenville. Parker and John Wilkins Norwood successfully convinced the citizens of Greenville of their need for a public library. See Ebaugh, "A Social History," in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, 20-21.

the librarian, about the possibility of having an exhibit in the upstairs hall to stimulate some interest in art in Greenville. She thought it was an excellent idea and offered the hall.

Mr. Marshall B. Prevost encouraged youngsters to draw by offering classes in a studio he had in his back yard.³⁸² His deep interest stemmed from the days when, as a youngster, he grew up in Washington, DC His encouragement was responsible for John Sitton, a Prix de Rome Beaux Arts winner, and John Hix, the famous Broadway billboard builder of the Camel cigarettes blowing smoke, and many others. Mr. Prevost befriended anyone who dabbled in art, and this is how I came to know him. He was a tall dangly man, loose in dress, his shirt collar not buttoned, a bow tie hanging to one side. He had the “aura” of a leisurely Southern gentleman. He was known for his real estate deals although he had no office. He began his day at the Greenville Pharmacy, located at the beginning of North Main Street, with stops all along until he wound up at the southern end of Main Street at Carpenter’s Drug Store. If you needed him for anything he could be found talking to someone or to a group. His casual dress, the large floppy hat and swaying, easy walk made him unique.

“Marshall, we need to organize an art organization in Greenville and you should be the first president.” I confronted him somewhere on Main Street with this idea. He leaned his back against a light pole, looked down on me with his famous chuckle: “Abe, you are crazy as hell, I don’t have time to be president of anything.” I pressed further: “If

³⁸² Evelyn Pack Daniel writes of Marshall Prevost: “A connoisseur and painter, Prevost had a studio in his own yard where he interested himself in the development of young artists. Someone has called him a ‘talent scout in the arts.’” See Daniel, “Art: Architecture and Painting,” in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, 71.

you will call a meeting at your house of the following persons, we will organize and form a Steering Committee, make me chairman of it and you will not have anything else to do. I'll do the work, but as the father of art in Greenville you should be the first president of it."

The meeting was called, the following were invited. It was gratifying to see the enthusiasm when we organized. The following were present: Professor Robert L. Anderson, Alma Barkshdt, Goode Bryan, A. Wolfe Davidson, Mrs. R. H. Daniel, Miss Agnes Deal, Thomas Edwards, Mrs. Fernow, Miss Hattie Finley, Professor Rudolph E. Lee, Professor Sidney Little, Mrs. L. O. Patterson, Mrs. J. A. Piper, Marshall B. Prevost, Mrs. Milton Sullivan, Mrs. Margaret Walker, Mrs. M. D. Earle. Marshall Prevost was elected the first President, A. Wolfe Davidson Vice President, Goode Bryan Secretary.³⁸³

Plans were set for the first exhibitions at the Library Hall for the first week in November 1935, in connection with National Art Week.³⁸⁴ Many notables came to welcome the occasion. Dr. B. E. Geer, President of Furman University; Dr. E. W. Sikes, President of Clemson College; Mayor L. M. Mauldin gave the official welcome. Professor Sidney Little from the Department of Architecture gave an excellent lecture on Art Appreciation.³⁸⁵ Former Greenvillians who had made a name in the art field sent their

³⁸³ The Fine Arts League of Greenville, SC was organized on May 11, 1935. The first exhibit conducted by the league took place on November 4, 1935. Evelyn Pack Daniel describes the Fine Arts League as the "first permanent art organization in the community." See Daniel, "Art: Architecture and Painting," in *The Arts in Greenville, 1800-1960*, 70.

³⁸⁴ President Franklin D. Roosevelt created National Art Week in 1940 to increase art sales. Greenville made \$105 in sales. See Swensson and Higgins, eds., *New Deal Art in South Carolina*, 23.

³⁸⁵ Bennette E. Geer was president of Furman University from 1933 to 1938.

work. John Hix sent a comprehensive series on how he developed a cartoon. John Sitton, the Prix de Rome winner, sent interesting batiks he did after a tour in Bali where he picked up the technique. Mr. Prevost loaned, from his private collection, etchings by Zorn and Goya and many others. Mrs. O'Neal Verner, well known Charleston etcher was represented and there was a charcoal by a young student from Charleston, William Halsea. Miss Marie Chisholm was there from Lander College, and Mrs. Fernow had her miniatures on display.³⁸⁶

We had difficulty getting newspaper coverage. The answer I got was if I could prove that there was a demand for art and enough interest in Greenville in the fine arts they would gladly run headlines, even streamers, as they referred to it.

Professor Lee let me off for a couple of days from whatever classes I monitored and from work on the statue (he never checked my time in the studio but as a matter of courtesy I asked him to be off). My calls began with Roger Peace, editor and owner of the Greenville News who was glad to give his endorsement; Dr. Geer, President of Furman; Dr. J. L. Mann, Superintendent of the School System, Mr. Alester G. Furman, Mr. Haynesworth, a prominent attorney, Mr. Pete Hollis, Superintendent of Parker School District, Dr. Ramsey, President of Greenville Woman's College and many others.³⁸⁷ I had an imposing list of prominent citizens giving a strong endorsement of the arts. I took it to E. N. Smith, the city editor who admitted, "You convinced me." The next

³⁸⁶ Davidson entered a sculpture of George Bryan, one of Mrs. M. P. Gridley, one of Marshall Prevost, and one of Mrs. Fannie Calhoun Marshall. See "Clemson Will Have Part in Art Exhibit," in *Anderson Independent*, November 3, 1935.

³⁸⁷ The Greenville Woman's College later merged with Furman University.

day we had a streamer announcing the opening of the exhibit. We were newsworthy from then on.

Mrs. Bruce expressed a desire to see the progress on the statue when she came to Clemson to see her son who was a Cadet in his freshman year. I made myself available to show them the progress and looked forward to their visit. With her came two friends who taught at the Greenville Senior High School. We had a tour of the campus. Bob invited us to have lunch in the Barracks Mess Hall, I had to decline but promised to join them later. One of the guests was Miss Katherine Harbin, somehow she and I fell back when we walked over to their car and had a pleasant visit.

When in Greenville I frequently visited Dr. Bruce's home, the two teachers who lived next door to each other also were there. Miss Dorothy Zirkle enjoyed a good argument, and we had some lively discussions over the New Deal, but mostly I think they were probing me on my radical views. Mrs. Bruce was good at baiting us while Dr. Bruce just sat back to enjoy our working ourselves up over something we had no control over. Katherine, too, enjoyed siding with Mr. Bruce. Escorting the ladies home, I discovered that my attachment was more than just cordiality.

Getting up enough courage, I invited myself over for an evening, not having the slightest idea I would be welcome. Later when I was invited to have a meal with them, it was embarrassing to explain that I could not eat regular food. To my surprise this did not matter at all, since they probably were aware of my physical condition, visiting Dr. Bruce as often as they had.

“Midsummer Night’s Dream” was being shown in Clemson. Again testing my courage, I issued Katherine Harbin an invitation and to my delight she accepted it. The bus arrived in time for us to have dinner at the boarding house and have some time together before the show. The bus schedule back to Greenville was late so it gave me more time to see her. Our visits to Dr. Bruce coincided more often after that and I came around the apartment to take walks.

We were invited to spend Thanksgiving in Chapel Hill, North Carolina with Katherine’s friends, the Williamses. Waldo Williams was completing his doctorate in bio-chemistry, his wife, Dorothy Mumford, was Katherine’s roommate when she was getting her MA in English there.³⁸⁸ They had a two-year-old daughter, Kay, a lively child, whom we enjoyed.

Going to Chapel Hill as a guest, to such an academic environment, gave me much anxiety. However this feeling was soon dispelled in the home of Waldo and Dorothy. Waldo came from a Quaker community in Guilford, North Carolina, from a farm family.³⁸⁹ Dorothy, on the other hand was the granddaughter of the man who connected Western Union, west and east. Her father was a city engineer for New York City until his death. When you met them, their background did not matter at all.

Many of the graduate students were on the radical side and were anxious to meet someone who came from Communist Russia. Thirteen years in America had its affect on

³⁸⁸ Davidson is referring to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

³⁸⁹ See “Quaker History” in Guilford County, NCGenWeb online at ncgenweb.us/nc/guilford/quaker-history/.

me, I was liberal, but not a Communist, nevertheless we had some good times interpreting some of the “isms.”

Dr. Rupert Vance, an eminent sociologist, had us over for an evening dinner.³⁹⁰ It was a black-tie affair. They assured me that it did not matter if I did not wear a tuxedo—my blue suit, white shirt and tie would be sufficient. Waldo had to wear a formal suit in deference to his colleagues. Waldo and I had an arrangement: I was to follow his actions, and whatever he would do at the table I would follow him, whatever fork he picked up, I would pick up the same kind of fork, etc. Reba was Katherine’s friend from South Carolina days so they wanted to make me feel comfortable by having me for their important dinner. The dinner was a la-de-da affair with servants attending all through the meal.

Dr. Vance, paralyzed from the waist down, used crutches to get around. When he sat in the chair he was a very imposing looking gentleman. One was hardly conscious of his affliction. He sat at the head of the table, carried the conversation skillfully to be shared by all at the table. The evening went off very well and I was not made to feel any different from them at any time.

When we got home Waldo hilariously started pulling out his shirttails, I think mostly to make me feel that it did not matter, he was anxious to shed all the dignity and stiffness he had to put on during the dinner. It made us all relax.

³⁹⁰ Rupert Bayless Vance was a sociologist and professor. He received his PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and became a professor at the same university. He later became the president of the American Sociological Society in 1944. See J. Isaac Copeland, “Rupert Bayless Vance,” 1996 online at ncpedia.org/biography/vance-rupert-bayless.

Everyone was in the kitchen preparing the Thanksgiving turkey while I went outside to watch Kay. The joggling board was in the back and a sandpile, the usual children stand-by.³⁹¹ Every now and then she crawled under the house with a bottle to fill it with sand and then went back to get another bottle. She tried to uncork one of the bottles with her teeth, unsuccessfully. She brought it to me to open it. I realized what she was up to. The bottles had wine in them that Waldo had made, and stored under the house. She ruined many of them before I discovered it. We had a delightful visit with Katherine's friends, and it gave me an opportunity to see the campus. We returned to Greenville Sunday.

My visits became more frequent. Besides the long walks we took, I asked my brother Max to let me have his car so we could have a date in the car, taking long rides. Before I realized it we were making plans to get married.

Katherine came to the house to meet Mother. They got along well, but it was mostly using sign language, since Mother never learned to speak the English language. There was a different attitude toward her from my brothers, they simply ignored her. They suspected that this was not just a friendship, that it was much more serious than that.

Their objection was not so much to Katherine as it was feeling sorry for her to marry such an impractical person. They reasoned she was taking on a responsibility to support an invalid for the rest of his life. There was a rule in the school system that

³⁹¹ A joggling board or jostling board is a springy bench common in the low-country of South Carolina.

married women could not teach, creating that much more of a problem. My relationship with my brothers was not too good and this pushed us farther apart than ever before.

The reaction at Clemson was quite different. While they were surprised, they all gave me their blessing. Professor Pop Lee was the first in the department told of it and Robert Anderson, whom I considered as one of my best friends, was pleased and concerned. He went into details with me about problems that could arise. Katherine came for a visit, and they all had a good time with her and highly approved of her and stressed how lucky I was to marry such a fine and intelligent person.

Katherine's father, a Methodist minister in the lower conference in South Carolina, lived in a small town, Woodford, about twenty miles from Columbia.³⁹² We went down there to spend a weekend. Rev. Harbin was a widower whose children were grown, some in college and some away from home.³⁹³ He lived alone.

A Jew in the South is a prime target for zealous Christians to convert and I felt I was no exception. Automatically, I bristled to defend myself, I was determined to hold my ground without being insulting or obnoxious. In the past I was very touchy when I was approached to be converted and became quite insulting to the party who tried to convert me. Living under the Bolshevik regime many years destroyed any religious feeling I had, but to change from my ancestral religion, that was something else. I resented someone telling me that their religion was superior to the one I was born to,

³⁹² Woodward, SC is a town in Orangeburg County.

³⁹³ Katherine's mother, Ivy Edwards Harbin, passed away November 3, 1930. See Ivy Edwards Harbin online at www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=19607568.

when in truth theirs was an offspring from the one they were trying to alienate me from. I found a different attitude here.

Sunday morning Katherine masterfully declined an invitation to go to church, sparing me from making a decision. The entire visit was cordial, no issue was raised by either one. Rev. Harbin, I thought, was very matter of fact. I was just another guest Kattie brought for a visit, it had me puzzled for awhile, surely he must have been informed or at least suspected.

Before we were to take the bus to go back, I cornered him to have a talk with him: “Rev. Harbin, there is something I want to talk to you about, I don’t know whether you are aware of it or not, of Katherine’s and my intentions?” With his characteristic chuckle and broad smile he replied, “I have been hearing a lot about Abe.” I pressed further, “Now let me ask you something, if you have any objection in any way now is the time to voice it.” I further went on, “I want you to clearly understand that you are not gaining a Christian, nor will you lose one because of me. We intend to live a free life with the highest respect of each other’s upbringing.”

We were sitting on the steps of the house, when he got up so did I, thinking he had nothing to say I was ready to move on. He walked up to me, put his arm around my shoulder (he was a large man), “The nearest and dearest thing to me was a Jew, how can I object to you.” He went on, “If you were a scoundrel, I would object no matter who you were.” By that time Katherine came out, he got between us, put his arm around both of us. “You have my blessings just let me know.”

It was not so simple a matter in my family to pass over the hurdle. I did not expect whole-hearted approval, when all I was concerned about was to win Mother to my side, the rest of the family and the Jewish community bothered me very little. A Justice of the Peace would have sufficed for me. Katherine and I understood each other and this was all that mattered. I knew Mother better than anyone in the family and I was aware that she had more tolerance than all of them put together. I was convinced if she ever got to know Katherine she would love her.

Katherine's conversion to Judaism was as far from my intentions as anyone could imagine. If I would not give up my ancestors' religion I would be the last person to expect her to do so. When Katherine told me her willingness to go through an acceptance of Judaism, I adamantly rejected the whole idea. I tried to explain to her the humiliation one is put through during the process. Her answer to me was that she did not want Mother to feel that she had taken me away from her and that Mother was in a strange land, not like her father who had family, land and he did not care. She was so insistent that I had very little say about it.

With great humility I went to Rabbi Wernick to ask him what all this involved. I let him know in no uncertain terms that if she was to go through all the humiliating rituals I would not submit to it, I would not let her go through with it. The Justice of the Peace would be the answer. I insisted that they would have to modify the routine. Knowing me, he was convinced that I would do it my way.

Rabbi Wernick was more liberal than many rabbis I knew. We agreed on a certain procedure of instruction and he let me select the other two members of the committee

who would participate in the instruction. Rabbi Wernick agreed to do it if my mother would give permission to go ahead with it. I was glad for him to go to Mother, to talk to her about it. It saved me from having to do it.

Mother's reply to him was: "If it was good enough for Moses to marry out of the faith, it is good enough for my Avromele." His report to me of his visit with Mother was most heartening. She had nothing but praise for her Katherine. He was astounded at the old Jewish woman's philosophical view of the whole thing. She had all the hope and confidence that we would have a good life together.

The original plans for the Clemson statue called for a pedestal to have in low relief the five schools: Agriculture, Textile Engineering, Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, School of Architecture, and the School of Education, with the statue to be on top of the pedestal. All along I was led to believe that the foundry in school would do it as a school project. When we got closer to completion, I began to press for a commitment from the foundry only to find out that the professor in charge had minimum knowledge of foundry work and we had to resort to other means.

Professor Robert Anderson, through his connection at Princeton, got permission for me to visit the studio of Charles Keck, one of the leading sculptors located near Greenwich Village.³⁹⁴ He gave me valuable advice in casting the statue in plaster and discouraged the idea of having it done as a student project. He arranged for me to visit the

³⁹⁴ Robert Lowell Anderson was an architecture professor at Clemson. Charles Keck was a famous New York sculptor. See Charles Keck online at web.archive.org/web/20150207210747/http://www.centuryarchives.org/stamps/documents/Keck.pdf.

Roman Bronze Foundry to observe their method of casting.³⁹⁵ Seeing the foundry convinced me that we had better go another route to have it cast.

Mr. Tom Wigginton in Anderson, South Carolina, a supporter of Clemson with a reputation which was quite a legend for ingenuity, offered his foundry to do it, he would be delighted to help Clemson.

The Monday afternoon class at the high school was doing well, and the administration was pleased that students' enthusiasm did not abate in spite of having to stay after school hours to take the course. Dr. Mann included in the budget for the following year \$550.00 for three afternoons per week with one unit of credit. The Federal Art Project WPA, offered me its directorship in August.³⁹⁶ Things began to look up for a livelihood after we got married.

A new high school building, under the auspices of the WPA, was in the drawing stage. The heads of various departments were consulted in regard to the facility. The Art Department was not a fully sanctioned entity at this time, and I was very pleased when Dr. Mann told me to get together with the architects who were in consultation with the different heads. I felt we had come along. A northern light was desirable and to have a place on the ground floor, not to have any classrooms under it to avoid disturbing classes when casting and chiseling in wood. As it turned out we were only consulted about what we needed, but we got what the architects thought we should have. The Art Department found itself on the second floor over a foyer to the auditorium which gave us a good light

³⁹⁵ Davidson is probably referring to Roman Bronze Works in New York.

³⁹⁶ Davidson became the WPA Federal Art Project Director for Greenville, SC in 1937.

and no classroom under us. A window for the projector was in the art room which caused no conflict.

We were given twenty-four desks with adjustable tops to raise at any angle with cubby holes for drawing paper and a drawer. The tops were the most unsatisfactory type ever designed, they never worked. All I asked for was a large drawing board on saw-horses which could easily be adapted to any use. They did give us a trap to put under the sink to catch plaster. I warned if they did not do this the plumbing would create much of a problem.

Arrangements at Clemson were coming to an end. Our marriage plans were formulating. Mr. Littlejohn was kind enough to extend us an invitation to stay around Clemson that summer, under the same arrangements. He suggested that there might be things I could be doing for the school and they were only too glad to have us around.

With assurance of a job and a promise of the Directorship of the Art Project when we settled in Greenville, and with the Sesquicentennial Coin approved, we looked forward to the future.

Presumably all of the possible obstacles to our marriage had been cleared away. Katherine's father seemed quite agreeable, the rabbi's visit to Mother met with approval, we set the date for the wedding, which was to be a simple ceremony to be at the rabbi's house. Louis was the only one of the brothers who accepted my invitation to be there.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁷ Davidson mentioned earlier in the memoir that Louis was the most understanding about his choice to pursue a career as an artist.

Happily I went to see Mother as I always did when I came to Greenville. She fell on my shoulder, sobbing the way I had not heard her cry in many years. Finally, through her sobs, she begged me to call the wedding off. A neighbor came to see her, alarmed that I was falling into a Christian trap. Katherine's father, a priest, would convert me to Christianity. She would rather be dead than see her son go through a "Schmad" (conversion). I had not seen her so broken up since tragedies had befallen her in Russia. It took me a long time to calm her down and when I was able to sit with her to have some tea the way we always visited, all my reasoning faculties came into play. The first thing to explain was that Katherine's father was not a priest and that there is a big difference between the two. Besides, priest here in America were not like the priests in Russia that she knew. With all the persuasion in my power I assured her that never would I accept Christianity, no matter what. Katherine was going through all the humiliation of conversion for her sake, not mine because I was against it. Then I reminded Mother how the Bolshevik indoctrination diluted any feeling I ever had for any religion and that I was far from an observant Jew and that I could not care less whether I married a Jewess or one of any other faith. Besides, why didn't she speak up earlier? What about Katherine's feelings? I finally let her know that I was committed and nothing would change it.

I stopped at the neighbor's who had been responsible for upsetting Mother, and I let her know how I felt about her meddling in someone else's life and warned her to stay out of our affairs.

All of the anti-religious indoctrination began to surface. “Religion is the opiate of the people,” loomed over and over.³⁹⁸ If ever the question rose, why can’t we just be people? Here were two individuals in love, ready to throw their lot into a beautiful relationship only to be marred by deep-rooted conscience that went back to childhood upbringing, proving to be difficult to shake. In spite of my liberal thinking, a veil was thrown in my path which made me wonder—did I cause equal pain in Katherine’s life?

A tormenting thought brought me back to the day when I reached thirteen year. My father took a pair of his phylacteries, had them reduced in size to give them to me for Bar Mitzvah [son of commandment].³⁹⁹ He put me on his lap and looked in my eyes: “Up to now I was responsible for your sins sonny, now you are eligible to be included into a ‘Minyan’ (to be one of ten) to constitute a quorum in official prayers.” The next three years I observed regularly the prayers, three times daily.

When I was in the middle of crossing the Atlantic, I threw the bag with the phylacteries and some sympathetic Komsomol Papers I had to travel within Russia, into the Atlantic Ocean thinking that this act completed my liberation from my past. I now found out how wrong I was.

After the Germans evacuated our area in 1918 to let the Bolsheviks come in, many of my friends joined the Youth Communist Party. While I was not a card-carrying

³⁹⁸ Karl Marx wrote that “religion is the opium of the people.”

³⁹⁹ A phylactery is a leather box with Hebrew texts that Jewish men wear for morning prayers to remind them to keep the law. A Bar Mitzvah is a coming of age ceremony for Jewish boys, which occurs at the age of 13 and symbolizes a commitment to follow the commandments of God.

member, I was very close to the movement, which renounced everything. With the rest of my friends I attended lectures and meetings.

My father went to Kharkov to take a position with my cousin who operated a string of flour mills. It was reported that he died as a victim of a battle that took place between the retreating Germans and the advancing Russians. We never heard from him again. During this period my interest in religion waned considerably.

While my attitude toward capitalism had changed, my liberal approach to life in general was lackadaisical more or less, up to this time. Now it began to assert itself again to the point of being rebellious. If it were not for pleasing Mother, I never would have consented to have Katherine go through all that I was sure she had to go through.

The day for the wedding was set, the 3rd of June, 1936. Louis was the only one of my family side who showed up, I felt sure more would have come from her side, but we were advised it was best not to do it. So we limited guests to just the ten males. The affair took place at Rabbi Wernick's apartment, Leon Campell and Morris Zaglin arranged for the rest to make the ten. The ceremony under a makeshift canopy was simple, and the marriage certificates were duly signed by two witnesses in Hebrew and in English translation.⁴⁰⁰

Katherine, dressed in a white two-piece suit with a large brimmed hat, looked prettier than at any time I ever saw her before. Everyone was puzzled about where and how we were going. They knew I had no automobile and no mention was made to anyone. A Model A, parked in front, was not suspected as being the vehicle to take us on

⁴⁰⁰ See marriage certificate in Dorothy McCulloch's private collection.

a honeymoon. The springs on the seats were coming through, the top was wired down to the windshield, and it was several years old. When I began to put whatever belongings we had into the trunk of the two-seater they were horrified. “Abe, you can’t take this beautiful lady in this piece of dilapidated junk on a honeymoon!” Several last minute offers were made, but we laughingly climbed in and took off.

We had to change the water in it on several occasions and the wire had to be redone to hold the top down, but it did not matter. Abe Finestein, the Western Union Telegraph operator in Clemson, had loaned us his car and it carried us to Tryon, North Carolina. Three days were all our finances allowed us to stay there.⁴⁰¹

Making the wedding was equal to my finances, I bought the least expensive wedding band I could get, thinking that in later years I would get her a really nice ring. Little did I know that she would never give up the ring she was married with. This is how naïve I was.

Clemson was a delightful place to spend the summer, for newlyweds. Summer school was not very big in those days, and some school teachers were taking courses in education. We took long walks, occasionally riding over to Greenville. Mother learned to like Katherine, the two got along splendidly, it was all sign language at first, then Katherine began to pick up a few Yiddish words. To hear them talk was a delight. I wish we had a tape recorder, because it would have been precious to listen to it. The atmosphere was good.

⁴⁰¹ Tryon, North Carolina is a small town in the Blue Ridge Mountains famous for fine arts.

Mr. Robert Armstrong, the state director of the Federal Art Project WPA, appointed me to direct the project in Greenville when we moved there permanently. This was quite a challenge for me since I had no managerial experience of any kind. The project had about ten teenage boys whose qualifications limited them to do poster work. Some worked at Furman University, and some had a workroom at John Street Elementary School. After evaluating the work they were doing and going over their qualifications, I could not see any justification for the existence of the project as it was then functioning.

I invited Mr. Andrews to come over and see for himself what we had. I then laid out a plan which took in the Parker School District as well as the local school system. We offered to help teachers in the classroom, with the bulletin boards and doing posters with the children along educational lines.

Mr. Andrews was telling of some successful program under the project in North Carolina and Virginia. My position in Greenville, to be effective, required transportation. Mr. Andrews managed to get approval for thirty-five dollars per month for transportation.

To purchase a used car seemed to be the way to solve the problem. The auto dealer, a long time friend, insisted that I get a new vehicle. This seemed impossible, because I did not have enough to make a down payment and thirty-five dollars per month would not be enough for monthly payments. He offered to waive his profit, which was a third of the cost of the car, enough to consider a down payment. The bank would make a loan to stretch out the payments so that I would be able to meet it. He called his banker to help me out. The car in question was a Plymouth, with a retail price of \$750.00, requiring

to finance \$500.00. The bank stretched out the payments, making it possible for me to have the vehicle.

The car had to be picked up in Columbia. I did not understand how to go about it. Mr. Henderson, in the bank, gave me some blank checks and said for me to give them a check for the car. It frightened me. "Mr. Henderson, I don't even have a bank account, I'll get arrested for giving a false check." He laughed, "Don't worry, I'll take care of it, you come by here when you get back and we will fix up the papers." This was my first exposure of how business was conducted in America.⁴⁰²

Mr. Andrews suggested that I take a trip to visit the other projects, he applied for an itinerary and an expense account on a per diem basis.⁴⁰³ He felt it would mean much to our project for me to take this trip. It began in Asheville, North Carolina; Johnston City, Tennessee; Big Stone Gap, Virginia; Lynchburg, Virginia; Richmond, Virginia; Danville, Virginia; Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Charlotte, North Carolina and back to Greenville. It was inspiring to see what could be accomplished. The Big Stone Gap, Virginia. Project was operated by a young lady from Brooklyn, NY Social work was her main interest. The school where the program was concentrated was considered in the poorest condition of any project. Sanitary facilities were horrible. A switch in the corner of the room was a reminder of discipline. In the center of the room a large rectangular table was surrounded by standing children, barefooted, in ragged clothing, working on

⁴⁰² This seems to be an exaggeration because Davidson had prior exposure to how business was conducted in America.

⁴⁰³ Davidson is referring to other WPA/FAP projects.

various projects. In the center of the table were their accomplishments in dry clay and papier-mache. Crayon drawings were on the walls, also some in tempera. The drawings reflected the scenery of the mountains, with holes in them indicating entrances to the mines.

The question came up where were the funds for supplies coming from? This we found to be a touchy subject. The young lady frequently used some of her own paycheck. The coal mine superintendent and the company store were shamed into giving some help. The enthusiasm of the children was most heartening. We inquired about the disciplinary switch in the corner of the room. Proudly she informed us that it had not been used since she had been there. For the first time I came face-to-face with the oppressed worker of the company store. We would have liked to spend a night there but the boarding house, the only available place, was filled to capacity so we had to go to the next place, Lynchburg. The entire atmosphere, the faces of the youngsters in their tattered clothing, haunted us all the way.

The atmosphere in Lynchburg was quite different. The project was located in a vacant store on the main street, not too far from the business district. The young lady in charge here was from Richmond, Virginia, who knew her way around in the business community. Here was no lack of anything as far as supplies were concerned. The tables had been recently built, and there was adequate wall space to hang completed work, she had two assistants to help her with classes, outsiders dropped in to see what was going on, and in general the place had the appearance of generating much interest. Signs of lectures were displayed in the windows. The students were of different ages and

backgrounds. The lady told us that at first the neighborhood received them skeptically, when rough boys leaned against the doors making fun of anyone who ventured in. Gradually she invited them in and gave them materials to work with. Before too long it became a hanging out place for the toughies who discovered that it was fun to work with art materials. The business community recognized the value of the project, which reduced vandalism, and they subscribed funds to it.

Richmond was not as lucky as Lynchburg. It had difficulty getting going, perhaps due to being the capital city and the beginning of the Payne Museum of Art, which to some extent minimized the value of the Federal Art Project.⁴⁰⁴ However, they kept on plugging away with it.

Danville, Virginia, like Greenville, did not have much of anything at that time. We did not spend any time there. They were mostly in the process of organizing. We went on to Winston-Salem, North Carolina.⁴⁰⁵

Winston-Salem had much activity in teaching but had very little space to display accomplished work, a most necessary part of this type of endeavor. Fund raising was no problem but there was something lacking that we could not put our fingers on.

Charlotte, North Carolina was not much different from the Greenville project, as it was in its beginning stage. The Mint Museum controlled the activity, not wanting to

⁴⁰⁴ The Payne Museum of Art in Richmond, which opened in 1936, is now known as the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. See Virginia Museum of Fine Arts online at vmfa.museum/.

⁴⁰⁵ Daniel Defenbacher, the North Carolina WPA/FAP director, organized the first FAP community art center in Winston Salem in Fall 1935. See Nick Taylor, *American-Made*, 280.

relinquish whatever dominance they had.⁴⁰⁶ We felt that all they were interested in was the financial end of it. They had a program, so this was nothing new.

Back in Greenville, full of ideas and inspiration, I began to look around for a place where we could have classes and a gallery, probably in the center of town. The Lynchburg, Virginia set-up was the kind of program I wanted to see in Greenville.

On Main Street, across the street from the Poinsett Hotel, in the second busiest business block I located a vacant third floor, the former home of the Duke Power Company.⁴⁰⁷ The first floor was occupied by a fine restaurant. The second floor was occupied by a nice pool room operated by the same owner, a Mr. Francis Drake, a dapper gentleman adding class to the poolroom as it was then known. A wide stairway led to both floors above the restaurant. Ideal, I thought, for a gallery entrance.⁴⁰⁸

“Mr. Francis, I want you to lease the third floor to the Art Association, for a gallery, for one dollar per year.” Twirling his mustache he looked at me out of one corner of his eye, “I always thought you were crazy, but now I am convinced you are crazy as hell. Who in the hell will want to go to a gallery above a poolroom?” Puffing on his cigar and looking through the smoke he continued, “You know good and well people who will patronize a gallery will not climb to a third floor and above a poolroom here in Greenville.”

⁴⁰⁶ The Mint Museum Randolph in Charlotte was the first art museum in North Carolina when it opened in 1936. See History of Mint Museum online at www.mintmuseum.org/about/history/.

⁴⁰⁷ The Poinsett Hotel was constructed in 1925. It is now known as the Westin Poinsett. See “The Westin Poinsett, Greenville,” online at www.westinpoinsettgreenville.com/history.

⁴⁰⁸ The gallery was located at 113 South Main Street on the third floor. See “To Open Gallery” in *Greenville News*, April 1, 1937.

“Francis, having a gallery in your building will not only help your restaurant but it will upgrade your poolroom,” I argued. After discussing it from many angles he gave in and agreed to let us have the place provided he would not be asked to spend anything on it. The dollar per year made it legal for the folks in Washington.

With the location secured, the space was measured and a rough floor plan of openings, columns supporting the ceiling, also an elevation of the four walls was sent to Robert Andrews in Charleston, who in turn forwarded it to Mr. Parker in Washington. I was advised that to have a gallery, the kind proposed, we had to have a board of directors. Again Dr. Ben Geer, president of Furman took on the chairmanship.⁴⁰⁹

Architectural drawings prepared in Washington for the gallery were received with much enthusiasm. The estimate for cost of material ran to around \$800.00. The work we could do ourselves with the people on the project.

I had to raise the funds before we got started. I selected sixteen people in the city whom I thought I could persuade to give us \$50.00 apiece. I prepared a little form and began to call on the various individuals. The following contributed: Dr. C. O. Bates; Dr. R. C. Bruce, The First National Bank, Alester G. Furman, Dr. B. E. Geer, Haynsworth & Haynsworth, Mrs. Johnny Holmes, Col. Keith, Dr. J. L. Mann, McAliater & Pate, Meyers Arnold, Henry Mills, Roger Peace, Peoples National Bank, Marshall B. Prevost, Shepard Saltzman. Out of all the people I called on only one industrialist refused. The owner of the Union Bleachery listened to my plans, then he leaned back in his chair, gave me a

⁴⁰⁹ Furman is a private liberal arts college, which is located in Greenville. Bennette Eugene Geer was president of Furman from 1933-1938. See Laurence Glenn, *Bennette Eugene Geer: A Biographical Sketch* (Greenville, SC: Keys Printing Co., 1956).

quizzical look and began telling his side of the story. When he was a little boy his mother took him to church and had to hold him during the singing and organ playing. “Davidson, the only value I ever considered at all was cotton at so much a pound and a dollar at so much interest. No, I will not contribute a dime to anything that has anything to do with art.” This arrogant attitude triggered the long dormant anti-capitalist feeling in me that grew during the Bolshevik days. It infuriated me almost beyond control. I leaned back in my chair the way he did, placed my thumbs in my vest, defiantly stared back at him. “Mr. ...your dust no doubt will buy and sell me many times, but I want you to know how poor you really are and how much wealthier I feel. Good bye.” Holding my head up I stomped out of his office.

During the solicitations I was frequently asked what assurance we had that the government would not cancel the whole project before we got started and here we would spend all that money, and remain holding the bag. I approached Dr. Geer about it and suggested that we have a conference with Mr. Holger Cahill, the National Director of the Federal Art Project.⁴¹⁰ Perhaps he could give some assurance.

Dr. Geer called Senator James F. Byrnes, asking him to arrange an appointment for us with Mr. Cahill. Dr. Geer was making reservations on the Crescent Limited for both of us. I stopped him in time before he made reservations for me too. I could not afford the Crescent Limited. I told him I would meet him there in time. I traveled by

⁴¹⁰ Holger Cahill was an art writer and director, who organized a number of exhibits in New York and served as National Director of the WPA/FAP from 1935 to 1943. See Francis V. O'Connor, “Appendix A,” in *Art for the Millions*, 272. See, also, Nick Taylor, *American-Made*, 272-273.

coach and instead of stopping at the Mayflower Hotel, I stayed at the YMCA.⁴¹¹ We met at Mr. Cahill's office in the McLean Mansion in the next block to the White House, as equals as far as Cahill was concerned.

Mr. Cahill and Dr. Geer knew the same people at Duke and chit-chatted for what seemed to me an eternity.⁴¹² I was anxious to get on with our problem, and their conversation appeared to me irrelevant to what we came for. At last Mr. Cahill turned to me to ask what I had on my mind. Prompted by Dr. Geer, I finally got across to him that I had to live in Greenville to face the people who were contributors and would like some assurance for the project to last.

Mr. Cahill moved to the edge of his chair, looked straight into my eyes, "Davidson are you married?" He further pressed on after I told him I was. "Do you expect to have any children?" He paused a moment. "Suppose you die," looking at both of us, "Life will go on, won't it? This is the way you have to look at the Art Project. This idea is to get the community involved, then they will see it through, and it will go on if a good job is done with it."

Dr. Geer and I looked at each other, there was nothing much to say after this kind of reasoning. We all parted in good spirits. I wondered how Dr. Geer felt about our meeting, but it gave me much to think about that sustained me through the years. If the idea is worthwhile, do it, and it will perpetuate itself—that was my deduction from this meeting. The Greenville Art Museum is the best example I know.

⁴¹¹ Davidson may be referring to the bus when he uses the term coach.

⁴¹² Davidson is probably referring to Duke Power Company.

The blueprints called for a cloth ceiling in the exhibiting part with light above the cloth. We made large cones of shiny tin to act as reflectors. Benches were designed for the school children to straddle. One end was raised above the seat to accommodate a drawing board. The columns were covered wide enough to hang pictures. The gallery proper was in the middle of the area, with the children's school in the front part. The rear was used for storage and general work area.

The gallery opened in April 1937 with an exhibit by members of the local organizations. It was open from 12:00 to 9:00 during the week and from 2:00 to 5:00 on Sunday. Preparations were made for art courses with the following instructors: Capt. Michael Seymore, Interior Decoration; Mrs. Catherine Boyd Calhoun, Design; Mrs. Milton Sullivan, Landscapes; Prof. Robert L. Anderson, Clemson, Water Colors; Margaret Moore Walker, Oil and Charcoal; and A.W. Davidson, modeling in clay.

During the summer we had children's art classes taught by the Project Art Staff. Tempera was the only media we could afford.⁴¹³ The fee for materials was fifty cents.

We all realized that if the art program was to perpetuate as Mr. Cahill envisioned, it would be necessary to involve the city some way. Mr. Marshall Prevost, president of the Art Association, was also a member of the City Council. He agreed to propose twenty dollars a month toward the light bill. I had to appear before the City Council meeting to state the case and ask for the appropriation. Mr. Prevost made the motion to give this amount, but it was turned down. Mr. Prevost managed, through some parliamentary maneuver, to table it until next meeting.

⁴¹³ Also known as egg tempera. Tempera is a quick-drying paint.

Mr. Prevost advised me how to sway the individual members of the City Council. He also tipped me off that one member of the council, who was the biggest stumbling block, had a unique situation: his garage was in the city limits but his house was in the country, therefore making him ineligible to serve on the council, if this was known. Now it was up to me. How would I go about it? We wanted him to abstain from voting, because he was vehemently opposed to passing anything for the Art Project. Somehow we needed to get around him. I used all the power of persuasion I could muster and could not shake him. He was as stubborn as any hard-headed mule I had ever heard of. Quietly I raised the question that I understood a City Council member had to reside in the city to be eligible for the council, I further understood that his garage was in the city but that he did not live in the garage. He controlled his anger very well. I did not dwell on it long and changed the subject. Before I left I suggested that we did not expect him to vote against his conscience, but he could abstain or even not be present at the next meeting. The council voted twenty dollars per month for lights for the Art Gallery at the next meeting. Mr. Prevost had a good chuckle over this.

Gibbes Art Gallery in Charleston considered itself to be the sponsor of all the arts in South Carolina.⁴¹⁴ Whenever they had a statewide exhibition it was by invitation only. The upper part of the state never got a showing under that system. I felt it was time to break this tradition. I began to work to have the Statewide Show in Greenville, in our

⁴¹⁴ Prior to the creation of the WPA galleries, the Gibbes Art Gallery in Charleston was the “only art museum in the state.” See Lise C. Swensson, and Nancy M Higgins, eds. *New Deal Art in South Carolina: Government-Supported Images from the Great Depression*, 7. See, Gibbes Museum of Art website, online at www.gibbesmuseum.org/index.html. See, also, James M. Hutchisson and Harlan Greene, eds., *Renaissance in Charleston: Art and Life in the Carolina Low Country, 1900-1940*.

gallery, and have a jury select the entries. Mr. Day from Augusta, Georgia, and Mr. Skidmore from the High Museum in Atlanta acted as jurors.⁴¹⁵ An unknown won the first prize which did not set too well with some of the old guard, but it started a new trend. The director of the Gibbs Art Gallery never forgave me for such heresy. The show as a whole was very successful. The school was doing well. The Federal Art Project sent us traveling exhibitions making us all feel proud of our endeavors.

Under the WPA Program a new post office was planned. A deal was made with the City of Greenville for them to provide the necessary land on East Washington Street in exchange for the present post office building which the city planned to convert into a City Hall. We got busy trying to convince the city fathers that while they were remodeling it would not be too difficult to include a gallery in the plan. We were not only successful to include a gallery but they provided a supplemental salary for an attendant. We had the city government involved from then on.

Every Monday morning the boys who worked on the art project told of the good times they had in a cabin on Paris Mountain on the weekend. Paris Mountain was located about five miles north of Greenville. The crest of the mountain was about seven miles long between Buncombe Road and Spartanburg Road. There is a story told of when Vanderbilt came down to look for land to build Biltmore near Asheville, North

⁴¹⁵ The High Art Museum Atlanta is located at 1280 Peachtree Street, N. E. Atlanta, GA. The museum has an impressive collection of contemporary art and is “the leading art museum of the southeastern United States.” See “About the High” online at www.high.org/About/About.aspx.

Carolina.⁴¹⁶ On the train he met a gentleman from Greenville in whom he confided his plans for the castle that he intended to build. The gentleman suggested that he, Vanderbilt, look into Paris Mountain before he definitely decided. They agreed on a time they were to meet in Greer, South Carolina for the Greenvillian, whose name was Thompson, to take him and show Vanderbilt Paris Mountain. The idea of having his castle on a mountain, all by itself, had great appeal. He was ready to investigate the possibilities.

On the appointed day, Mr. Vanderbilt came to Greer. There was no Mr. Thompson anywhere in sight. He waited long enough for the next train and proceeded with his plans for the Biltmore Estate. The story has it that Mr. Thompson had the weakness to celebrate an event before it ever happened by getting inebriated.⁴¹⁷

After one of their weekends at the cottage on Paris Mountain the boys lamented over the fact that they would not be able to spend anymore weekends in the cottage. The bank had it taken over, and it would be offered for sale. “Why don’t you buy it, Mr. Davidson, this would make a wonderful studio and Mrs. Davidson would love it.” They were so insistent about it that I mentioned it to Katherine. We rode over to see it. It was slightly below the road, all shut up. We walked around it. Being a summer home it had shutters on all the windows and doors. Grown over with ivy and weeds, to us it was more

⁴¹⁶ George Washington Vanderbilt II, grandson of Cornelius Vanderbilt, built his architecturally stunning home in Asheville, NC. The construction of Biltmore House began in 1889. For more information, see Biltmore online at <http://www.biltmore.com/>. See, also, William A. V. Cecil, *Biltmore: The Vision and Reality of George W. Vanderbilt, Richard Morris Hunt, and Frederick Law Olmstead* (Asheville, NC: Biltmore Estate, 1972).

⁴¹⁷ I cannot find anything to confirm this story.

than just a cottage, it looked like a huge place. Located on a slope, the downstairs was of solid brick construction, the chimney indicated it was not an ordinary fireplace, it was at least twelve feet wide. Two porches were upstairs with two porches downstairs, we counted eleven windows facing the mountain view. Hog Back Mountain, near Tryon, North Carolina, could be seen from where we stood. Electricity was connected to the place, and for water, a pump on the porch was used. We immediately fell in love with the place. We tried the hand pump, the water was cool and had a wonderful taste.

I must say Katherine was the bravest of the two of us. The entire evening we debated pro and con, whether or not if we should get involved, to obligate ourselves not even knowing what it would take to swing it.

The bank had possession of the cottage and 54 acres of ground to go with it, all in woods on the mountain side. The price was \$2500, a down payment of \$300 and the rest in payments of \$30 per month until it was paid out. We were too adventuresome to pass it up. A friend advanced us the down payment to close the deal. This was the first piece of property ever owned by me or Katherine. Our emotions were mixed. I was afraid and glad at our adventure. I woke up to the fact that I had obligations to meet regularly. We discussed it and laughed it off.

When it became known that we had purchased the Patterson Cottage on Paris Mountain, we began to hear that the former resort area had now become a bootleggers' haven, with the exception of a few persons who lived there in the summer. This added to my anxiety.

Mr. Tom Parks, known as the king of the bootleggers in Greenville County, lived not very far from where Max had built a home for Mother. I knew him. When I told him of the problem I had about buying the Patterson Cottage and expressed my fear of the neighbors, he laughed. "Why Abe, those people are the nicest neighbors one can have, I know every one of them. All you have to do is see nothing, hear nothing, and keep your mouth shut." My answer to him: "But how can I convince them that I will mind my own business?" He motioned for me to follow him. "Come on, let me drive you up there, I'll introduce you to them and I promise you that you will never have any trouble with them."

Our nearest neighbor was Bud Moon, who was the most respected among the bootleggers up there. The road up the mountain was not paved, and the care of it left much to be desired, it was a rough ride. The hairpin curve, as we ascended to the top, was rough. His house was perched on the side, giving a view of the road in both directions. In the yard we were greeted by a number of small children. Evidently they were not accustomed to too much traffic during the day. We sat on the steps to wait while the kids ran into the woods to tell Bud that we were there. We heard someone coughing as he approached the house (Bud was a victim of gas exposure during the first World War, entitling him to a partial disability pension and giving a legitimate excuse to live on the mountain). "Bud, meet your next door neighbor. He just bought the Patterson place, and I'll tell you one thing about Abe, he has tight lips. You need never worry about him telling anything he sees or hears." After a warm handshake we were invited to have a beer—home brew—up to this time I had never tasted it, but being a good sport I drank half of the mug. We chatted awhile, then he took me around to meet the other neighbors.

The same was repeated with the others. I managed to get to the car, to sit quietly all the way back home. All I could do was ring the bell to our apartment and slump to the floor. All I could say to Kattie when she came to the door was: "Honey, help me upstairs and I'll explain it all to you later." The home brew really worked on me the rest of the day and all through the night. This was a memorable escapade.⁴¹⁸

After we purchased the house on Paris Mountain we learned that besides it being a bootleggers haven that the area was infested with rattlesnakes. The legend had it that they stayed part of the time on the eastern side of the mountain and then moved to the western side.⁴¹⁹

I never saw a live snake until we visited the Berlin Zoo. I was nineteen years of age and the snake was in a cage. This fear of snakes kept me from enjoying the mountain during spring and summer.

After I came from work in the afternoon I would go down a stairs to have a shower.

Kattie still had the laundry on the line to dry. A heavy flannel bath robe was still on the sunny side. When I got through with shower I called to Kattie to drop the bath robe down to me. Donning the robe I sat on the side of the bed while getting dressed. No sooner I had sat down when some thing grabbed me on the thigh. I yelled to Kattie: "Snake got me, come quick." I was frightened beyond description, Kattie came, poised with axe in hand ready to kill the unwelcome intruder.

⁴¹⁸ The paragraphs which follow were inserted later by Davidson.

⁴¹⁹ Davidson is probably referring to the Timber Rattlesnake, or *Crotalus Horridus*, which is native to the eastern United States.

Easily I proceeded to shell from the robe. Quickly I threw it on the bed and jumped away from it.

When the snake got me I grabbed it through the flannel robe, I could feel the head giving as I squeezed on it, I felt the tail wiggling against my leg.

At last when freed from the ordeal, to our amusement we saw a clothes-pin fall out from the robe.

The pin was still on the robe when it came off the line, and as sat down and moved slightly the pin opened enough to pinch me and as I held it the pin gave some, the end of the robe left like a tail. This became a family classic.⁴²⁰

We had a house-opening party, where friends came out to help us open the place. It was a dream place we found on the inside, the living room had nothing but windows in it, and the outside shutters bolted on the inside, we could plainly see Hogback Mountain from the living room. The ceiling and walls were covered with Arizona pine, and an eight-feet fireplace with exposed brick took up twelve feet of the wall. A full basement with the same arrangement as upstairs had a large fireplace. A bedroom was in each corner, with a large porch. The porch, later screened in, made a wonderful living area. The downstairs was converted to a studio.

One afternoon when we came home, a note was attached to the door, it read: "Move away from here in forty-eight hours, KKK." This made us furious. If whoever wrote this note intended to frighten us it had the opposite effect. I took the note to town to

⁴²⁰ This marks the end of the added page.

confront the head of the Ku Klux Klan organization, whom I knew.⁴²¹ He worked in a clothing store. I called him to the back of the store and showed him the note, and I also showed him the '32 revolver I had just purchased and told him I was quite agitated, that anyone who entered our premises, hooded, would be shot at, with all intentions of killing the culprit. He laughed at me. He assured me that this was nothing but a prank, that their organization had nothing against us. Their notes were more formal. I took a bale of hay, set up a target in the yard, and invited my friends to come over to practice shooting. We had a shooting gallery going and never had any trouble of any kind. In fact the bootlegging neighbors were most protective of us. Not being a mountain boy, I had to learn many things about mountain life to enjoy the good part of it. Snakes I never got accustomed to.

Summers were delightful, the air was fresh and the mountains looked luscious green, more beautiful every day, but all this beauty was not without its handicaps for someone not familiar with the ways of the hills. One morning I woke up itching all over, and after close examination, I discovered bumps in the most unpredictable places. The itching was excruciating. Showing Kattie, I was alarmed, I had heard of all kinds of diseases a person could pick up, but I could not understand where I could have possibly picked up a disease since I had not been anywhere. Her diagnosis was quick: "You have a load of chiggers." I protested, "But I have not been fishing anywhere." Ever since I had

⁴²¹ The Ku Klux Klan is a post Civil War organization which promotes white supremacy. For more information on the KKK, see David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987). See, also, Nancy K. MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

lived in the South I frequently heard people complain after they had been fishing that they picked up chiggers. I soon learned that one does not have to go fishing to get chiggers. Rubbing some butter, or any kind of fat, and rubbing salt into the bites would stop the itching. From then on we had a bag of salt near the shower and when we came out of the woods we rubbed salt all over before showering. This kept us free of chiggers.⁴²²

We were sound asleep one night when around the corner of our bedroom we heard the most awful sounding howl. Hounds were baying, chasing a fox. Fox hunting on Paris Mountain was quite a sport we found out.

Fall, to me, was the most wonderful time of the year, when the mountain was ablaze with color from the turning leaves, and the morning sun glowed as it shone on the shimmering leaves, changing with the time of the day. With snakes gone, and no chiggers to worry about, we roamed over the mountain for hours to come in refreshingly tired to build a good fire in the huge fireplace. The only heat we had was the fireplace but we convinced ourselves we were rugged and we stayed very healthy.

A double garage with rooms upstairs was used for servants when the previous owners had it. A mountain couple, Tom and his wife Florine, with a young boy Herman, about sixteen, came by and asked us if we would let them live there over the winter. They lived on a place higher up on the mountain but wanted a change. According to them, the place had changed hands and they were asked to find another place. They were a clean-looking family. We needed someone to help us, I for one needed someone to help in the

⁴²² Chiggers are red mites.

studio on weekends and some in the afternoons. Tom worked around at odd jobs for other people. Kattie would not be left alone when I was in school. We made an agreement on an hourly basis.

Together we threw our resources in to making the place livable, giving them two rooms upstairs and one of the garages was converted to a living room. As they said, it was much better than the log cabin they lived in before.

Tom kept us in wood the first winter. A friend had a horse he was glad to let us keep. We had the stable and made good use of him. Tom made a sled which looked more like a skid, to bring dead logs in. It served a double purpose, as we got a chance to dispose of much dead wood and had a good fire in addition.

Our place proved a haven for many friends in town who came to enjoy the huge open fire. We baked potatoes and had an iron kettle for hot water to supply all our needs. It was much colder on the mountain, and at times water would freeze on the window sill while the fire kept one quite comfortable.

As spring was nearing, Tom interested me in purchasing a cow, we made a deal that we would furnish the cow, but he and Florine would take care of the milking and processing of the milk, and we would divide it in half. This sounded like a good deal. The place where Tom lived before was cleared for a residence, but due to the depression the plan was abandoned. It was fenced in and had a nice lawn, ideal for grazing, and there was also a shelter for the cow in case of bad weather. The pasture was about two miles away from the house and every morning and evening I drove Tom over to milk the cow named Dusty.

In Russia it was considered odd for a man to milk a cow, for this was a woman's job, but here I found that no one thought anything of it. When it came to churning butter, I felt there must be a better way than beating the dasher up and down. For five dollars I got an old sewing machine motor and rigged up a contraption with a twisted round belt that turned a vertical dasher in a glass jar, and in no time butter began to form. Ours probably was the first electric churn around.

Our arrangement with Tom worked fine until one Saturday night Tom did not show up in time to milk Dusty. I did not know that once in awhile Tom would get drunk and stay on it for several days. Dusty had to be milked. I had watched Tom milk her, and it looked so easy, I knew you had to work the fingers from the top down. All this worked fine in theory but in practice it was a different story. Dusty was the type that as long as she had meal she stood there, but as soon as the food was gone, so was Dusty. I had milk all over the floor and over me and very little in the bucket. I was determined to learn to milk, no matter how the upper part of my hands hurt. The main difficulty was that I was allergic to something about milking, I would get blood poisoning necessitating antidote shots. After a couple of such incidents I had to give up my milking career and give up Dusty.

Among some of the experiences we had with our neighbors, some were narrow escapes as we learned later.

On a Saturday night during a heavy storm the rain was coming down in sheets. Sam, who lived at the highest part of the mountains, knocked on our door telling a hard-luck story that his children were at home without food, and that he had got caught in the

storm and had no way to get home to get the groceries to them. Would I be kind enough to drive him over? His groceries were at one of the neighbors.

The way he carried the groceries into the car made me realize I was tricked into a dangerous game but I did not know how to get out of it. I decided to go through with it, hoping for the best. The rain was coming down so hard we had to travel in the middle of the road. Sam had his head out of the window, directing me not to run off the mountain. When we pulled in the driveway the rain abated. The supposedly ill children came running to meet their daddy. I asked him to come see me the next morning, that I had something of importance to discuss with him. I pointed out to him the dangerous predicament he had put me in the night before when he asked me to take his groceries home. Did he realize if the law stopped us, my car would have been confiscated, my job would have been lost and my whole future would have been affected? He lowered his head and did not say a word. I told him to never play a trick like that on me again. I might be a city slicker but I was not born yesterday and would never again would I allow myself to be used like that again. He left, just said “Thank you, Mr. Davidson.” This whole episode shook me quite a bit.⁴²³

On another occasion I had another close call: I came home from school in the afternoon, there were many law enforcement officers from the Sheriff’s office and some revenue officers just above our home. As a matter curiosity I walked up to see what it was all about, and I followed them into the woods but did not know what the whole thing was about. As time went on I forgot all about it. This was in the wintertime. Later on in

⁴²³ Sam was actually transporting illegal moonshine.

the spring, on a Sunday, a neighbor came sobbing, begging me to call the law. A fight was taking place and her brother was being killed. She was wringing her hands for me to do something. I invited her in and sat her by the telephone and told her to call the Sheriff if she wanted. She protested that she did not know how to use the phone. I told her I was sorry but I would not do it, it was up to her.⁴²⁴ She left without using the phone that morning. Later I learned that this was a test. After the gathering of all the enforcement officers that were in the woods when I came that winter day, the bootleggers held a meeting to decide who had reported on them that a load of whiskey was hidden up there. I also learned if the officers had gone just a little further they would have found what they were looking for. It was decided that it must have been I who informed on them since they saw me with the officers. There was one person who stood them down, saying that I would not call the law for anybody, he was sure of it. They decided to test me.

Our first-born was due in December. Tom promised he would not let us down during this critical time. Florine was wonderful in helping Kattie with the necessary preparations. I took an extra job in the afternoons after school and half a day on Saturday in a foundry, helping in the pattern department. To secure the service of an obstetrician, I swapped to do a fountain, we had the best available service.

On this Saturday morning I did not go to the pattern shop, instead I had gone to town to do some necessary shopping. Somehow I had a premonition that Kattie should know of every place I would go and at approximately what time. About eleven I had a

⁴²⁴ Davidson had been told by Tom Parks to mind his own business when he moved into the bootlegging community.

call to contact home, that the show was beginning. She informed me the doctor ordered her to get to the hospital as soon as possible. I rushed home to find her calmly taking a shower. I was frantic. I just knew the baby would be here any time and here she was fooling around.

The doctor came over to the hospital and found her asleep, he advised me to go on to attend to whatever I had to take care of, the baby was not in too big a hurry to get here.

The small waiting room soon filled with friends who came to ease the long vigil. And a long vigil it was. Ivy Dorothy did not arrive until after midnight.⁴²⁵ The nurse came in to tell of the healthy girl, to walk right by the father to a friend who appeared more nervous than I was. Dr. Bruce came in to congratulate me. We all went out to have a steak in the early hours of the morning. I was embarrassed not to have enough money to pay for the steaks but my friends bailed me out. The superintendent of the hospital, Mrs. Homes, would not let me pay for the room, it was her gift to us.

Ivy Dorothy was named for Katherine's mother, Ivy, and Dorothy for two friends, Dorothy Zirkle and Dorothy Mumford Williams, both dear friends. Tom cut down some young hickory saplings for me to make a primitive crib, but in the meantime when we brought her home we put her in one of the dresser drawers. Tom and I gathered dry brush, made into bundles piled on the porch. In the night when diaper-change time came around, a bundle of brush thrown on the fire blazed up to warm the immediate area long enough to make the change.

⁴²⁵ Because Katherine converted to Judaism, the Davidsons' children were born Jews.

To spare Kattie I undertook the job to make the change. I placed Dottie on my lap, folded the diaper, put it on her and found enough room to put my whole hand in it. The blaze was dying down, the baby appeared too fragile as though she might come apart. I broke out in perspiration, and humbly had to waken Kattie to admit that I could not do it.

Dottie's bedroom was not heated, and everyone who came to see her was horrified at our keeping the baby in such a cold room. Dottie grew up to be a picture of health.

We were about to go to bed one night when we heard a frantic knock on the door. There was Florine, wringing her hands, crying: "Tom and Herman are about to kill each other, come and stop them." Florine stayed with Kattie while I went over to see what it was all about. As I entered the living room I found myself between father and son. One had a double barrel shotgun, the other had a shiny sword ready to spring at his father. It was a frightening situation, and had they chosen to attack there was very little I could do to prevent it. Gingerly I stepped out of the direct line of fire as I found myself when I came in. Slowly I began to talk to them, using the shame tactic of two grown men, father and son, ready to harm each other. Surely there must be a better way to settle whatever bothered each one of them. I invited them to the house to sit down by the fire, just the three of us, to thrash it out in a peaceful manner. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed them lowering their weapons and instead of gazing at each other they both looked in my direction. Noticing that, I authoritatively asked for their weapons. Walking toward Tom I took his gun then I walked over to Herman to get his sword. Obediently Tom went to his

room while Herman chose to remain downstairs. Florine met me with tears streaming down her cheeks, because she knew that one of them would have been dead, maybe both. She was sure that if it hadn't been for me neither one would have given in to the other. The truth of the matter was neither one wanted to hurt the other but it had gone so far that it took an outsider to intervene for them to save face.

Herman got in with a bunch of bootleggers and continued to haul whiskey until he was caught and cast in jail. He would have been sentenced and sent to the chain gang if it had not been for an understanding judge who listened to my appeal. We made a deal: the judge would release Herman if he would join the Army. I had a recruiter agree to sign him up and put him on a military bus departing for camp.

In spite of all the promise to stop drinking, Tom got worse than ever. He managed one day to get to the driveway, lie down in the ditch and holler for Florine to come and get him to the house.

To cast the Clemson statue in bronze was as remote as one could imagine, there were no funds available. The next best material would be cast stone, relatively new in this area, an aggregate of marble and sand.⁴²⁶ I had been experimenting in casting a pair of tigers for my neighbor, Harry Stephenson, who had them placed on a curve in his long driveway, also a statue of Christ at a cemetery as well as at an entrance. I made a proposition to Mr. Littlejohn that I would cast the statue in cast stone if the college would

⁴²⁶ The Clemson statue was originally cast in stone in 1939 due to lack of money. Later in 1966, the statue was recast in bronze. See A. Wolfe Davidson, Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

furnish transportation, erection costs and pay me fifty dollars a month for ten months during my stay in school in New York where I intended to go to do some studying with William Zorach at the Art Students League.⁴²⁷

The casting of the statue was an all-day deal in the fall of 1939, one could not stop for any length of time to let the aggregate settle, because it had to be fresh for the next mixture to adhere and be tamped into it. We had a fine casting and delivered it to be erected before I left for New York in the fall of 1940.

Dr. Mann, the superintendent, gave me a year's leave from the high school position to go to New York for further training. They hired Katherine as a substitute to take over the job while I was gone although she was not an artist, they felt she could hold the class together with my advice if she needed it. It turned out she did an outstanding job with the class.

On the fatal Sunday afternoon that has been written about in American history, I was listening to a concert on the radio, the announcer interrupted the program with a special announcement: the Japanese had just attacked Pearl Harbor and destroyed most of our fleet.⁴²⁸ I was stunned.

The shock of the interrupted announcement, as with so many Americans, posed uncertainty for the future to each who planned for the future. I had to call my friend of

⁴²⁷ William Zorach was an American artist, born in Lithuania, who taught at the Art Students League in New York from 1929 to 1960. See his sculpture in Paul S. Wingert, *The Sculpture of William Zorach* (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1938). The Art Students League of New York was founded in 1875 and continues to facilitate artistic development today. See The Art Students League of New York, online at www.theartstudentsleague.org/About/History.aspx.

⁴²⁸ December 7, 1941. Davidson would leave New York and travel back to South Carolina soon after this.

early Greenville days, Joe Wise, who lived nearby. We made our way to Times Square. An aura of gloom reigned over everyone. People riding the subways, who to me never appeared too jovial, this day, they were the opposite of joviality. Tens of thousands of people descended on the Times Square, craning at the ever-repeated news on top of the Times building. There was some magnetism that drew New Yorkers to the Square, be it New Year, or any other major event. Special editions of the newspapers soon appeared to repeat what we had already heard on the radio news.

We were glued to the radio, anxiously awaiting some hopeful news, but were greeted with more gloom. Shipping took a terrific toll at sea from the submarines. Our boys in the Pacific were in a precarious position not having our mighty Navy to protect them. President Roosevelt was to speak to the nation the following day. Shops, stores, everything was at a standstill awaiting the guiding hand.

President Roosevelt would speak to both houses of Congress on the attack by the Japanese government on our naval base in the Pacific. Everyone was glued to the radio waiting for the golden voice heard so often to ease the agony of the depression during the recovery days. The words “All we have to fear is fear itself” were still fresh in our memory. War was officially declared against the evil forces of tyranny, and he called on us to fight it on land, sea and wherever it occurred.⁴²⁹

New York City for me was the worst place to be during the early days of the war. Emotions ran high among the ethnic groups, and suspicion began to creep in among various groups. Every background had an inherent allegiance to its origin. In a studio

⁴²⁹ The United States declared war on Japan on December 8, 1941 and on Germany and Italy on December 11, 1941.

where one normally was oblivious to the outside world, here it became a hotbed of discussion ending in argument. Sirens were constantly screaming in practice warnings. I decided it best to rejoin the family and terminate my leave, to take my job back.

To illustrate how bad things had become, Dr. Mann had a farm in Walhalla, South Carolina. During the Christmas holidays he had to visit the farm and I went along with him to keep him company. There was a sawmill where he had some business, and while he was in the office I walked around the yard. A sawmill operation always fascinated me. When we got in the car he asked how long it had been since I had been to Walhalla. I related my Clemson experience when Edwards and I had to put a new harness in his Model A Ford on the way from Highlands, North Carolina about five years or so before. He chuckled his famous chuckle. When he was in the office talking business, he noticed someone whispering something to one of the staff. They both walked to the window pointing at something, then others joined, and soon he found himself sitting alone so he, too, walked to the window. "See that man, Dr. Mann? He is up to no good, we'd better call the sheriff and have him locked up. He has been here for several days looking at our sawmill." Dr. Mann pointed to me, "You mean that man in the black coat, he came with me, he is one of my teachers. You have to be mistaken."

Another time, Kattie got a call on Paris Mountain. "Is Abe there?" when Kattie answered affirmatively, they hung up. A few days later Dr. Mann came to the house. I was doing a bust of him. "I nearly had a fight over you this morning." He went on: "The postman asked, have you heard they got a German spy in jail? Abe Davidson." "I told him it was a lie, that I had been to your house yesterday and am going there today,

furthermore I told him to retrace his steps and tell them that they heard wrong. I want you, Abe, to get on this phone right now and tell him off.” I did just that while Dr. Mann sat by me. I sounded seven-feet tall the way I talked to him.

The blow at Pearl Harbor was so severe it put out of action eight battleships then in the harbor, in all some nineteen naval ships and 177 Army and Navy planes were destroyed and there were close to 5000 casualties, about 2500 dead. Three men from Greenville were among the dead, which brought the war that much closer. A few hours after Pearl Harbor, Japanese planes attacked Clark Field near Manila, where more American planes were caught on the ground parked in rows, wing to wing, as they had been at Pearl Harbor. All the Flying Fortresses and pursuit planes, just arrived in the Philippines, were destroyed or severely damaged.⁴³⁰ Two days later the Japanese sank the British battleships the Prince of Wales and the Repulse, off the coast of Malaya, thus further strengthening their power in the Far East.⁴³¹

The way of life settled in—waiting for the newscast from morning, to noon, to evening for some hope of good news, to no avail. It was all bad. Island after island, country after country fell into the Japanese scheme of the war. With the capture of the Dutch Indies, all vital supplies were cut off from the British and the Allies. The

⁴³⁰ Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses

⁴³¹ For more information on this topic, see John Burton, *Fortnight of Infamy: The Collapse of Allied Airpower West of Pearl Harbor* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2006).

Philippines had to be given up. General Jonathan Wainwright surrendered to let MacArthur retreat to Australia to consolidate his forces for an attack.⁴³²

Manpower registration was organized all over the country, with schools serving as registration points. General Lewis B. Hershey was in charge of the Selective Service System.⁴³³ Draft boards were established to call eligible males to stand physical examinations. Class “A” was subject to induction, other classifications were deferred for dependents, handicaps, and certain ages. Army camps sprang up everywhere. A huge training camp near Spartanburg, South Carolina, Camp Croft, was being built. Greenville, South Carolina was designated for a major air base to train B-25 bomber pilots.⁴³⁴ New roads had to be built, homes for families found. Our whole way of life was being transformed.

The news from the theater of war was very discouraging, as the Germans were rolling and conquering all of Europe. We were so ill-prepared, all we had was good old patriotism and we, as a nation, were so angry that we were eager to get into it and get it over with. The art class at the high school undertook to make small models of various

⁴³² Jonathan M. Wainwright was in charge of the Allied forces in the Philippines. See Duane Schultz, *Hero of Bataan: The Story of Jonathan M. Wainwright* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981). Douglas MacArthur was an American general who played a key role in the Pacific during WWII and oversaw the occupation of Japan after the war. For more information, see William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1978).

⁴³³ For more information on General Hershey and the selective draft during WWII, see George Q. Flynn, *Lewis B. Hershey, Mr. Selective Service* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

⁴³⁴ Davidson is referring to Donaldson Air Force Base.

enemy aircraft for the pilots at the air base to use for identification. It was a wonderful experience for the class.⁴³⁵

In Marietta, Georgia an assembly plant was being built to manufacture the B-29 Flying Fortress, the largest plane at that time. Tournay Prevost, a friend of mine, was in the employment office at the Bell Bomber plant in Marietta. While on one of his visits to Greenville, he called me, urging me to apply as a pattern maker in the Plaster-Paris Department where they were making huge patterns for dies to fabricate parts. They had difficulty getting experienced help.

The opportunity to help with the war effort was too tempting for me to remain in teaching, where anyone could fill my position. After much deliberation and soul searching, we decided that I should accept the job with Bell Aircraft in Marietta.⁴³⁶

The size of the building was beyond my imagination. A rail track was around the periphery, with an electric engine pulling flat cars, low enough to jump on and off when one needed to go anywhere. The building was empty, and machinery of all kinds was being installed day and night. Various departments were being organized. Some of the key personnel had their training at the Buffalo, NY plant, and they were the nucleus of the force.

⁴³⁵ See "Students Make Models to Beat Axis," in *Greenville News*, November 29, 1942.

⁴³⁶ Davidson left Greenville County Schools and moved to Marietta, Georgia to work at the Bell Bomber Plant in 1943. He became the Coordinator of Experimental Engineering. See Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, Abe Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections. Davidson worked at Bell Aircraft from June 1943 to October 1945. See Employment Record of Abraham Wolfe Davidson for Bell Aircraft Corporation, Dorothy McCulloch's private collection.

As the workers were coming in daily it was difficult to visualize how some of these people, coming from the farm area, could produce a complicated piece such as a flying bomber, as the B-29 was supposed to be. But in spite of the many workers there whose only reason for working there was to dodge the draft and the attractive hourly wage, there were more conscientious workers who did an honest job in the reputable American tradition.

Gradually all departments were filled to get the plant into full swing. The plant employed over twenty-thousand workers on three shifts. The rivalry between the shifts was intolerable. Any incomplete work, if left for the night shift, was invariably either completely neglected or messed up so that the day shift had to start on it all over. The day shift, in some instances, was not much better, but at least in most cases it left the work alone.

The city of Marietta was a sleepy small town, accustomed to the old southern tradition of doing things in a leisurely manner. Here, suddenly, there was an influx of population, some not too desirable, which disrupted their way of life. They simply did not accept the so-called defense people. Our children had to go on second shift to school, making it very difficult for the housewives. Churches had their difficulties too. Medical care was at a privilege. Dentists did not try to heal, it was easier just to pull teeth. It was an adjustment for everyone, even though many so-called defense people had respectable standing in their own communities.

Like any other situation when a large group of people come together there were always pranksters. For some strange reason, guards were always resented. A bet was

made that “those dumb guards don’t know which end is up,” and one person suggested that he could steal a 24-foot ladder from under their noses and they would never know it. The bet was made. During his lunch hour he took the ladder in question, put a dusting rag in his hip pocket to dust the light bulbs in the hall where the guards had the turnstile. As he dusted the bulbs, when he came to the guards he simply lifted the ladder over the guards to dust off some more bulbs until he got his ladder outside. He leaned it against the building, to come back to tell the person with the bet that he had the ladder ready to go. He had better get it if he wanted it.

Toward the end of the war a special project was set up in the engineering department, which was of a most secret character. Mr. Joseph Ashkouti had full charge of the project, giving him priority for anyone he wanted in his group, also over any work or material he needed. By that time I had left the plaster pattern department for personal reasons and was coordinator for the experimental department. Any part that they were not sure of, we made by hand according to engineering prints. It was my job to coordinate this. Mr. Ashkouti and I became good friends, and he approached me to see if I would be interested in joining his department. He had intelligence clearing on me, all I had to do was get a transfer.

The project was given Number 16 with a hangar at the airport all to ourselves. There was a guard on duty around the clock. We had a select crew of thirty people, all skilled fabricators who could do anything. I was made coordinator and liaison with the engineering office. A three-wheel scooter was put at my disposal. The airport was quite a distance from the main plant.

The bomb-bay doors were removed, all catwalks rearranged, and new doors were designed and fabricated. We were still in the dark as to why all this was being done. When a blueprint arrived, Mr. Ashkouti and I would cut it up, give it our code number so that when a part was taken to a machine shop to have it made, all they had was our number. It was an extra precaution so it would not get in the hands of some spy. We handled our own inspection, much to the chagrin of the Army inspectors. They became very autocratic in their authority. Some of them made it very hard at times for parts from the experimental shop to get to where they were needed.

I was alerted that a very special shipment was in the government area of the shipping platform. I was to get a truck and have two motorcycle patrols escort it to the hangar. Our excitement mounted, because we knew this was the thing we were working for but had no idea what it was. The officer in charge of the shipping place insisted on inspecting what was in the crate, in spite of the marking on it "Classified." I instructed the motorcycle patrol not to let him near the crate. That infuriated him but there was not much he could do about it. After contacting the security office to get clearance and informing him that he was not to interfere with the shipment, we drove out of there, leaving him fuming to himself. Triumphant, I followed the truck on my three-wheel scooter all the way to our hangar. The crate contained a wooden mock-up of the twelve-ton bomb we were to prepare for the B-29 to carry to the enemy. Later we learned that this was just a decoy for the atomic bomb that was being readied all along.

All this tight security was to make it more tantalizing for the spies if we had any among us.

Mr. Ashkouti was not the kind who was a stickler for foolish regulations. One morning he was so angry he was ready to resign. An order came out that smoking could be allowed in the office only. We in the hangar did not have any office, just a desk to work on. I told Joe not to get upset about it, just to let me work overtime tonight and I would take care of it. "What are you going to do Dave?" He always called me Dave. "Just leave it to me, you will see in the morning."

On the second shift, I took our truck and got two platforms ten-feet square, and had our carpenter put a rail around them. I painted a sign "Office" and nailed it to the rail around them. When he came in the next morning he looked at the arrangement and he had the most pleased smile, but all he said was "Hee, hee, hee," then he pulled out his curved pipe and went to work on his blueprints.

The test pilot, Mo, came to me frequently to get things for him when all else failed. A couple of days before I left I ran into him. "Mo," I said to him, "I have never been up [in an airplane] and here I will be leaving before too long, doesn't it make you feel bad?" He told me to come by the flight center, he would have a parachute checked out and we would go up in the morning. He put me in the nose part of the B-29. We flew all over Atlanta and some beyond, he was not very high up, visibility was good, while I was enjoying it all he suddenly took a dive. I grabbed the sides of my seat to brace my feet. He looked at me "kind of rough up here." He straightened the plane as we got ready to come down.

Ashkouti was looking all over for me. “Where have you been Dave?” I told him that Mo took me up. “That’s fine, I am glad he did that.” This was Joe. He was without a doubt the finest person to work with I ever had any contact with.

After the war ended our project was dismissed shortly. To collect “Rocking Chair Money” as all terminated workers referred to unemployment did not suit me at all. I could not do this. We piled in the car, drove up to the filling station on the much looked-to-day when we could say “Fill it up” and that is just exactly what we did, and we drove to Greenville for a visit.

The adjustment from a defense worker to a civilian posed many problems. On the short street where we lived, over half of the people moved to their home town. The houses they had purchased as defense workers, they had very little equity in them and they were glad to get whatever they could just to get away from Marietta. The other streets shared the same fate. The property that boomed a short while ago now spelled doom for the city. Many of the people who were living there hated Marietta for not accepting them and left with an air of vindictiveness. They resented being treated as second-rate citizens.

Foundry work had always intrigued me, so when a moulder approached me about opening a foundry I readily jumped at the idea. It turned out he was the wrong person. The whole venture was a disaster. It took all the ingenuity I could employ from declaring bankruptcy.

Our home on Paris Mountain was sold during the war at a handsome profit, but this was lost as well as our savings we had accumulated while working at the defense plant. The outlook for our future was very dark. There was not enough work in the field of sculpture to support a family. Kattie applied in the local school system to teach seventh grade, far below her teaching training, and this gave us something to hang on to until I latched on to something. There were jobs in Atlanta but not the kind that I would stake my future on. Florida seemed promising but Kattie would not hear of it. She agreed for me to go down to investigate the possibilities.

At this point my self-confidence was at a very low point. A change was of paramount importance. I needed to get away from everything in this area, to start anew somewhere else, as the old Hebrew saying has it: “Meshane Mokim meshane Mazel”—a change of place a change of luck.

The Champion Studebaker car was loaded with various artifacts produced in the foundry when I started toward Florida. I had relatives there and some friends.

It was a dreary, rainy, October, morning, when I took Kattie to her school and Dottie to her school and Edith to her kindergarten. I was on the way south. Going through Atlanta on Highway 41, tears began to come down in a stream as though turning on a faucet. When it began to interfere with my vision to drive, I hardly knew what to do. On the side of the road, a nice-looking gentleman thumbed a ride, so I pulled over, and checked his credentials. He did not seem to be a bum, just someone in hard luck who needed a ride. I asked him where he was going. He told me he was going to Albany. I

told him to get in that I, too, was on the way to Albany.⁴³⁷ Talking to him stopped my tears. I excused myself for having a cold but assured him it was better.

James Harbin, Kattie's brother, lived in Chaires, Florida, so I went down there.⁴³⁸ He and Bernice had some sort of obligation in school, where they taught. I dropped on the bed to sleep until the next noon, so exhausted was I.

The next day I tried selling some of the stuff I had in the car. I found it was not too difficult to sell at filling stations, and by the time I reached Miami things were looking up. I was not as washed up as I thought I was. I started with just enough money for gasoline to get me to Miami. I actually had over fifty dollars when I got there.

Driving at night I always avoided, but after leaving Jacksonville it was so pleasant compared to the weather back home, that I drove all the way to Miami.

At Palm Beach, in front of a stop light, a gentleman approached me for a ride. His truck had broken down. His identification proved him to be a civic leader, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, who operated a pottery store on the main highway. He was good company. He had moved there from Indiana. After shoveling snow all these years he decided to live where it was warm. He suggested that I look up a certain Phillip, who was Russian and quite a character. He felt sure that Phillip could be of great help to me to get located. Of all the characters I was privileged to meet here and there, Phillip proved to be the case of them all.

A small man in stature, with a heavy mustached and balding in the front, he had grayish long hair covering his collar in the back. Across the railroad track in North Miami

⁴³⁷ Albany is a city in southwest Georgia.

⁴³⁸ Chaires is a community in northern Florida.

the house had a cloister-type effect on the inside. It was adorned with all the trappings a priest might have—icons, incense lamps, samovar, and accordion on a stand. His playing the accordion was not even amateurish, but his guests “Oooed” and “Aaaed” at his playing. He was dressed in Cossack fashion, only the sabre at his side was missing.

In the back yard he had a dental-technician laboratory. He was quite good at it. He did not work for other dentists, but fitted the dentures to his clients, and even extracted teeth on occasion. His sanitary facilities were not even standard. I felt it was a miracle someone did not get blood poisoning. He had no license. What surprised me the most was the type of clientele he had.

To spend one night there gave me an opportunity to observe how he duped his clients. The small lamps were lit, and there was a strange odor of something he burned in the incense lamps, as he sat playing the accordion, the samovar boiled away, and a lady dressed in a Ukrainian attire, complete to the last detail, greeted the guests. Graciously he clicked the heels of his boots (with pants tucked inside) bowed as he kissed the ladies’ hands. Skillfully he escorted them around the place, as they admired the various Russian bric-a-brac stuck around all over. It was amusing to watch the ostentatious aura this little man was able to put on to what seemed like sophisticated people.

When I got to know him better, I was convinced of my first impression of him, that he was in imposter of some sort, but I was not sure who he really was behind all this façade.

I had my chance: a young lady came to see him unexpectedly, and a scene took place. After much shouting, he ordered a taxi for her and told her never to come back

here again. Later he tried to justify the confrontation that took place between them. A few days later he was looking through some of his photographs. He was going to discard this photo but forgot and left it on a chair. It was a family photo of him, his wife and daughter, the same girl he ordered not to come back. It seems that he abandoned them in New York, but they located him down there and were making him support them or they would expose him. He was not Russian at all. He was Jewish, but posed as a refugee from the Bolsheviks, as a former priest.

A cast-stone shop advertised for a plaster mold maker, I applied and got the job. My foreman was a Czech, who was Communistically inclined, and was glad to have someone to work with him whom he thought would be sympathetic with his views, since I was from Russia. He could not envision coming out of Russia and not being Communistic. We had many good discussions. He taught me much about handling materials—his attitude was: “Let the material work for you, instead of you working for the materials.” It was a lesson I remember. We have a tendency to rush the materials we work with, but if one learns the nature of it, to take advantage of it, one can get along much further.

The Hollywood Beach Hotel ran an advertisement for an ice carver.⁴³⁹ Although I had never carved in ice, it was still carving, I reasoned to myself. The cast-stone work was more of a stop gap, because I was still looking for something better. More from curiosity than being serious about the ice-carving job, I applied and, to my surprise, I got it.

⁴³⁹ Hollywood Beach is in Hollywood, Florida.

The chef had charge over the ice carver so I was assigned to the kitchen force with the elite of the help—chefs—they had a separate roast-beef chef, and a chef for every item of food. A building facing the ocean, more like a barracks, housed the cooks. My roommate was a cook from Hot Springs, Virginia, a typical-looking cook. A close friendship was developed between the ice carver and the cook.

A large freezer, about ten-feet square, was assigned entirely to ice. My contract called for a carving for every dinner. The chef had ways of dressing the carving with battery lights and all kinds of reflecting devices, and when he got through with one of my carvings I hardly recognized it. It did not take long for me to learn that if they had enough pieces carved in the cooler they did not care what I did in the meantime. This gave me an opportunity to explore Florida for a permanent location. After breakfast, the Studebaker headed each day for some destination. At night the roast-beef cook made sure I had something to eat when I got back.

It was difficult for me to comprehend the value of people who came as guests to the Hollywood Beach Hotel in Florida, to sprawl on a beach chair, to lie there in the sun, to wait for snacks that were brought around regularly every couple of hours, then to go to meals and eat some more. To them this was a gorgeous time. If a weight count were taken before they came and after they left, it would have been astronomical.

To greet the New Year, because the Hialeah Race Track was so near, and so many of the guests were horse-race enthusiasts, the chef had me make a small model of a race horse with a detachable Cupid holding a flag of the incoming New Year.⁴⁴⁰ The Cupid,

⁴⁴⁰ Hialeah Park Race Track is in Hialeah, Florida.

straddling the 18-inch racing horse, proudly holding the flag, decorated the center table laden with food of all kinds. The dining room seated about 2500 guests. Drinks were served at every table, and a seven-piece orchestra was stringing away to everyone's delight. The war was over, all the guests were overflowing with affluence. After the meal, the tables were rearranged to clear the room for dancing, with everyone merrily waiting for the lights to go out to welcome the New Year.

Everyone stood up, glasses in their hands, candles were snuffed out, lights went out. Cheers literally shook the building. The New Year was in.

Some wanted to toast the Cupid. They were shocked, because there was no Cupid! There were shouts from everywhere, "Where is the little Cupid?" Secret police milled all over, but to no avail, since there was no sign of the Cupid. The Hollywood Beach Hotel took pride in the police protection of their affluent clientele and here in front of over two-thousand persons, something like this had disappeared and no one noticed it. "Where were the guards?," questioned many of the guests. A thorough search was made over the entire hotel, but no Cupid. A prize was offered for any tip. The embarrassment of the security force was beyond description.

A room-service head waiter who had questioned me earlier came running to me, "Davey, I found him. I went into this man's room with a service tray, and there he sits in the chair." The man laughed all the time the search was going on. "When the lights went out, I slipped him off the horse, draped my coat over him and took him to the room." Just a prank.

During one of the bull sessions, several cooks assembled in our cabin. One was a German who lived in Coral Gables, Florida. All saw service in the war theater, some in the Pacific, some on the German front. The roast-beef cook was in the unit who were the first to liberate the Dachau extermination camp, and he was telling of some of the atrocities he witnessed there and how he could not imagine that humans could degrade themselves to permit such as this.⁴⁴¹ The German, in a heavy guttural accent, spoke up: “This did not happen, it was all propaganda.” Without uttering a word, the roast-beef cook rushed to his bunk, pulled out a locker, scrambled through it, then pulled out a handful of photographs. “Don’t you tell me it did not happen, I took these,” he said, and spread them out on the cot. He shook his fist at the German cook, “Just one more word out of you about it being propaganda and I’ll shove your teeth in your throat.” The German eased out of the room. He never visited us again.

I came in late one night from one my exploratory trips over the state. The cook, instead of the customary beef sandwich, had a plate full of fried chicken legs for me. They tasted good, and while I was eating I remarked that they were very small chickens. He explained that the hotel had a connection in Hawaii where they could get this size. It was only this place that could afford it. When I got through eating, he fell on the bed laughing. Sometime before I told him that I could not eat frog legs, so he fooled me.

⁴⁴¹ Dachau was not an extermination camp, only a concentration camp. For more information, see Marcus J. Smith, *Dachau: The Harrowing of Hell* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995).

Toward spring the hotel business began to taper off, getting ready to close for the summer and all jobs were terminated.⁴⁴²

Back in Marietta, I still had nothing definite lined up for future work. Teaching was still the most desirable and most satisfying work I could do if I could not get connected. Art was not that widespread, there was not that much demand for it. We were discussing many options of getting into some field of endeavor. Kattie expressed a wish to teach in a girl's school. Since we had two daughters, she thought it would be a nice atmosphere for them to grow up in. I suggested that she pick a school for us to pursue the possibility. I would make my adjustment to open a studio, a cast-stone shop, a photo shop, for her not to worry about me, I'd land on my feet.

Kattie remembered a talk she had heard at an AAUW meeting by a president of a girl's school in Gainesville, Georgia whom she liked very much, but did not remember his name nor the name of the school.⁴⁴³ We knew someone in Marietta who had ties in Gainesville, and she gave us the name of the president and the school. This was on a Friday. We called the president of the school, locating him in the dining room. Kattie asked him if he had an opening in the English Department, after stating her qualifications. He asked her about her marital status and her husband's occupation. She covered the receiver to ask me if I would be interested in teaching art in a girls school, because there was also an opening in the Art Department. An appointment was made for the following

⁴⁴² Davidson worked in Florida from Fall 1947 to Spring 1948.

⁴⁴³ The AAUW is the American Association of University Women. Josiah Crudup was probably the speaker at this meeting, as he was the president of Brenau College at the time.

Monday. We brought our little girls, Dorothy, 9, and Edith, 5, with us. We secured the jobs we dreamed of getting. The president charmed us with his personality. Brenau College, a girls school, was exactly what we needed. It offered a four-year course and had a wonderful reputation of having the finest girls anywhere. The school had faculty apartments on the campus. The City of Gainesville, where the main businesses were located, was on the square just three blocks from the college. The elementary school was also within walking distance. The grounds around the school were most inviting. Athletic facilities for girls were nearby. The prospect of living in an intellectual environment gave us a new lease on life.

August was set as the month to move to Brenau College.⁴⁴⁴ All the necessary arrangements to terminate our existence in Marietta were made. Some things had to be sold, others we disposed of the best way we could, and in general we had to evaluate our future course of life.

We could appreciate the feeling of the many people who left the “Defense City” when the bomber plant closed its doors.⁴⁴⁵ Normally, after residing in a place five years, one has a sense of nostalgia, but unfortunately this place had the opposite effect.

The apartment we were to occupy was not vacant, because the professor who had lived in it was away on a teaching assignment for another month, so temporarily we were housed in an apartment next door to the dean. The dean’s wife made us feel at home, a

⁴⁴⁴ Davidson started working at Brenau College in August 1948 and would remain there until retirement in 1966.

⁴⁴⁵ The Davidson family had lived in Marietta, GA from 1943 to 1948.

lift Kattie needed at this point. There were other faculty children the same age as ours. It was a most welcome change for us.

The positions fell to us so quickly we did not have time to find out anything about the school, all we heard was that it had a good reputation. That year it was taken off the Accredited List of Universities and Colleges, due to offering too many majors. Over half of the student body transferred to other schools, causing alarm for the administration. Again uncertainty loomed over us. It became questionable if we had made the right decision. There was nothing much we could do but wait and see what would happen. In the meantime, we were in the field we wanted to be in and if we had to come to the point of change, we would have a reason for doing it. Then, on the other hand, we reasoned if things were not so good, no one else would be competing for our positions either. A poor consolation, but something to laugh about. Anxiously, everyone waited for the registration time, wondering if enough would enroll to have a school at all.

The Art Department, located over the Library, was in an unbelievable disarray. A pile of rubbish was in the middle of the floor and it looked like the place had not been swept in weeks. A small room at the head of the stairs, overlooking the balcony, had to be the office. Two larger rooms were on each side. One was made into a classroom, the other was for painting and sculpture. One more small room with a sink in it was a welcome part. We later discovered that the water from the sink emptied into the street, not a very desirable arrangement. Art supplies were handled by the book store, which had a very high profit markup. In addition there was an extra fee for taking Art. All of this

was very discouraging. My first reaction was to take off the fee charge, arguing this would hold down growth in the Art Department.

Even since teaching in high school my policy had been that no door where students were should have solid paneling, but should have glass. All solid doors were replaced with glass panels so that the entire room was in full view. We scrounged around for furniture, and scraps of lumber and soon had the place looking halfway presentable. The business manager was very cooperative in helping any way he could.

The faculty was arranged in “U” shape order in the Library for our first meeting. Each department sat behind place cards. The president gave the welcoming talk and introduced the faculty, giving their qualifications. The dean followed with a list of instructions and procedures for registration, to take place in this same room. This in turn was augmented by the Dean of Women, a stately lady who had been there for many years, and who had a convincing aura of authority.

The sororities had their hands full, orienting the girls in the ways of “Do’s and Don’t’s.” Everyone looked with anticipation to the next day. Rumors were flying thick and fast about how many actually came. The old timers were very unhappy at the number registered, because it was almost half of what it was the previous year. Six students enrolled in the Creative Art Class, eight in the Art History, and hardly enough to offer an Art Appreciation course, but we did not close it out anyway. It picked up a few after registration.

Assembly, or “Chapel” as it was generally known, met twice a week. One day was known as Administration Day when the President or special guests spoke to the

student body, one day was Student Day when student affairs were brought up. It was mandatory for the faculty to attend the Administration Day. The stately lady, the Dean of Women, assigned seats for the first assembly meeting, this was a seat used for the entire year. It was most selective according to rank. Heads of departments occupied the front seats in the side boxes reserved for faculty, and the rest of the faculty had their places behind the heads of departments.

The auditorium, a cozy place built in the nineteenth-century tradition, seated around seven-hundred persons, including the balcony which was usually reserved for the prep high school connected with Brenau. During concerts or plays, a box in front of the balcony was occupied by the president and his guests.

On the ceiling over the curtain on the stage was a copy of a painting of “Aeneas in the Court of Dido,” with the little boy standing on one leg.⁴⁴⁶ The story was told by one of the old citizens in Gainesville: a sign painter was engaged to copy the painting from a post card. He mixed the flesh color and while he was on the ladder, some of the youngsters playing around turned over the bucket with the flesh paint. He could not duplicate the mixture so he just left the leg off.

The President gave his welcoming address to the new students. The faculty and many guests from town came to see for themselves how many students did not show up. Behind the President on the stage were members of the Board of Trustees. He projected the prospects for the future, giving a detailed explanation for the loss of accreditation,

⁴⁴⁶ The painting of “Aeneas in the Court of Dido” is attributed to Bernardino de Donati.

assuring everyone that this was a necessary step to get the school on a solid footing. From here on the school would embark on a program to earn back the accreditation.

We were optimistic of the future and we knew that this was just a phase that would soon be behind us. Organizing the Art Department was a job from the very beginning, and there was no carryover from my predecessor.

The Drama Department put on Shakespearean plays, a credit to any school. It was unbelievable for a small school to be able to put on such plays.

Chapel programs every week became boring, especially to hear the President ramble when he did not have anything special to talk about. The faculty usually had very interesting programs and the dean, when he spoke, with his choice of words was worth listening to. He was a person of few words and when he had the podium it was worth while.

Graduation exercises were always an emotional experience. Having students for a year or more one gets attached to some of them, they in turn feel the same way about faculty. The faculty lined up behind the President and the Dean and the Dean of Women to march into the auditorium while the audience stood, then the students marched in and took their seats. A well known speaker told of the cold world they were about to go into, to leave the institution that gave them protection for four years.

The sunken garden rendered itself beautifully for the alfresco dinner given by the senior class for the parents and faculty and guests. Alongside the street was a row of cedars, supposedly from Lebanon, rather scrawny in foliage but the legend of them

helped the atmosphere. Huge trees flanked the steps descending into the garden. The sunken garden was later done away with by filling it in, for the sake of modern progress.

The first year of teaching gave me an opportunity to evaluate what was needed most for teaching art at Brenau for the following years. Books in the Library were the first priority, then stands for sculpture displays, turntables for modeling, a place to display student work and plans for an outside art show. The list was prepared and taken to the President, and he looked it over, reacting favorably.

Kattie, too, was happy with her first year of teaching. The children got along well in school, and they made many nice friends who came to play with them at the college. What a wonderful place for children to play, over the entire campus. The first summer we spent fixing the apartment, there were so many things we needed, like book shelves. The place needed painting. We were not happy with the exit, a wooden stairway nailed against the building, while not very safe in case of fire.

We soon found out, in our second year, when new faculty members came in that any demand an incoming faculty member made was met. After one year, one had to get it done alone. The same policy held true for the departments. My biggest shock came when I approached the president about some of the equipment that was promised, and he denied that it was ever promised. This crushed me. I made whatever could be made, but there were some items that just had to be bought. The Department was given a budget. I held off, waiting until the last minute to spend what I needed. About April I got a notice

that whatever funds I had left were frozen. To me a budget was like a deposit in the bank, you have it until it is spent. This I simply could not understand.

Toward the end of the second year we were invited to stay, with no change in rank or pay.

Kattie got a position with the Continuing Education Program of the University of Georgia, later leading into her having charge of it. To augment my income, it was necessary to solicit outside work. Art was always a commodity everyone liked but no one had to have, so it was not easy to sell.

Doing heads of children, I thought would be marketable if the price could be within reason. Doing them in ceramics was the answer. Bronze was too expensive for this area. My thinking was: parents of children would in all probability still have parents living, this would make a wonderful gift for them. Once I made a mold, duplicates could easily be made from it. I offered three for the price of one head, thus giving a chance to give a gift to each set of parents. Before long I had all the work I could do. There was the problem of firing, I did not have a kiln. Friends in Chamblee, Georgia operated a commercial pottery, with a tunnel kiln.⁴⁴⁷ They agreed to put my heads on the last cart, in case of an explosion it would not damage any of their pottery. We never had any accidents. The roads to Chamblee were rough, and my worst casualties were in transporting the green ware.

⁴⁴⁷ Chamblee, GA is about 43 miles from Gainesville, GA.

Peter Voulkos, a nationally known ceramist was spending a summer in Black Mountain College, in Black Mountain, North Carolina, a fine opportunity for me to get a different point of view.⁴⁴⁸ Much had been written about the liberal program and the unique way of life at the college. Kattie and I thought it was good idea for me to go over to see what it was all about.

All we knew about Black Mountain College was that Dr. Rice from Rollins College had the idea of organizing a school where students and faculty lived and studied in a commune type of an environment.⁴⁴⁹ Many acres of land were acquired at the foot of Black Mountain. It had a fine lake, much farm land, with a pavilion was facing the lake and there were many other buildings for classrooms, housing, and a craft shop. The idea attracted people like Walter Gropius, from the Bauhaus school, who designed a dormitory.⁴⁵⁰ Louis Adamic was interested and was a heavy contributor. The abstract painter, de Kooning; Estaban Vicente who painted in a college approach; the modern composer, Cage; Merce Cunningham and a ballet troupe; and many others were participants.⁴⁵¹ The list of people it attracted was very impressive. They tried to grow all

⁴⁴⁸ Black Mountain College was a fine arts school founded in 1933. The school closed in 1956. See Judith H. Bonner and Estill Curtis Pennington, eds., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 21: Art and Architecture*, 43-4.

⁴⁴⁹ Rollins College is a liberal arts college in Winter Park, Florida.

⁴⁵⁰ Walter Gropius was a German architect and founder of the Bauhaus in Germany, the most important design school in modern times. For more information, see Dennis Sharp, *Bauhaus, Dessau: Walter Gropius* (London: Phaidon, 2002).

⁴⁵¹ Willem de Kooning was a Dutch American abstract artist. For more information, see Sally Yard, *Willem de Kooning* (New York, Rizzoli, 1997). Esteban Vicente was a painter. Davidson is probably referring to John Cage, an American composer. For more information, see David Nicholls, *American Composers: John Cage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Mercier Philip Cunningham was an “avant-garde choreographer-dancer” who created a dance company at Black Mountain College. See Bonner and

the food they needed on their own farm. The whole concept was far ahead of its time. They were not accepted in the community. The hippies of later years were tame by comparison.

The place where I was to turn off to the college was not too well marked, and it was easy to miss it. At the filling station, where I inquired about the place, they gave me funny looks, and sneeringly they pointed to a road I was to take. At the end of a nice dirt road was a small rock building, which looked like it might be an office. The sound of a typewriter was the only sign of life anywhere around. The office was closed for business. She was just catching up on her work.⁴⁵² This was her appearance for a Sunday afternoon: barefooted, a dirty blouse and skirt not much better. She took me to see the director, whose wife gave me directions to a certain cottage. After riding a short distance, she pointed for me to turn across a field, where there was no sign of a road. It turned out to be a short-cut to our destination, but it kept me anxious until we got there.

We were greeted by a large dog running through the screen door, which had a hole in it and apparently no one had bothered to repair it. The large room, supposed to have been a living room, had a large fireplace that showed use at some time. The table in the center of the room was littered high with papers and old magazines. Sweeping must not have been on their program for this room looked as though it had not been swept in ages. The smell was musty. The young lady led me upstairs to find a room. She opened one door, "Oh, there is someone in there," this was repeated until she finally pointed to a

Pennington, eds., *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Volume 21: Art and Architecture*, 44.

⁴⁵² Davidson may be referring to the secretary.

room that was to be mine during my stay there. Before she left she drew directions where that evening everyone was to meet to hear poetry and with a “Tureldo” she left, not giving me a chance to offer her a ride back.

The poetry reading was taking place in the craft room. The path that led to the craft room was waist deep in weeds. Snakes were one of my horrors, and I knew somewhere along the path I would meet up with a rattler. As the audience gathered, slowly the atmosphere was friendly and jovial. The craft room, located downstairs, had looms and work benches, but the floor was also used to sit on.

After the poetry reading a heated discussion took place—pro and con opinions were freely expressed. The casual dress, the general comradeship were heartening and outweighed all the inconveniences. Peter Voulkos fitted into this environment like a glove. He was of Greek parents, a very simple person, the type who would accept and be acceptable to a commune environment.

The next morning in the dining room, wood stoves were going full blast. The cooks accommodated us with any special foods in the breakfast line; hot cakes, eggs, toast, etc. You had to bring your plate and utensils by going to the sink, picking it out and washing it yourself. Large round tables seated eight, and any vacant seat was yours to occupy.

If there was a shortage of dishes, borrowing someone else’s dish was not out of the ordinary. Sometimes a sip was passed around the table to share by many from the same soup bowl. Right here my comradeship ended. Small children ran around naked, and in some instances couples had different mates the year before.

Merce Cunningham's Ballet Troupe gave a performance. Many people from Asheville came to see it. Most of these were on the liberal side, who came to anything that was offered at the college. They, too, came in casual dress, barefooted, let their hair down, so to speak, to fit in with the atmosphere. There were no seats. People were on the floor and standing against the wall filling the place to capacity. Piano was the only background music. It was a beautiful performance.

Esteban Vicente, the Spanish painter, was reviving collage with paints instead of different bits of material.⁴⁵³ He was a good painter but a poor teacher. When I asked him to explain to me what he was trying to achieve with his work, he shrugged his shoulders and said: "Work, work, and you will find the answer." He was not at all interested in my wanting to learn what and why his approach was so that I could pass it on to my classes. All I got from him: "Who cares if I pass it on or not?"

Peter Voukos, on the other hand, was exactly the opposite, he bent over backward to explain all he knew in ceramics. His background, according to him, was that when he graduated from the University of Montana, a firm interested in promoting ceramics offered him a proposition to set up an experimental studio. Whatever he would make would be his while they would furnish everything. Voukos was known for large urns he turned with a cup type of top, similar to the Amphora type found in Greek antiquity. He turned his items large, because, as he said, he thought they had to be large.

⁴⁵³ Esteban Vicente was a Spanish artist who was famous for abstract paintings and collages. He was a founder of the New York Studio School and taught at Black Mountain College. See Roberta Smith, "Esteban Vicente Dies at 97- An Abstract Expressionist," in *New York Times*, January 12, 2001 online at www.nytimes.com/2001/01/12/arts/esteban-vicente-dies-at-97-an-abstract-expressionist.html.

They were different and easily won prizes. It was an ideal situation for someone just out of college to have such an offer. He experimented in building electric kilns and made the coils for the kilns. This information he generously passed on to me, which proved very valuable when I returned to Brenau.

Another guest was Williams, with his wife, Mary Sheier who introduced excised design into hand-thrown pottery. Mr. Sheier told us an interesting story of how he developed such thin thrown wares. During the Depression, he and his wife, Mary, had a pottery shop alongside one of the main roads in the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was during the time when it was difficult to sell much of anything. They had thrown much pottery and placed it on the rickety shelves to dry getting it ready for firing. A tourist came by to watch them work and ventured into the drying area. Accidentally he tripped on one of the shelves, overturning the whole load, breaking most of it. The tourist insisted on paying for the damage. Laughing, Sheier said they made a sale, thus giving them an idea that bowls did not have to be thick. They were making thin ware from then on.

Over a period of time many fine programs were given during my stay there.

That winter, Research Art Studios in Maitland, Florida, extended me an invitation to spend the month of December there.⁴⁵⁴ This, too, was a unique place, founded on a whim.

Mr. Andre Smith was an etcher, architect, and stage engineer who was invited to do etchings of the Expeditionary Forces in France during the First World War. He lost a

⁴⁵⁴ Davidson is referring to the Maitland Art Center, founded in 1937. See "Maitland Art Center," online at artandhistory.org/maitland-art-center/.

leg and decided to move to Florida from Connecticut to live in a milder climate. With his driver he came to Orlando. Mrs. Boch, a friend of Lillian Russell had endowed the drama department at Rollins College where they were building a theater. Mr. Andre Smith had just published a book on stage designing and was promptly engaged to help with the props for the stage. When his work was completed, Mr. Smith went by to tell Mrs. Boch goodbye. She said: "Why goodbye, why not another beginning?" Talking at random she asked him: "Mr. Smith if you had a chance at your 'druthers' what would you life to do?" His reply: "I would build an artist colony where artists would be invited to do their work at their leisure." Mrs. Boch told him to draw his plans and select a location, and she would endow it. Maitland was selected for the place, they called it Research Studios, a delightful place. The plan was around a quadrangle, with an Exhibition Hall and a small studio with a utility room for preparing meals if one so desired. There were a number of these studios for the invited guest artists. At first it was free, but later a very nominal fee was charged. From what I learned, it was a dream place at the beginning, but problems arose later when some of the guests with radical leanings resented the idea of being given everything, the idea of being more or less like welfare dependents. It nearly broke Mr. Andre's heart for people to be so ungrateful. We developed a good relationship, and I did a bust of him in ceramics which I presented to them later. I did many paintings of the place.

The following summer my daughters, Dorothy and Edith, were of camping age and in no way could we get enough finances to send them to camp. Kattie and I both felt

the need for them to have this experience. A deal was made with a girls camp, Chattooga, near Tullulah Falls.⁴⁵⁵ I took charge of the Crafts Department in exchange for having both of them with me. We did this for three years until they outgrew it. This was a marvelous experience for them as they learned so many skills they otherwise would have been deprived of and I enjoyed the change.

The camp doctor had a reputation of partaking in the drink known as White Lightning.⁴⁵⁶ In kidding him one day, I expressed surprise that he, knowing how dangerous the stuff was, would use it. He told me that as long as he had been in the mountains he knew who had the good stuff. By that time one of the workers in the camp came along. He pointed him out to me. "If anyone gets his White Lightning he need not worry. It is made under the most sanitary conditions and he uses the real ingredients, and he charges more but the difference is there." I approached the person about getting me some of it. He had a blank expression on his face as though he had never heard of it. I gave up on the idea as not being trustworthy in their opinion.

As the summer went along, the mountain people did many chores around the camp and I developed a friendship among them. One day the same person I had approached earlier came to me and asked when I was going to Gainesville. "Mr. Abe, when you get ready to go to Gainesville next week, if you will go to the stable, you will see three rocks piled up. Go to them, look toward the stable, then turn left and walk to the sawdust pile. About five steps from the edge, dig around with your foot and you will find what you want. Take it and I will see you next week." Following his instructions I

⁴⁵⁵ Davidson is referring to Camp Chattooga for Girls in Tallulah Falls, GA.

⁴⁵⁶ White Lightning is moonshine.

uncovered a half-gallon jar with its contents. The next year he did not ask if I wanted any, but just put it under the seat of the car and told me about it.

The following year the director of the camp and I were talking about the people in the mountains and when I told her my experience about the White Lightning, she hardly believed it. "You really must rate with them if they trust you this much," was her remark.

At the end of the summer I loaded the car with the girls and their luggage and started down the mountain, when suddenly I realized my brakes on the car had given way. We came down in low gear, and frequently had to put it back in low until we got home.

In the process of acquiring accreditation for Brenau, cooperation with the community rated high with those who came to inspect us. An area hospital was being built and the Art Department was asked to paint Mother Goose nursery-rhyme characters in the children's ward. They furnished a special wallpaper and other needed materials. This report was a big plus for the Art Department.

The Library needed updating and a committee of the following heads of departments was appointed: the English Department, History Department, Science Department, and the Art Department. We were to present our findings at the end of the summer. Many hours and much consideration was given to the study. The report was presented to the President, who graciously accepted it and promised to look into it. Reasonable time passed and nothing happened. At the next faculty meeting the Librarian

passed out allotments on a slip of paper for each department to purchase books. The Art Department had hardly enough funds to buy three books.

As expected, the Art Department was turned down for funds for materials to build a kiln, even though I was going to build it. Out of my meager salary I traded around for some of the work I could not do myself, and paid for the refractory bricks and ordered the Kanthol wire advised by Voulkos, but I had a problem on how long the wire was to be for my size kiln. As luck would have it, Dr. A. H. Einstein, the son of Albert Einstein, who was a dear friend, dropped by to see us.⁴⁵⁷ In fifteen minutes I had the answer and have been using the formula ever since.

As student interest grew in the Art Department, the space over the Library was not adequate. Having the ceramic sections with my homemade potter's wheels and electric kilns on a ground floor was more desirable. An area was located under Butler Building, that had been used for storage by the Dean. We made arrangements to move his records, that were beginning to get mildewed due to lack of ventilation. It was ideal for ceramic, because the noise of the wheels and the clay footprints did not disturb anyone.

To supplement my income I had a children's class for ages seven to fourteen on Saturday mornings. Half of this income had to be paid to the college, but this helped pay for the material on the potter's wheels and other equipment.

⁴⁵⁷ The Davidsons were friends with Hans Albert Einstein and his family. Davidson sculpted a bust of Albert Einstein in 1964. See "Einstein's Son Visits Here," in *The Daily Times*, Gainesville, GA, August 25, 1964. The Davidsons met Hans and his family while both families were living in Greenville. Hans and his family moved to this city in 1938. Hans worked for the Soil Conservation Service. See John M. Nolan, *A Guide to Greenville, South Carolina* (Charleston: The History Press, 2008), 19.

Many were the needs for the department, such as a projector to show slides, also slides for the Art History class and Art Appreciation class. A friend in town donated an enamel kiln. Being frugal, I saved up enough from the budget to get a slide projector and some slides toward the end of the year so that I would have them for the next year. When the requisition was made, I was informed that the budget had been frozen, whatever funds I had accumulated for the purchases were lost.

Along with the strain and emotional stress I began to have chest pains diagnosed as angina-pectoris.⁴⁵⁸ My whole way of doing things had to be adjusted, since the main thing was to avoid aggravation.

The poultry industry had its beginning in Gainesville, the headquarters of the Georgia Poultry Federation. They began to have an annual festival here culminating with a parade with many floats. The chairman of the float committee approached me to handle the next parade for them which meant to design and build floats and put on the parade. Because of my health problem I was hesitant to take on anything of this magnitude. We would have to build a chasis to build the floats on. A friend of mine, Charles Blackwood, head of the Art Department of Furman University, happened to come along on the way to

⁴⁵⁸ Davidson had a heart attack in 1951, which made it difficult to sculpt afterwards. Davidson began painting more as a result. See A. Wolfe Davidson, Biographical Data A. Wolfe Davidson, Abram Wolfe Davidson Papers, Clemson University Libraries Special Collections.

a wedding in Atlanta. We talked it over, and he agreed to be a partner. And so we became float builders.⁴⁵⁹

It all sounded so simple to build floats and put on a parade. We wound up with thirty-six floats, and considering that each float was in the neighborhood of twenty or so feet, this required space. Each design needed to incorporate the product of the company it was selling. At all times the whole parade had to be taken into consideration so that it would not be monotonous. Sketches were made by Mr. Blackwood, which were approved by the respective firm and then we built the float.

The 50's seemed to have been the years of centennial celebration for small towns around here. Madison, Georgia, needed a parade, Cleveland, Georgia, and Ellijay, Georgia, in the mountains, were towns around here I helped with their festivals. In the above-mentioned towns, all there was to each town was the square, and since they had such a good time parading, they marched twice. It was much fun to go into these towns to work with the citizens, for each was a community affair, when everyone helped, women and children and men. Men did their share by growing beards, having contests for the handsomest beard or the wooliest beard. After the judging the cutting of the beards was like shearing sheep.

In the city of Ellijay, someone suggested having a paddy wagon in the parade with someone inside. A still was put inside. I got the bright idea that if we had it

⁴⁵⁹ Davidson and Charles Blackwood created the floats for the Poultry Festival for a number of years and even organized their own float-building company called Davidson-Blackwood, Inc. See "Festival Spirit Invades New Float Building Plant," *Georgia Poultry Times*, March 6, 1957.

operational, it would be more fun. I talked to three people standing there and asked them if they knew of someone who could operate the still, hoping they would volunteer to operate it. The liquor still was a confiscated still which the Sheriff furnished. The three fellows brushed me off, saying they didn't know anybody, neither did they know anything about a still. A bystander whispered in my ear: "Those damn liars over there, each one spent time in the pen for making whiskey."

Dorothy, our oldest daughter, was graduating from high school. Dr. John Plyler, President of Furman University, was one of the first few people I had met when I arrived in this country, because he did business with my brothers. On several occasions after he became president of Furman he told me that when Dorothy was ready for college to be sure and look him up. A deal was made the year before she got ready for college that I would do busts of all the past presidents of Furman in exchange for room, board and tuition.

The first year of handling the parades gave me some income but mostly it paid for the equipment to put us in a position to make a profit in the future, and we learned much and also established credit at the bank. The time seemed right to negotiate for a lot and material to erect a building for me to have a cast-stone shop as well as room to build the floats. Perhaps we could rent some of it to meet the payments. To get the location and secure the material was no problem, but finding the financing was another matter.

A very dear friend who was a high officer in one of the banks in Atlanta came to the rescue. Taking my crude sketch to him, I described the location, and I also projected

the idea that I would supervise the construction. He asked the amount it would take me to do the job. He picked up some gadget to dictate our conversation into, then turned to me, “You have got your money when you get ready for it.” This was a bank commitment. It was unreal to me that this was all it took to do it. A loan on the insurance policies provided enough money to pay an option retainer and take care of labor.

The cost exceeded the estimate on the building, and it was necessary to arrange with the lumber company to sign a note so that I could pay it off. To this I assigned my college check to the bank for two years. Many projects were taken on during those lean two years to make ends meet. Kattie’s position with the University of Georgia Off-Campus Center for Continuing Education saved the day for us.

A restaurant occupied the front of the building, a cast-stone shop was in the back along with a rental place in half of the back. Payments on the building were met by the income from the rental space.

A friend in Atlanta called, wanting to know if a pagoda could be built of cast-stone. A lady had bought a house on West Paces Ferry Road, which had a wooden pagoda by a pool. Someone stole it before she took possession of the house. My sketch called for three tiers. Later a five-tier pagoda was built for a person in Greenville, and while I was at it I made one of the four tiers for my back yard, where it still stands.⁴⁶⁰

By now my portrait work in ceramics had taken off. I had to develop a slip-a-liquid clay—made of ball clay, feldspar, flint, talc, and kaolin, also some local

⁴⁶⁰ Davidson created a pagoda for his garden at his residence at Candler St. in Gainesville, GA. See Dottie Colwell, “Not many backyard gardens boast a real honest-to-goodness pagoda,” in *Gainesville Tribune*, November 29, 1961.

Greenville, SC ball clay Gillsville, GA. A tiny bust of silicate of soda was added for fluidity, some red oxide to give a better body for bronzing.

It was difficult for me to get reconciled to imitating bronze. I had a strong feeling that each material should stand on its own merit. When a piece of work is cast in a foundry, it needs all kinds of ingenuity to give it the patina aging bronze will take on over the years, which is an imitation of sorts.

This made me feel better about imitating bronze.

“Your building burned to the ground,” a voice over the telephone at midnight awakened us. “What’s the gag?” I asked. “Honestly Abe, I am telling you the truth, it burned down.”

There we stood in the night, watching the smoldering ruins cracking and falling as the flames engulfed it on every side. Only people in the neighborhood came out to see the burning fire. Two more years was all that was left to have it paid off, and here it was all up in smoke and flame. The insurance would protect the mortgage but what about all that was in the shop, the tools, the models? As I stood there watching it, I was reminded of an earlier fire some sixty years ago, when the barn with all the grain burned, causing great hardship for the entire winter. Destruction caused by fire is never advantageous or timely but this fire could not have happened at a more depressing time for us.

Our younger daughter, Edith, was going through a rebellious stage in her life. She was not like Dorothy, who accepted whatever was meted out. As a matter of self-

preservation it became essential to send her off to a strict, supervised, school—not an easy matter for her parents.

Being away from us and in a private-school environment did much for her. She was ready to go to the university if she passed certain requirements. Kattie had guided many students with similar problems in her work so this was just one more. Edith was accepted early at the university and from her junior year was in the Honors programs, giving us a sense of pride. Not too many years long after this was my retirement age and so it was time to retire from Brenau.⁴⁶¹

On my last day at the college, I went by to bid goodbye to office staff at the business office. I was informed by the business manager that the President wished to tell me farewell. I thought this was a nice way to end eighteen years of service and all the feuding we had had. He reached in his drawer, pulling out three checks due me for the summer. “You understand this is the last you will get from here.” This was a funny way of wishing me well, I thought!

“Dr. President, we are parting even. You employed me here because you needed me, and I served the school well. I stayed here because it suited me to teach here. Brenau, to me, was like a rose bush.” He interrupted me, “A rose bush.” I proceeded, “Yes, a rose bush. Frequently one sees a beautiful rose, but when one reaches for it he gets pricked, carefully he pushes aside the thorny branches and gets the rose. Brenau was like this to me. I pushed the unpleasantness aside and enjoyed my work.” Tears trickled down his cheek as we parted in friendly fashion.

⁴⁶¹ Davidson retired from Brenau in 1966. See “Davidson, Artist, Succumbs,” in *Greenville News*, October 28, 1981.

Garlien my banker friend in Atlanta made it possible for us to purchase a home three blocks away from Brenau. Moving turned out to be a blessing in disguise for had we remained at the school, upon full-time retirement we would not have had a place to go to.

Dorothy joined the Peace Corps and was sent to Iran. We all went to the airport in Atlanta to see her off. Iran is so far away. I tried to place myself sixty-one years back when my brother Sam was put on the train to come to America. Although it was a far cry from the comparison in communication and nature of the trip, I still felt a loneliness gnawing inside of me. While I had all the confidence about her being protected by the American government, still she was going to live in a fanatic Islamic environment.

Nothing much was said on the way home. I assumed Kattie had similar sentiments but did not dare discuss them. I finally broke the silence: "Kattie, you are going to Iran to see Dorothy next year." She looked at me from the corner of her eyes, "You are talking through your hat, how do you think we can manage to do this? We are hardly making it as it is."

As time went on, I began to rationalize, that she could not go by herself for she needed protection, and so plans began to materialize for both of us to go. We consulted a travel agent, a passport application was made and all other arrangements were completed. There was one hitch that I did not expect: Kattie was born in Mexico.⁴⁶² Her father had been a missionary in San Luis Potosi. Before he died, he gave her a hand-written

⁴⁶² Mary Katherine Harbin was born March 24, 1906 in San Luis Potosi. See Mary Katherine Harbin's Birth Certificate, Dorothy McCulloch's Private Collection.

document in Spanish, she did not bother to have it translated and took it for granted that it was proof of her birth.⁴⁶³ The hand-written document turned out to be nothing more than a description of the page where her birth was recorded. A birth certificate is a requirement to get a passport. With the cooperation of the American Consulate in Mexico (of San Luis Potosi) a translation of the page in the record book was made for us.

The Immigration Bureau in Atlanta questioned the validity of Rev. Harbin's American citizenship. Proof was needed that he himself had American parents. It pointed out that her father could have bribed the Mexican offices to record her birth. Kattie was quite worn out at this point. To cheer her up a bit, I made what I thought to be a funny remark: "Don't worry honey, my citizenship will always protect you." This did not seem funny to her at all. She solved this dilemma by locating copies of her grandfather's Civil War records.

The missionary records of the Methodist church did not help much either, because there was nothing in them to show her father's birthplace, (early court house records of Greenville, SC County had burned) all they had was information of a general nature. Her grandfather was the only supporting evidence, but he died a few months before her father was born in 1868 but he had been a Confederate soldier in the Civil War conflict.

Her last resort was to get his Civil War records. Fortunately her father had been named for his father. She had often heard family stories that her grandfather had

⁴⁶³ Rev Andrew Vandiver Harbin died June 18, 1951. See "Rev Andrew Vandiver Harbin" online at www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=40072438.

surrendered with General Joseph E. Johnston's army in Greensboro, North Carolina.⁴⁶⁴ A search in the records of the United Daughters of the Confederacy showed that an Andrew A. D. Vandiver Harbin had fought in the Civil War, and if his son was Andrew Vandiver, Jr., though the Immigration Bureau in Atlanta would accept this part of it, there was still a question to be answered. Were her parents legally married? Further search turned up a newspaper clipping in an old trunk in the attic, covering their marriage in Chico, California, along with letters to Kattie's grandparents in California telling of her birth in 1906, also an album in an old trunk in the attic confirmed their claim. There was still a need to prove where her parents entered the United States in 1907 with their baby Katherine. After much deliberation and searching for railroad lines on a map, the examiner in Atlanta accepted the possibility of Laredo as the entry place, because her father had gone to a church in Austin, Texas.

One more thing, he needed to have Katherine's marriage license. Our marriage license was in Hebrew. He threw his arms up at that. Kattie laughed and pointed to him that on the bottom was a translation duly signed. "Go and get a cup of coffee and when you come back you will have your citizenship 'Double A.'" An immigrant can have only citizenship papers "A." I was quite content with having just "A" papers.

The first stop on our trip was London. From the railroad station we confirmed our arrival to the hotel, then took a train to Canterbury Cathedral, to spend a delightful day.

⁴⁶⁴ For information on Joseph E. Johnston, see Gilbert E. Govan and James W. Livingood, *A Different Valor: The Story of General Joseph E. Johnston, C.S.A.* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956).

The British Museum was in state of renovation, but there were other things to see. St. Paul's was also undergoing reinforcements. Our next stop was Paris. Although it was forty years since I had been there, it was still exciting. The hostile attitude of the French toward Americans was beginning to show and got much worse as time went on.

Something Kattie ate did not agree with her, and she ran a temperature and could not join me on any of the trips I took. Making a trip to Chartres Cathedral we had both looked forward to so much, and I hated to go alone. We could have shared so much seeing it together.

Joining me for lunch were two Spanish ladies (Jewish) who were teachers. They urged me to see the Memorial to the Unknown Jewish Martyr in Paris, seemingly not too publicized, and they gave me the address to it. It was very little known by the Parisian information people.

In a section where Jews had lived, when Hitler conquered Paris, many Jews were herded and taken away. The French government cleared a section in the center of the area—17 Rue Geoffroy-L'Asnier, Paris-4 and gave to the Jewish people to erect a memorial.

It was a typical Parisian narrow street, off the main beat, with an iron fence and an impressive gate at the sidewalk as you entered the yard. In the center as you enter the yard is a huge cylinder with raised letters of the names of the concentration camps: Auschwitz, Dachau, Belsen, etc. ... Behind the cylinder is a building in the shape of the United Nations, only it is windowless. On the front of the building, in French and in Hebrew: "REMEMBER THE EVIL AMALEK OF MODERN TIMES HAD DONE TO

YOU. HE HAS ANNIHLATED SIX MILLION SONS OF ISRAEL, MEN, WOMEN AND CHILDREN, DISARMED AND WITHOUT DEFENSE.” The Star of David is there and in Hebrew on one side “NEVER FORGET” and in Yiddish on the other side “REMEMBER.” The entire court is paved. Three iron doors with vertical full length bars provide entry to the building. Once inside, a stairway on each side descends into a crypt. In semi-darkness a Star of David on the floor is discerned, and on each side a beam is directed against the back on a quote from Lamentation: “LOOK AND SEE IF THERE IS GRIEF LIKE MY GRIEF, OUR SONS AND OUR DAUGHTERS MOWED DOWN BY THE SWORD.” A light from the ceiling reflects on the Star of David on the floor. A winding stairway leads to four floors above, where each floor displays records and photographs of the Holocaust.

From Paris we flew to Venice. Like all tourists we took a sight-seeing bus in Paris to pick out certain places we wanted to visit later. The announcer on the bus deliberately waited until we passed the point of interest before he began explaining in English what we were seeing. We experienced the same rudeness in some eating places. As much as we had enjoyed seeing museums and galleries, we were glad to leave the rudeness of the French. While waiting for the plane at the airport, I noticed tourists purchasing wine, cognac, etc. Not to be outdone by the others, I, too, purchased a couple of bottles encased in a woven covering, swinging it like the other sophisticated gentlemen. We had much fun laughing at it. Our fun did not last long. While looking at the schedule of the plane’s departure, the package slid off my lap, landing on the floor, and creating a sophisticated

puddle. Hurriedly we moved to another bench, leaving me to be again just another provincial traveler. So much for being a ‘world traveler’!

To read about Venice is one thing, but to be there and take in all of what I would call wonders of the city, is beyond description. The airplane landed some distance from Venice, and we boarded an open boat to take us to the dock. The Grand Hotel orderly was there to take our luggage and see us to the hotel located on the Grand Canal.

After we got settled, we ventured out in the narrow alleys full of cats. Venice has a reputation of being over-populated with cats. As we walked along, not knowing where we were ambling, we came into an opening and there we were in front of the St. Mark’s Cathedral, the wonder of the eleventh century. It was unreal to be in a city, in this age, and not see any automobiles. The canal is their way of getting around, it is used for freight, for getting from place to place, as well as for pleasure riding. St. Marks Square is full of pigeons. People everywhere feed them. We ate our meals in the open places in front of the hotel on the canal. On a visit to the cathedral one finds a conglomerate of mosaics dating from the early Byzantine era and some statuary leaning to Byzantine, Romanesque and Gothic. The horses over the façade came there in a strange way. As part of a triumphal celebration, they were cast for Nero during one of his victories. After Constantine conquered his rivals in the West, he brought them to the capital of the Eastern Empire, Constantinople. Some nine centuries later, when Constantinople was conquered by the Fourth Crusade, they were brought back to Venice. In spite of all this, the cathedral has an airiness about it which is typical of Venetian architecture. Where, in a city, can one use a canal like a thoroughfare—to get on a boat, pay a fare, and get off at

the various stations along the way, walk across a bridge to the other side and ride in the other direction as though you might be on a subway in New York!

Florence, the city of the Medici patronage during the Renaissance, offered so much to anyone serious about the arts. Walking along the banks of the Arno River, it was hard to imagine that the river could overflow its banks into the city, causing such irreparable damage. Turning left at the bridge, then into an alley, one comes into a square. Tables and chairs are there for people to enjoy refreshments, surrounded by statues. Though the statues are duplicates, still it gives a unique thrill. Looking in another direction the dome of the famous Cathedral of Florence is seen.

During the construction of the Cathedral Santa Maria del Fiorre in Florence a competition for the doors of the baptistry took place. Fillipo Brunelleschi submitted a design for one of the panels as a sample. He lost the award to a sculptor, Lorenzo Ghiberti, who designed the doors to the baptistry.

Disgusted, Brunelleschi, with his good friend the sculptor Donatello, left Florence to go to Rome. While in Rome they got interested in the antiquity of Roman buildings such as the Pantheon, the Coliseum and others. He was called back to Florence to complete the cathedral, and to make it an edifice so magnificent that it should surpass anything of the kind produced up to this time. There was no architect in Italy capable of building a dome over such a span, and making it tall enough to be impressive. Many wild suggestions were advanced such as to build a dirt mountain, liberally spiced with gold coins, as a supporting mold during the dome construction—the dirt to be removed by an avaricious public. Brunelleschi's scheme struck his contemporaries as not any more

practical than some of the other plans. Brunelleschi built a wooden model to convince his skeptic, and finally triumphed over them, getting the appointment as the architect for the completion of the cathedral. By buttressing the octagonal substructure of the crossing with a series of half-domed apse chapels, he created an external skeleton of eight gracefully curving stone ribs. His majestic dome made all subsequent domes in Europe possible.

The Medici-Ricardi Palace, by Michelozzo, has the rustic wall surface stressing on the early principle of the first floor being rustic, getting lighter as it gets to the top. On the inside wall of the chapel are paintings by Benozzo Gozzoli, in the Procession of the Magi. He has Lorenzo as a handsome youth in golden robes on a white horse, leading the parade.

We hired a surrey to take us to the hill outside of Florence where the statue of Garibaldi stood majestically looking over the city. The view of the city was magnificent. After a last visit to the Pitti Gallery we departed for Rome.

The airport bus let us off at the terminal. We later found out that our pension was within walking distance from Republic Square. The cab driver took advantage of our ignorance about Rome to run up a sizable fare. Rome, known as the Eternal City, overwhelmed us. The Coliseum, as the legend has it, was built by Hebrew slaves taken into captivity after sacking Jerusalem. We enjoyed walking around it and going inside, looking across, trying to visualize some of the events that took place in it. Completed in 80 AD, it was the largest building anywhere, accommodating up to 50,000 spectators. In its construction it utilized the barrel vault and groin vault, while on the outside it made

use of the three classical orders in a very logical way, the Doric on the first floor followed by the Ionic and the Corinthian. The vaulted corridors and stairways with many entrances assured an orderly flow of crowds to and from the arena.

The Arch of Titus, a short distance from the Coliseum, shows on the inside a carving of the triumphal return celebrating the conquest of Jerusalem, with people carrying the candelabra—the seven-branch candelabra—the holiest treasure from the Temple. No Jew ever enters under the arch. Titus has gone down in infamy in Hebrew folklore.

The Pantheon is another marvel of achievement in such a barbaric society. The dome is a true hemisphere: a circular opening in the center 30 feet in diameter admits an even flow of light—this opening is 110 feet above the floor, the interior diameter is also the same as the height, making the same in balance. The entrance to the Pantheon has a classical portico, a pediment supported by eight columns behind it is a cylindrical drum, hardly indicative of a dome emanating from it. As a result, the bottom, which is intended to support the outward thrust of the dome, is heavy and the thickness of it produces seven niches representing the seven planetary gods. Agrippa built the original temple much smaller in 27 A. D. Hadrian rebuilt it in the 2nd century, A.D.

The Sistine Chapel was so crowded it was uncomfortable to appreciate the Michelangelo ceiling or the Last Judgment. Reproductions in many periodicals looked much better than what we could see in the Chapel.

Much is told about Michelangelo's Moses in San Pietro in Vicoli. When it was completed the sculptor, it is said, slapped the statue on the knee and said, "Speak,

Moses.” There is also a story told about the two fledgling horns on his head: When Michelangelo researched Moses, he looked at a Greek translation from the Hebrew Bible, the interpretation was not very accurate. When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai, the Bible says his face shone like the “Rays of the Sun” (Keren Kayemesh).⁴⁶⁵ Keren, in Hebrew, has a double meaning: it means horn, it also means ray. It is truly a magnificent work of art, although Baroquish in execution, and it is unbelievable that an inanimate material such as marble should have such an emotional impact on the viewer. Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s “The Ecstasy of St. Theresa,” –one cannot help but have great admiration for the skill in executing such delicacy in marble in the seventeenth century.

A trip to the Tivoli Gardens outside of Rome revealed the enormous fountains fed by gravity, with the water emptying back into the river flowing to Rome. As a side trip we stopped over at the Hadrian Villa, just a shell of its previous grandeur.

We wound up our stay by seeing the opera “Aida” on a stage at the Baths of Caracala. During intermission it was comical to hear “Coka Colia, Coka Colia, Pop Corn,” a touch of home. On the stage there were elephants, camels, etc. It was impressive when Rademes, in his carriage drawn by four horses, charged on the stage to stop just short of running off the stage.

Before leaving Rome we took a trip to Pompeii and Salerno along the Tyrrhenian Sea, stopping over at the various points of interest. We could see the Salerno beach from our vantage point. This puzzled me. I recalled reading about the invasion of Salerno during the Second World War. This small beach seemed hardly able to hold any force,

⁴⁶⁵ Exodus 34: 29-35.

certainly not an expeditionary army. I later learned that the landing took place a few miles beyond this strip. We walked through the excavated city of Pompeii which was covered by Vesuvius in 79 A.D. Restoration was still going on but enough could be seen of the life that was going on during that time. Mt. Vesuvius, quietly in the background, could hardly be imagined to erupt with such fury to cover an entire city, not giving anyone time to escape.

In Athens, out of our hotel window, the Acropolis at night with beams of light directed on it looked like a jewel against the dark background, the cream marble silhouetted, adding to the exciting view. By order of Pericles, the boss of Athens in 447-432 B.C., the architects Ictinus, Callicrates, and Carpiion, under the supervision of the sculptor Phidias, built the temple. It has survived over 2000 years of war and insurrection. This temple had been turned into a Christian church many centuries earlier and many changes had taken place during that time. Had the insanity of the Iconoclasts prevailed, no doubt, many of the sculptures would not have been passed on to us. The length of the temple is 228 feet, the width 101 feet. It is surrounded by forty-six columns of the Doric order. The diameter of these columns is six feet one and one-half inches and the overall height, to the top of the pediment, is sixty-six feet. A statue forty-feet high, by Phidias, of Athena Parthenos, was placed in the Cella of the Parthenon. The naked parts of the statue were of ivory, the dress and ornaments of gold, and she held a spear and a shield in one hand, with a serpent behind and on the pedestal was wrought the birth of Pandora. The gold used on Athena was estimated to weigh 40-50 talents.

Athens was under the influence of Byzantine rule for 700 years. The Franks drove the Christians out and restored the Acropolis. Small communities of Byzantine churches sprang up every so often, creating small squares on the main street of Athens. A small Byzantine-type church was in the center of the square. It was more of a neighborhood-type place of worship.

The interiors are lavishly decorated, all are built on the Byzantine plan of a main aisle and two side aisles, evidently the streets have since been raised, as they are paved so that in some places it is necessary to step down. The Agios Eleftherios is next to a modern church, dwarfing the old church.

The Lion Gate in Mycenae is the forerunner to the corbel arch, later developed into a full arch with the keystone the important introduction, and the Treasury of Atreus—1300-1250 BC—built in concentric layers of precisely cut stones shaped into a dome—also called “The Beehive Tomb.” The lintel over the entrance is said to weigh twenty tons, precisely cut to the curvature on the inside and straight on the outside.

We went on to Delphi and Mount Parnassus, the place where the Dragon Python guarded Mother Earth’s oracle until Apollo slew the Python and took the place for himself. Ruins of Apollo’s Temple can be seen below the Delphic theater. Delphi had become Greece’s central archives and seat of political intelligence. Apollo’s oracles were considered necessary for any city-state before undertaking any important project, thus making Delphi not only sacred but most powerful. The Greeks considered this omphalos to be the center of the earth, the finely carved stone in the shape of an oblong dome is located in the Delphi Museum. The Sacred Way, that leads to a spring in a cave in the

mountain, was trod by many petitioners who came to Delphi for advice from Apollo. There is the Castalian fountain where Pythia bathed before entering the place of the oracle.

On the wall along the Sacred Way, the names of the slaves who were freed were carved in the rocks that made the wall. The way led to the Treasure House, built like a small temple, used to store the most valuable gifts dedicated to Apollo. Kattie picked wild flowers to serve as memento's of Delphi.

The honesty of Greek restoration one cannot praise too much. The Treasure House is a perfect example. Whenever a reproduction piece is introduced, special care is taken that its appearance is not deceiving.

The Delphi museum was built in 1902 and rebuilt in 1937-38. Many works of art belonging to this area were sent from all over Greece. The Naxian Sphinx sits on a tall Ionic Column. Naxos sent it as a votive offering to the Delphic god for slaying a dragon.

Commemorating the victory of a chariot race at the Pythian Games of 478 BC, a votive was sent of a bronze chariot drawn by four horses and driven by a charioteer. The earthquake of 373 BC caused huge rocks from the mountain to dislodge, destroying the temple and several edifices and votive offerings. The Charioteer was miraculously saved intact. It was evidently made in the "Lost Wax Process," the investment can still be seen inside the bronze. It is now placed in the end of the long hall of the Museum, giving it a very imposing place.

To visit Athens and not go to Crete is like being in Paris and not visiting the Louvre. The Minos Palace at Knossos, only five miles from Heraklion, was a bunch of

rubble until Arthur Evans, before the turn of the century, began his archeological finds and began to restore much of the place, to give us a fairly good understanding of what it was like. It also lets us know about King Minos himself.

Cretan palaces were built earlier than any palaces on record. The Citadel of Sargun II at Dur Sharukin (Khorsobad) dates from the Eighth Century BC; Persepolis, from 500 BC and the Palace of Minos was built in 1500 BC. It had so many rooms one could get lost in without a guide, it was known as a Labyrinth. To go down into the storage room one can still see the boxes carved in the floor that were covered with stone and lead slabs, and there are still large-mouthed clay jars in which the foodstuffs and liquids of state and commerce supplies were stored. The throne room, in the middle, had a basin for washing of the hands. The famous alabaster throne of Minos is still there where Minos, the Ruler of the Seas, performed as High Priest. The throne is the oldest in the world. On the wall on either side of the throne is a fresco of griffins, fantastic birds or animals which have the head of an eagle and the body of a lion, which symbolize the authority of the King. The Eagle, the strongest bird symbolizes the power and authority of the High Priest. The lion, the strongest beast, symbolizes the power of the King. They also symbolize the triple divinity. The head symbolizes celestial, the body the terrestrial, the tail the infernal divinity. The columns are wooden slanted toward the bottom, (an explanation given: to protect against earthquake). Among the many advanced innovations, they had a sewer system—the pipe, terra cotta, can still be seen today. It had been puzzling how they managed to lift the tremendous lintels on top of the columns. On

one of the ruins of the temples there in some explanation; at the end of the lintel a “U” was carved, a heavy rope fitted into the “U” part enabled them to lift the slab.

On one of the hills outside of Athens a top was leveled to build an amphitheater. “Antigone” by Sophocles was being presented before we left. It was in Greek, but was so forceful that it did not matter whether one understood the language or not. The chorus and the characters came through strong. This was a memorable way to wind up our stay in Greece.

In Istanbul, a persistent taxi driver insisted that we ride with him to our hotel. The airport bus was waiting for passengers while I argued with him, but he provoked me so that I told him to go to hell and climbed in the bus. Kattie and I took the vacant seat in the front. Two passengers behind were having a big time hearing my argument with the taxi driver. “What part of the South are you from?,” one of the persons asked me. Surprised I turned to him: “What makes you think we are from the South?” He laughed, “Oh, I recognize the southern accent.” I told him I was from Gainesville, Georgia. “That’s strange, I have a brother-in-law who is pastor of the Lutheran Church in Gainesville.” We had a nice time talking about different things. I thought of something that would interest him. Before we left Gainesville, an article in the local paper told of how laminated beams for the new Lutheran Church got shipped to a different place, delaying the completion. He said he would write his brother-in-law telling him that he read it in a Turkish newspaper.

The next morning we could look out the window across the Bosphorus into another continent and project ourselves fifteen centuries or more into the past,

particularly to Emperor Justinian when he undertook to build the wonder of its time, the Hagia Sophia by the architect Arthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus, the mathematician of the project. It took sculptors, stone masons, polishers and workers in iron, bronze, lead and marble as well as mosaicists, goldsmiths, and glassblowers. Justinian was ever ready to give advice to the architects. A story is told that when piers began to crack under the weight of the completed arch, certain to collapse, Justinian commanded workers to carry the arch to completion, "For when it rests upon itself it will not need any props beneath it." This was done and the arch was completed without any incident. Justinian spent much of his time on the site. Part of a "Metatorium," or imperial resting place was built so he could eat and rest during the day, and then a portico was added so he could go over as he liked without being seen by anyone.

Many legends of a miraculous nature were passed on to following generations: of the Angel of God who taught them and guarded over them while work was going on. A great deal of mysticism was attached to the marble slabs that covered the walls, the veins formed lifelike shapes—likenesses of a bearded human crowned with a helmet and of a woman with uplifted hands a though in prayer, one to resemble Saint John the Baptist and one the Virgin Mary with Jesus in her arms.

One corner seemed not properly joined, probably due to the rebuilding of the church after its destruction. There is a legendary story told: around the tenth century, one of the rulers of Russia intended to wage war against Constantinople and he sent spies to report on the strength of it. Their awe at the magnificence of the Hagia Sophia was

reported, he concluded that any country who could build such an edifice, not only would defend itself to the death but must have the resources to repel any invasion.

It is said that when the Hagia Sophia was completed Justinian said: “Oh Solomon, I have surpassed thee.”

The Topkapi Palace (takes the name from two cannons that stood in front of the main gate) sits on the point where three important waters meet; the Sea of Marmora, the Golden Horn and the Bosphorus. As a palace it is disappointing but it is interesting as one rambles through it. We came through the carriage area. Chinaware is displayed against the wall, then into the room where the garments of the sultans are displayed in glass cases; some are blood-stained garments of the assassinated sultans.

Many rugs, gold and silver, are on display at every turn. In one room in a display case was the ink well of the Prophet Mohammed, also his footprint and other items. A guard was stationed near it. Our guide cleverly distracted him, to give me enough time to take a picture of the display. I was told later that this was not permitted.

The Archeological Museum was overwhelming, so much was there it was difficult to display it properly. The sultans occupied so many countries for many centuries and helped themselves to whatever struck their fancy.

Of all places visited, the old cemetery on one of the hills we would have not chosen to go to, but our guide thought it was worthwhile, and indeed it was. A well planned inter-denominational chapel was for people of all faiths, to go to meditate. The grave stones were so close together, it made one speculate if they were buried vertically.

The Church of the Whirling Dervishes was quite a contrast to all other places of worship. Poverty greeted us from the time we entered the street, which was poorly kept even by standards of deprived countries. A little girl of about twelve years old let us inside the church. Instead of the beautiful stained glass windows we were so accustomed to seeing in every church, here we found boarded up windows. The floors showed wear, instead of mosaic floors there were wide wooden boards. Although wooden, they were swept spotlessly clean. In the courtyard was a cemetery with tombstones very close together. Like in the other cemetery, the tombstones were capped with turbans for some and the fez for others. Square stones indicated male, a round stone was for female. Leaves were not raked. A cemetery should be the way nature wants it to be.

We asked our guide to take us to a place to have a typical Turkish meal before we left the country. He took us for lunch to a restaurant, it was more or less an exclusive place judging by the patrons who were there. They gave the appearance of the executive type. The first course was a concoction of eggs and something that looked like chopped liver, followed by a main dish. To our amazement the steamy bowl in front of us was noodle soup and boiled chicken. Kattie and I exchanged glances but did not make any remarks. Observing our good manners we praised the dish as though we had never tasted food equal to it. Sweet Turkish rolls wound up our typical meal.

Not to hurt our guide's feeling, as tactfully as we could we told him that we lived in the poultry capital of the world where we processed up to three million fryers daily. He threw up his arms, "Impossible, that can't be." We knew he thought this was just another American exaggeration.

The Sultan Ahmet Mosque, or the Blue Mosque, although credited to the Architect Sinan, was built by Mohammed Aga—the most distinguished pupil and the great successor of the great Sinan. It is distinguished by having six minarets as opposed to four minarets as in any other Mosques. The blue tile on the interior, reflecting from the 260 windows, gives it a unique atmosphere.

All flights from New York for some strange reason were scheduled on foreign airlines all the way to Istanbul. We looked forward to flying on a Pan American plane to Teheran, to see American stewardesses and generally to feel at home. Actually we had no complaints about the other airlines, they were on time and the attendants were courteous but it was just the provincialism in us. As it turned out, this flight was delayed six hours due to some malfunction in one of the engines, before it got to Istanbul.

Our daughter Dorothy, who was serving in the Peace Corps in Iran, awaited us at the Teheran Airport in a great deal of anxiety. At last, in the early hours of the morning, the plane touched down at the Teheran Airport and there, on the other side of the rail among the tense crowd, was Dottie, beaming with delight at our arrival.

The Peace Corps Office headquarters for Iran made us feel so special that we had come to visit our daughter. All the volunteers we met were a swell bunch of young people, personable, dedicated, truly a credit to America. Early the next morning we took a bus to Isfahan some three hundred kilometers south from Teheran. We took a route through desert country, with one stop half-way.

On the way to the bus station we had to make our way through sleeping people on the sidewalk. On the bus, we were the only English-speaking passengers, creating some curiosity. Dorothy had learned to communicate in the Persian language, acting as an interpreter for us. Along the road we saw many mounds (ghanats) and at one a gusher of water was pouring into a basin. Nature has its ways of protection, the sun is so hot that a layer of water is closely under the ground and the mounds were holes where water could be gotten as needed. The half-way stop was an oasis, which was small, with only a few settlements.

A rest station let us get some refreshments and some of the typical Iranian flat bread. Lack of sanitation is an understatement; the toilet was worse than any I had ever experienced in Russia—and that is saying much. Shooing away flies, we risked some chai (tea), reasoning that if we were to stay in Iran four weeks, as we planned, we might as well get our systems immunized to the germs that were prevalent everywhere.

Isfahan, one of the larger cities of Iran claims its beauty is equal to “Half of the World,” is breath taking. The tiled domes of the mosques and minarets glisten in the brilliant sun: the Theological School, the Shah Mosque, the Friday Mosque, the Sheikh Lutfalah Mosque. The Friday Mosque, while not the most elaborate type of construction, was the most interesting. It was built in the eleventh century but most of it was destroyed by fire in the early part of the twelfth century. The Seljuk originally built it and it was rebuilt by the Nizam, as recorded on an inscription. There is a discrepancy in the dates. The inscription shows no date and it is shown that the Nizam died in 1092. The intriguing part about the Friday Mosque, unlike the other mosques, is that it does not have acres of

glazed tiles covering the walls and dome. The building is constructed in a row of arches, a large arch in the center of each wall with a pair of narrow arches cutting in the corners, the smaller arches creating a kind of a squinch, and sixteen of these squinches hold up the dome. Later the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople resorted to the idea of the pediment to hold up the dome, the difference being that the pediment filled in the corner at the top. The various domes had different patterns in laying the brick which intrigued me very much. The minaret had geometric designs, later abandoned by the other mosques.

The Khajoooh Bridge spanned what looked to us like a dry branch, but in the spring after the snows melt, it becomes quite a stream. The way the bridge was designed, it made a tune if the water was directed a certain way. Dorothy lived on the other side of the bridge in Jolfa, the Armenian quarter.

Four Peace Corps volunteers lived in the same house. Judy Danielich from Pennsylvania taught English at the "Red Lion and Sun," an organization equivalent to our Red Cross; Doris Witriol from New York, Carol Posay from Mississippi, and Dorothy were assigned to the Faculty of Letters, University of Isfahan, teaching English.

Kitchen duties were divided on a weekly basis so each one prepared meals indigenous to her background. This was a good way of getting a variety of food. The southern girls had grits for breakfast and turkey stuffed with cornbread for Thanksgiving, southern style. They were a swell bunch of girls. Kattie could not get adjusted to squat over the hole in the floor, I got an orange crate and improvised a seat with a hole in the center.

To get the real feeling of what the desert is like and the more to appreciate the effort in building a road through it, we took a flight from Isfahan to Shiraz. The plane flew low enough to see the desolation of some of the settlements. Shiraz is considered the poetic capital of Persia, the birthplace of many poets including Sa'adi and Hafez. Situated on an oasis, it has a plentiful water supply, but not until a native of Shiraz, who made lots of money in the United States, and came back in 1952, did the city have a piped water supply. Twice daily a supply of water is released into the jubes or rock-lined gutters for people to get their supplies, wash, or get refreshed. Shiraz is famous for its inlay (Khatam) and silver work, as well as mosaics in the morgues. The shrines to her native son poets are national tourist attractions.

About a forty-five minute drive from Shiraz is the famous Palace of Persepolis, built by the Achaemenian King Darius the Great between the years 518-512 BC. He was determined for this palace to be the greatest palace, and like his capital, to be appropriate to his empire. There was much speculation that a structure of this size had to be built by slave or coerced labor. This fact has been attested by Greek historians, such as Herodotus, Xenophon, Ctesias, Thucydides and other historians. Until the discovery of 750 clay tablets it was still believed that, just like the Pyramids in Egypt and the great wall in China, it was done by forced labor. [illegible sentence follows]

The stairway leading to the audience hall has 110 steps 22 feet 8 inches wide, 4 inches high and 15 inches deep, it is said that several horses abreast brought up gifts to the king. Along the wall are carvings in low relief of the many countries who brought gifts to the kings Darius and Xerxes. Each group is led by a Persian or a Mede, a cypress

tree separates each group. Like the Egyptian carvings the right foot only is shown in profile. The Greek influence is shown in the overlapping of the drapery. Records show that skilled carvers were brought in from all the conquered countries to execute the work. The preserved carvings show tremendous skill in execution.

Dorothy knew one of the guards at Persepolis from previous visits, on one of the visits she took a group of blind children from a school that was operated by a British lady. Dorothy had volunteered to help the lady with teaching swimming and with some side trips like the one to Persepolis and to Naksh-I-Rustam. Dorothy said the children had no fear of climbing heights or jumping in water. She got permission for them to feel the carvings at Persepolis, but they had to climb on a scaffold at Naksh-I-Rustam. The guard said to Dorothy: "How lucky you are that your parents think enough of you to come to see you, all the way from America, and you are a girl."

Naksh-I-Rustam was located not very far from Persepolis to get to it we had to cross a stream-bed (impassable in heavy rains) go across a valley to the base of a mountain ridge overlooking the city of Istakhr, chosen by Darius and his successors for their rock-tombs, also used by the Sassanians.

There is a cube building fifty yards away known as the "Fire Temples" or "Cube of Zoroaster;" it is eight yards square and forty feet high. There are several tombs cut into the side of the cliff with large carvings in the pink stone some thirty feet above the ground. The four outstanding tombs are: Darius II, Artaxerxes I, Darius I, and Xerxes. The most famous of the reliefs at Naksh-I-Rustam is the one of Shapur I, on horseback, and the kneeling figure of the Emperor Valerian, whom he captured and kept to humiliate

him, some say he actually forced him to be his footstool to get on the horse. The figure between them is thought to be Cyriades, a fugitive from Antioch. The other impressive carving is the investiture of Ardeshir by Ormuzd. Both are mounted on their horses, heads touching. Ormuzd, on the right, holds a scepter in his left hand while his right hand grasps the circular hood which Ardeshir receives with his right hand. Behind the king stands a servant with a fly-flap. It was here at these huge carvings, thirty feet off the ground, that Dorothy had her anxiety with the blind children when she took them up to touch the carvings. There were narrow steel stairways and scaffolding around. The tension was enormous in her concern for their safety. From Shiraz we flew back to Teheran.

The Gulistan Palace, in Teheran now used as a museum and reception hall, was built in the early part of the nineteenth century, not a very imposing building from the outside. The entire wall as one approaches it is of mosaic mirrors as well as on some walls on the inside. It is divided into bays, an arch spanning across each bay. The bays are filled with gifts of many monarchs of the era, like gifts from Queen Victoria, Tsar Nicholas and the many other rulers of the world. At the end of the room is the Peacock Throne, resting on a rug that took something like twenty years to weave. The throne is made of gold inlaid with all sorts of precious stones.

Kattie and Dorothy posed in front of the Peacock Throne. Huge crystal chandeliers hung from the ceilings, illuminating all of the gifts in the various alcoves. The dining room, where Queen Elizabeth sat during her visit, was proudly pointed out by the guard.

The crown jewels of Iran, housed in the Bank Melli, are an unbelievable spectacle, located in a vault in what seems below the ground. The doors open at a given sign and with the rest of the spectator yours enter the inner vault. The doors close behind you; glass cases are all around the wall and glass cases in the center of the floor. A warning is given—not to get too close to the cases, not to step beyond the roped off area or even lean over it as it is protected by an invisible eye and once this line is crossed an alarm will go off. It is said that the jewels back up the Iranian currency. There were trays full of large diamonds in cases. Among some of the items were: a 17th-century snuff box, one of the rarities in the Crown Jewel Regales, it is transparent and composed of pieces of matched emeralds; a broach which ranks among the oldest, most historical diamonds of the world, weighing more than 182 carats; the aigrette, thickly set with diamonds and adorned with richly colored emerald, was worn on the turban during the 16th and 17th centuries; the tiara worn by the queen; a headpiece fashioned into a crown worn by Abbas Mizra the crown prince under Fath Ali-Shah (1798-1834); the crown made for the coronation of Fath-Ali-Shah Qajar (1798-1834), made with a huge number of emeralds rubies and pearls weighing more than 7 pounds; the crown made for the coronation of Reza Shah the Great in 1924, set with over 3755 pieces of precious stones weighing more than 2000 carats. Then there is the globe, almost two feet in diameter set with over 51000 gems weighing 18,200 carats. The globe was made by the order of Nasser-ed-din Shah in 1869.

A pitcher and basin adorned with large emeralds, rubies and diamonds was brought into the room to allow guests to wash their hands after a meal (period of Nasser-

ed-din Shah Qajar 1834-1896). Another pitcher and basin were made of gold and entirely enameled and decorated with medallions, animals, birds, and flowers (period of Fath-Ali-Sha Qajar 1798-1834). A bottle of a late 19th-century creation was studded with a large number of enormous diamonds. The stopper is capped with a big ruby and ornamented with four pearl drops. Another pitcher and a shallow basin set was decorated with floral swags on a plain gold ground (period of Fath-Ali-Sha Qajar, 1798-1834). A candlestick was ornate with emerald drops and clusters of pearls hanging from the wax guard. It is standing on a golden dish encrusted with enormous gems. A narghile, made in the 19th century, is set beautifully with a great number of graduated turquoise and rubies. The Qalan (water pipe) rests on a bejeweled base with 8 golden legs wholly enameled. The Qalan was often used by the Shahs during ceremonial occasions held at the Gulistan Palace (period 19th century). The Nadir Throne is popularly believed to be the Peacock Throne but it was, in fact, made in Iran for the coronation of Fath-Ali-Shah Qajar (1797-1834). It is not as big as the real Peacock Throne in the Gullistan Palace and is not as bedecked with jewels as the other throne. In the true Persian tradition it is of exquisite workmanship and bedecked with much gold. These are just some of the jewels in the collection. Also astounding were tray after tray of unset jewels. It was more than the eye could see or the mind comprehend.

When Katherine had charge of the Continuing Adult Education Program for the University of Georgia, every Christmas the State Department sent many foreign visitors who were farmed out to the various centers over the state. One year we had two visitors from Iran, one was with the Ministry of Finance, the other was with the Agriculture

Department in Iran. They were delightful people. When the party was over, they asked me if I would take them to see some Colonial homes. I spent a day with them, driving around through middle Georgia. When we parted, one of them gave me his address, saying if I ever came to Teheran to give him a ring. A couple of days before Katherine left for Israel, I called this number. The clerk in the hotel, who did the calling for me, was quite impressed that I knew this person. When he called back, he had arranged a party at his home and wanted us to drop in. A chauffer picked us up and also stopped by for an American, who, I learned later, was responsible for distributing the aid we were giving to Iran. The party gave us an insight into what life was like for the Iranian upper crust. His family evidently frequented Russia, for his sister spoke beautiful Russian and they were quite familiar with their neighbor.

The Peace Corps employed an Iranian in a high position, Hossein Moflekar, Dorothy's field officer position. He too invited us to his home for a meal, which was a typical Iranian meal with shishkabab and plenty of rice and a very jovial evening.

The deputy head of the Peace Corps of Iran, Jack Frankel from Connecticut, also had us out. He lived on the outskirts of Teheranian Shimran on one of those mountains that surrounds Teheran. It was good to talk of home with him and his wife, Judy. Watts was very much in the news at that time and seemed much worse than it really was.⁴⁶⁶

Katherine took the plane to Israel, and Dorothy and I took the bus to Hamadan and other places from there to see the area of the Caspian Sea. Hamadan, as it is known

⁴⁶⁶ Davidson is referring to the Watts riot which occurred in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, California in 1965. See, David O. Sears and John B. McConahay, *The Politics of Violence: The New Urban Blacks and the Watts Riot* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973).

today, is supposedly built on a covered up city, Ectabana, that existed in the earlier times. Close to the Alvand mountain ridge it abounds in springs, and these give it life and a fertile district. The given reason for its existence, besides the springs, is the historic highway connecting Mesopotamia with points as far as China. Recently other roads connected it with many important points. A large Jewish community was once settled in Hamadan as it was stated in the Book of Ezra. It is stated that when the question of the building of the temple at Jerusalem was raised:

“...Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the rolls, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.”

“And there was found the Achmeta (actabana or Hamadan) in the palace that is the province of the Medes, a roll and therein was a record thus written:”

“In the first year of Cyrus the king they same king made a decree concerning the house of God at Jerusalem, let the house be built...”⁴⁶⁷

It has long been popularly believed that Esther, the Jewish bride of Ahasuerus (who may perhaps be identified with Xerxes I or Artaxerxes I) founded the Jewish colony at Hamadan and that she and her Uncle Mordecai were both buried there. Their alleged coffins are housed in a picturesque domed building not very far from the Phlavi Maidan. Upon inquiry about the tomb of Esther, the Iranians spoke with reverence of “Our Queen Esther.”⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁷ Ezra 6: 1-3.

⁴⁶⁸ Esther and her uncle, Mordecai, are believed to be buried at a shrine in Hamadan, Iran.

This was a festive time—the 25th anniversary of the Sha’s ascension to the throne.⁴⁶⁹ It is reputed that half of the pottery in Iran is made outside of Hamadan, known as Lalejin Pottery, located some 15 miles outside of the city. It appeared to be in the desert, but evidently it had a source of water for they could not operate without it. A couple of years before, an earthquake shook this area, with very high casualties. The ruins were still there. No wonder a tremor took such a toll of lives, the remains showed the huts were made of mud, nothing to reinforce them. Going through narrow lanes of these huts, some underground, to keep cool in the summer and warm in winter, we came to a square lined with thousands of fired wares of all shapes, most glazed a turquoise color. This color is used as a base for the typical Persian designs superimposed on it. Pottery shops were located on the periphery of the square. The operation was well organized, unlike other places in that part of the world where one had to bargain, here, the price was set on a chart and that was it. As we walked around the suppliers brought their wares, mounted on donkeys, baskets hanging on each side. This was the distributing point for vendors.

The week before we left the States, an article appeared in the newspaper about a cholera outbreak in Iran. We were properly inoculated against it and had it recorded on our passport. It served me well on our trip from Hamadan. We had to change buses in Qazvin and to our sorrow we found out that the bus did not run that day but there was a mini-bus, a converted van, to carry 16 passengers. It was leaving and for a special

⁴⁶⁹ The 25th anniversary of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi’s ascension to the throne was in 1966.

consideration we were given seats to Rasht. Some passengers were hanging on in the back, resting on the bumpers, the little bus was filled to capacity.

Somewhere along the road all traffic was stopped. It was a checkpoint for cholera immunization shots, those who were not immunized were administered inoculation right there and then before gaining admittance to the town. My passport was in order. Shortly before we stopped I began to feel stomach cramps. I was let off the bus, where there was a crowd waiting their turn for shots. I needed to go to the bathroom, when I asked where there was one I could use, the driver pointed to the side of the road: "Do it right here." Many people did, but I could not. By then cramps really got hold of me, I broke out in a cold sweat. Across the road a house was being built, I made my way over there. The pressure was mounting, I feared I would never make it. When finally approaching one of the workmen, all I could say was "toilet." One look at me and he grabbed my hand and rushed me behind the building. Dottie had some pills the Peace Corps had provided for such emergencies, I took a couple and settled down a day or two later. Dottie recalled that I looked awful.

The climb across the Elburz Mountains⁴⁷⁰ from Chalus back to Tehran was on a highway built by U.S. aid of over 10,000 feet, is so winding that at one point, looking down, as many as six roads could be seen.⁴⁷¹ It is barren, hardly imaginable for any tribes to live there as the legend has it. The amazing phenomenon of it all is as soon as we began to descend the vegetation took on an entirely different look and it lasted this way all the way to Rasht. Every community was decorated for the festivity of the 25th

⁴⁷⁰ Also known as Alborz.

⁴⁷¹ Chalus Road or Road 59.

coronation, arches were built across the road and covered with rugs of typical Persian designs. Crowds were parading back and forth, playing oriental music on specially made pipes. From Rasht we drove along the Caspian Sea in Chalus where we stayed in the Shah Hotel.

Looking across the Caspian Sea, during the week on the beach, there was Russia the country of my birth. This was as close as I dared to get to it, yet there was a peculiar nostalgic feeling for the land of my ancestors as far as could be traced, the misery and sufferings people meted out to another people all in the name of religion. For generations stories of atrocities against my people had been told by mouth and written word. While Dottie and I stood there, with camera in hand to take a picture of her safe from this tyranny, across the body of water a whole panorama flashed in front of me: the horrible pogroms, the uncalled-for humiliation, to be confined to a ghetto, physical abuse and frequent torture, and again the story of brother Aaron's exile and final extermination. The downfall of Tsar Nicholas and the grand hope of equality for all people under the tyrant Stalin's regime, when it stilled all hope of the revolutionary movement, to be replaced by a vicious system of intrigue, exile, and mass murder. So engrossed was I in my thoughts while snapping the camera that I did not notice an Iranian woman with a child bathing in the sea without a bathing suit. Quickly she jumped into she chador (veil) and showed indignation of our taking photographs of her.⁴⁷² Dottie calmly assured her that this was not the case at all and we parted our ways.

⁴⁷² A chador is a veil, traditionally worn by Hindu and Muslim women.

The grass along the Caspian was green and lush in contrast to the desert-like appearance of the rest of the country-here rice and tea are grown-and there are visible trace of Russian influence, the thatched roofs reminded me of Russia, even the shaft-bow used in harnessing horses were seen now and then.⁴⁷³ I have not seen one since I left Russia.

When we got ready to check out from the hotel, we inquired about a little lady who had waited on us; there was something about her that haunted me and I wished to say goodbye to her. The bell boy said it was the Russian lady. While he was locating her I began to think in Russian and spoke in her language to her. Her reaction was priceless, for this American to speak Russian was for her hard to believe. In talking with her I found a very interesting human story. In the fifties there was a repatriation between Russia and Persia, and she chose to remain here. In the meantime she lost her husband and had no desire to live under the Communist system. Frequently delegations from Russia came over and stayed in this hotel. On one of these meetings a young man in the Russian delegations kept on looking at her very strangely, which made her uncomfortable. He got up enough courage to ask her where she was from; he evidently recognized that she was not a native Persian. In the conversation it unfolded that she was his aunt that he had not seen since he was a small boy, but he knew that she lived somewhere in Persia. This was my only last connection with Russia since 1922.

It also brought memories of the stories Mother told me if Granddaddy Zalmon had not taken away her pearls and given them to her step-mother I would not be here as

⁴⁷³ A shaft-bow is an arch above a horse, which allows a horse to pull heavy loads.

an American citizen looking at Russia from here. The pearls remained in Berezovo, Siberia.⁴⁷⁴

⁴⁷⁴ Katherine Davidson passed away on October 11, 1974. See “The Index-Journal from Greenwood, South Carolina” online at www.newspapers.com/newspage/69522276/. Abe Davidson passed away in 1981, two years after completing the memoir.

APPENDIX

Davidson's Artwork

President E.W. Sikes Bust, 1935
Governor Ibra Charles Blackwood, 1935
Thomas Green Clemson Statue, 1936
General Charles P. Summerall, 1936
Governor Richard Irvine Manning III, 1937
Andrew Jackson Bust, 1937
Marion Simms, 1937
Governor John Gardiner Richards Jr., 1938
Dr. J.L. Mann, 1940
Football Panel, 1940
Melvin Jones, 1949
Jesse Jewel, 1950
Andre Smith, 1952
Henry Belk, 1953
J.C. Littlejohn Bust, 1954
Governor Herman Talmadge, 1954
Senator Walker George, 1955
Governor Marvin Griffin, 1955
Myrt Power, 1955
Albert Einstein, 1956
Dr. Crawford W. Long, 1956
Chief James Vann, 1958
Byron Reece, 1962
Dr. Harry Forester, 1963
Dr. Charles Clegg, 1964
Robert Mills, 1964
James F. Byrnes Bust, 1965
Governor Carl Sanders, 1966
Ralph McGill, 1969
Gordon Blackwell, 1970
Tiger Statue, 1970

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