

My first recollection places me at the age of three, when upon being taken to a circus by an older cousin, I cried and bemoaned the fact that the trained pig had lost his tail. "The tail is lost, the tail is lost," I kept calling., thus causing my cousin much embarrassment and for the time being detracting the attention of those around us from the performance to my cousin and his young guest.

I was born in Lebedin, in the province of Kharkow, Russia, on March 9, 1882. My parents had had eight children, five of whom were living, the others, a girl named Zelda and two boys having died from diphtheria in their early childhood.

Sixty years ago, science had not reached the stage where anti-toxins, for the prevention of deadly children's diseases, were given to babies in their first few years. I do not remember these children and do not even know where they came in the range of our birthdays.

Two adoring sets of grandparents increased the size of our family as well as our happiness. Imagine having two sets of grandparents living with one's family today. What a far cry from the present mode of living, when one grandmother or grandfather must knock at the door of an aged or convalescent home, where she or he can spend the remaining years waiting for the inevitable---death.

I must not forget a cousin, Jake, one of the eight children belonging to our father's only brother, who lived in Poltava. My uncle, being poor, it was thought advisable to rid him of one more mouth, to feed. As it happened, my father could well afford to feed many, many mouths, for we were very comfortable. It

embarrasses me to confess that in our town we were on the top of the list, both socially and financially. I am speaking of the Jewish race only.

I was nine years old when we left Russia. Still, the events of that happy, peaceful life stand out vividly in my memory. The life of a family where the children and parents lived their lives together in harmony and unison, where love and devotion reigned supreme. They talked together, played together, and shared their confidences. A far cry from the family life of this modern day and age.

As for the games. One game I particularly remember. How we all enjoyed it! Imagine being interrupted while playing in our spacious grounds by an avalanche of real pennies, pennies raining from heaven, we thought. How we scampered to fill our dresses, the laps of which were quickly improvised into receptacles. Little did we realize at that time that our good father was standing in an upper story window supplying the pennies.

And now for our home. A large, white building with green shutters standing back from the street. A spacious well-kept lawn in front surrounded by an apple, pear, and cherry orchard. Oh, those cherries! Their taste still lingers in my mouth. They were so plentiful that one had but to extend an arm to a branch and be rewarded with a handful of luscious fruit.

Two rooms that stand out in my memory are the dining- and livingroom, or "zaal", as the Russians term it, at which forty people could be easily accommodated. That table! Never deserted, never a meal without friends or relatives. And the food on that table! All the dairy products home-made. Our cellar laden with butter, freshly churned, cheese hanging in cheese-

cloth, triangular in shape, crocks of thick, heavy cream, shelves filled with hundreds of jars of preserves made from berries picked in our own gardens, barrels of sauerkraut containing halves of apples, barrels of watermelon rind. My mother enjoyed putting up all these products because the work was made into a social rite, all the neighbors coming in to help---as they did in our own old-fashioned husking bees.

Food was so plentiful that one of sister Fanny's daily tasks was to bring some to the Jewish prisoners in the town prison who refused to eat food which was not prepared according to the dietary laws. Then on Friday nights and Saturdays---platters of succulent roasted chickens (none of your cold storage brand), chickens, who only the day before had been running around in the back yard, made their appearance. With that came "tcholant", a pièce de résistance which was a combination of meat, potatoes, and beans, cooked on Friday and kept in the brick oven through Saturday, when it would emerge browned to just the right degree---a dish fit for the gods. That dish was usually accompanied by a "lockshen kugel", a delicacy consisting of broad noodles (home-made) and combined with just the right amount of cinnamon, sugar, sliced apples, eggs, and chicken fat.

I must not forget to speak about those brick ovens. They served two purposes. On very cold days (and Russian winter days can be incredibly cold) one could curl up and be very cozy on either side of the extended platforms, built for just such a purpose. Among the peasants, beds were an unknown commodity, so that the entire family would retire for the night on the oven.

Russian people have one weakness in common---tea drinking. The steaming "samover" with its accompaniment of glasses (cups

are never used), lump sugar, sliced lemon, and "varenie" (strawberry or raspberry preserves) was always the center of attraction. In the summer we sat in the "besedka" (the summer house overrun with ivy and grapevines). In the winter, in the dining room, many a large business transaction was clinched around that samovar, where dozens of glasses of hot, steaming tea were consumed.

Since breaking bread with people makes for hospitality, the Russians were certainly a hospitable people---as they were always drinking tea with friends and business associates.

And now for our education. Lebedin boasted of two schools--pre-gymnazia, a preparatory school equal to that of our grammar school, and gymnazia, taking one as far as college. Anyone completing the courses at the two schools was assured of a thorough elementary education. French, German,⁺ English studied there enabled the pupil to converse fluently with people coming from those countries.

My sister Fanny was the oldest in the family. Money being no object, she was given the greatest advantages. She attended schools part of the time, but most of ^her education was completed with the help of tutors and governesses.

This is the story of my life, but it cannot be complete unless I stop long enough to tell you ^{about} Fanny, for it was she who reigned supreme in our home and guided the destinies of the entire family, until she returned to Russia---and even then her advice was sought through correspondence. We all would come to her as to a judge and her word would be final.

She was an outstanding personality. Had she remained in America, she would have become a Jane Adams. In spite of being

the first-born and living in luxury, she was not spoiled. She was wise and understanding and even during her adolescence, the townspeople would come to seek her advice in matters of domestic relations and even business. She had an uncanny power of knowing how to do everything---being at home in the kitchen, in business, in government, and in all human relations.

Our father would never decide an important business transaction without consulting Fanny first. Her decision would invariably bring the desired results.

I was nine years old when I left Russia, but I remember distinctly our life there. It was an extremely happy one. Never a day without a lot of friends and relations. They would come from distant cities and stay for months at a time. Time meant nothing in those days in Russia. Parties and feasting at all times.

And the fun in the winter! I shall never forget those sleigh rides. Dressed in furs from head to toe, we would all pile into sleighs drawn by four spirited horses. Fur robes covered us until only our eyes and noses were exposed to the Russian cold--and Russian winters can be cold.

Away we would go over mountains^{of} glistening snow, driving for miles and miles in the clear, crisp, invigorating air, with sleigh bells ringing. No matter how fast the horses travelled, they never travelled fast enough for our driver, who would call out words of exhortation and not spare his whip in the hope that the pace would quicken and quicken.

Our driver^{was} Petro, a fat moujik, made ratter by wearing suit upon suit of homespun and encased in a fur coat reaching to his ankles. For a belt he wore a red rope encircling his

rotund waist. It always puzzled me how he could handle his tall fur hat that covered his whole head, showing only his eyes.

I said our driver was fat. Diet was unknown in those days, and nobody counted calories. Least of all the moujik, whose daily fare consisted of black bread, bacon, thick gruel or kasha, and cabbage soup or borsch which was made richer on Sundays by an addition of chunks of meat. It was only on Christmas and Easter when his meals became a trifle more elaborate. I still taste the "paska" or famous coffee cake made from dozens of fresh eggs and pounds of butter that was the pièce de résistance of the moujik's Easter.

And so our lives continued in one smooth stream year in and year out. But it was not to continue so for long. This is not a political thesis and I do not intend to go into details about the terrible lives the Jewish people lived in Russia under the czarist regime. From time to time an ukase was issued which made their lives more and more miserable.

The edicts were very difficult to comply with, but sometimes life was made a little more bearable, especially if one had a few rubles with which to bribe the governor-general of the town. An unexpected appearance of this major-domo who would suddenly appear out of nowhere---sitting in his fine carriage, drawn by four of the finest steeds, surrounded by his entourage, resplendent in his bright colored uniform with his many decorations adorning his broad chest. Most of the chests of those in command were broad, for they lived on the fat of the land. Their pay was augmented by presents of money from the artisans of the town, and from the peasants would come contributions consisting of tubs of delicious home-made butter, cheese, freshly laid eggs, and vegetable produce.

There was an undercurrent of unrest in the world of politics in the ^year beginning 1880 and on. The masses of the people were getting tired of living in constant fear and being at the mercy and whim of the cruel czar and his crueler underlings.

In the year 1890, the czar decreed that our town (Lebedin, province of Kharkow), like hundreds of other cities and towns, should be ^rid of all Jewish wealthy business people. As it happened, we were the only wealthy business people in the town--- and so the decree was aimed directly at us. .

And so the ukase that was issued in the year 1890 decided the fate of Henry Romberg and his family.

The whole Jewish population of Lebedin was made up of about twenty families---all artisans. Some of them were tailors, some were shoemakers, and some were watchmakers.

My father was the proprietor of the largest beer brewery in the province of Kharkow. Years afterwards, when my sister returned to Russia and visited her old home, ~~she~~^she was amazed to find immense barrels still standing in the cellars of the brewery---too large for anyone to have moved them. To this day Eli has in his possession a heavy bronze medal that was awarded my father at a large annual fair held in the province of Kharkow, in a competition for the finest beer. On one side of the medal is the face of Catherine the Great. I am sure that Eli prizes that medal as one of his greatest possessions, reminding him of his fine father. I have often seen him show it to people with great pride.

That ukase! What a horrible nightmare! It astounded my father, as it astounded the Jewish people in Germany today, when that beast Hitler issued his decree. Rooted in Russia for gen-

erations and generations---it was impossible for him to consider any other place on earth as his home. Respected as the most outstanding member in the Jewish community, a pillar of his little synagogue... How could he ever tear up the roots that were so deeply imbedded in his physical earth as well as in his body and soul.

My father began to rack his brain, to consider places which were open to Jews for settlement. Where should he go? One cannot decide such a question rationally in the twenty-four hours allotted him. Should it be Poland or Germany or Latvia?

Now again Fanny comes to the rescue. If it is a question of driving new stakes for a place called home, why not consider America? She had heard people speaking of that land as a land of milk and honey where the pavements were lined with gold, where each person who was not lazy had an opportunity to make anything he wanted of himself, where success depended only on one's ability to work and take advantage of all opportunities.

So to America he would go! At least there, no one would know him, and it would not be so degrading to start at the bottom of the ladder if necessary.

I often put the question to father: If we were as wealthy as we were reputed to be, how is it that we came to America so poverty-stricken? And the answer was when one's house is on fire, one escapes only with the clothes he has on. As the head of the house, he had to leave within twenty-four hours---or else. Naturally, he took all the money that was at hand---and ran.

In the meantime our two sets of grandparents had passed on, and so there was no one to consider except mother and the five children, our cousin Jake having joined his sister in America.

Mother and the five children stayed on for a few months. There was no ready cash available. A lot of beer was out on credit and the government confiscated the rest of the money.

Whenever an emigrant leaves his mother country, the country of his birth, it is always to go to a place where he has some kin or "landsleit." That human touch! A yearning to be near someone who knows you. One feels a little safer in a strange land among people who speak a stranger language. When there is someone to whom one can turn in time of trouble or in an emergency.

Father had a niece in Boston, Mrs. Sandberg, who had emigrated to the "Golden Land" a few years before. She was a sister to the Jake whom we took into our home years previously. So to Boston he would go!

I do not recollect the hurried leavetaking and good-byes, for if I did, they would be terrible memories. But they must have taken place during the night, after the younger children had been put to bed.

After father left, Mother and Fanny tried their utmost to straighten things out. Sarah and I can never realize the agonies that those two must have gone through in trying to settle up the estate, an estate that took years to build up. Lucy was three, and Eli nine months old, so that they were too young to understand anything.---except that Papa had gone on a business trip as he had often gone before. But Sarah and I sensed that something terrible had struck our household---in the many whispered and secret sessions held between Mother and Fanny which would abruptly cease when we two older girls appeared on the scene.

And now I must pause in my own story, for here I have to tell about another story---a story which influenced all our lives to a great degree. It is about Fanny again. A little while ago, I sung her praises. But if I devoted all my time to singing her praises, there would be no chance to write about anything else.

In the life of such a wonderful person, one would naturally expect many romances. There were many. But she turned a deaf ear to them all. As fine men as there were in her life, there never was a man to equal her in intelligence and intellect. Then again, she was young and had her many dreams. She had ^{read} many of the best---Dostoevsky, Pushkin, and Tolstoy. Fanny imbibed the dreams and ideals of the latter. She, too, was going to labor for mankind and would leave the world a better place than she had found it.

But there was one man whose persistence was unequalled. His name was Samuel Smolianoff. He was a man of fine character, ten years older than Fanny. A dealer in grains who made a good living. A man of sterling qualities. But they were miles apart from one another intellectually.

Smolianoff lived about 50 versts (or miles) from Lebedin in a city called . He visited our home constantly and beseeched Father and Mother to help him win Fanny. But she had a mind of her own, and our parents did not dare to interfere in such an important step in her life.

He promised her everything---a life of security and luxury---but to no avail. She considered him a friend of the family, but as a life's partner---never.

Then at last came the day when we had to say good-by to

Lebedin and to all that was dear to us. It seemed that the whole city turned out to bid us Godspeed at the railroad station. The Russian people are an emotional people---and they did not hide their emotions when we left that day. But what was our greatest surprise amid the good-byes and the tears when we saw Smollianoff emerge from among the crowd with bag and baggage with the news that he was joining our little family and would take us as far as Hamburg , from there we would set sail for America.

Our itinerary was so arranged that we were to stop at the different cities to bid a fond farewell to our nearest of kin, most of whom we would never see again. We stayed several days with each one. One family in particular made a deep impression on me. It was in the city of Haditch. My mother's older sister's family whose name was Menetchka. My mother's family were particularly refined people and most of them were beautiful. Menetchka had three daughters and three sons. The sons were all tall and handsome and all became professional men. One of the daughters was named Rosa---but they should all have been named that, as their chiseled features were as beautiful as the most beautiful of roses. My aunt's face stands out as vividly as does my own mother's to this day. Her face was saintly, and her voice so sweet and gentle. In fact, all of the speaking voices of Mother's family were soft and beautiful. Eli and Lucy come rightly by their soft, mellow voices.

Menetchka's husband's name was Alexander. We all called him "Feter Shereder." What a man! He was about six feet tall with handsome features and a long, flowing white beard. He seemed to stand out among all men as a man apart. He was not

a lawyer by profession, but his relations and even strangers would come from distant parts to seek his advice and to listen to his words of ^Wisdom. He was often alluded to as the "Judge." I think Fanny patterned her life after his. She adored him so, that she named her younger son Alexander, setting a precedent that was not allowed among Orthodox Jews---that of naming babies for people who were still alive.

Nothing else stands out in my memory during the weeks before we sailed, except the constant wooing of Fanny by Sm^oyl-
lianoff. His main object in accompanying us was to try and persuade her to remain in Russia and marry him. He felt that once the great Atlantic came between them, his chances would become very slim.

✓ Fanny's answer was always "no." First because she did not love him and never did consider him in the light of a husband, and then again she was anxious to reach the golden shore of America and see what she could accomplish there for herself, her family, and the world at large.

And now for the trip to Hamburg. At the time of our expulsion from Russia, the decree affected thousands of others. We met them at every railroad station---young and old, mothers with clinging babes in arms, several girls and boys clinging to their ^Ksirts, older children trudging along laden with bundles tied in large red handkerchiefs, carrying pillows, featherbeds, copper kettles and brass samovars. Women predominated, as most of the men went on ahead to see what they could prepare in the form of a home for those they loved who would soon follow them.

At this time I want to say a word in favor of the German Jews. In every large city, guides would meet the Russian ref-

ugees at the railroad station and escort them to barracks built especially for them. There they were given baths and disinfected, for many of them had left their homes weeks previously and travelled in none too clean trains. Bathing facilities were allowed them, also a chance to wash their clothing. Then they were assigned sleeping quarters and food was provided for them. There they remained for weeks at a time, awaiting the departure of the boat to which they were assigned. en route to America--- and freedom.

I don't remember how much time elapsed between leaving Lebedin and reaching Hamburg. But I shall never forget the night before we embarked at Hamburg. It was a night of tears and pleadings for Smollianoff,--a last appeal as it were. During all these weeks he was travelling with us, not a moment passed when Fanny was alone that he did not pester her with whys and wherefors---but that last night was a nightmare! I could never understand how a man could be so persistent--- especially if her answer was always, "I do not love you--- How can I marry you?" If he were less of a man, he would have taken her bodily off the boat. We can well understand his feelings, when he kept waving to her as the boat was moving slowly from the pier.

✓ And now for our life on that boat. In those days (1891) conditions on boats were very different from those of today. To be sure, there were three classes, first class, to which only the very wealthy had access; second class, for the middle man, and third class or steerage for all refugees.

We were on that boat for eighteen days. A far cry from the four or five days of the schedules of today. The steerage was situated in the basement of the boat. And there were hun-

dreds of us there. The beds were in tiers of three, standing about four feet from each other. One had to dress in a sitting position, as there was only about three feet of space between each tier. One cannot realize how inconvenient it was to climb the narrow ladder leading up to the bed, especially with a baby in our arms.

One horrible night stands out in my memory. Eli, being only nine months old, had not yet learned to ask Mother for the necessary conveniences. What was our horror when we were suddenly awakened by a man named Wolf who occupied the middle tier. Loudly cursing, he began throwing us and all our bed clothes out of our bed. His cries and the commotion he made awakened the whole steerage. No one slept any more that night. At that time I thought his action was inhuman, but as I look back upon it today, I don't think I should have enjoyed getting drenched by a baby overhead. Before we landed, Mr. Wolf did something for us that made up for all his inhumanities of that night.

The boat was a German one, but the entire crew of sailors and officers treated us kindly. The fare was not good and there was very little of it---in accordance with our sleeping quarters.

We were all refugees, sharing the same agonies, and so we became very friendly---almost like one large family unit, joined together by bonds of misery. How many tears the women shed when the men of the steerage would don their "taleisim" and "twillen" for morning and evening prayers. For they did not forget to pray in their time of sorrow, hoping perhaps that their earnest supplications would ^{reach} their God, and he would heark-

en unto their pleas. An incident that happened while we were on deck one morning showed us how much suffering my dear mother was going through. All through my childhood, I never remember our parents laying a finger on us for punishment. But when a sailor passed us carrying a well-laden tray of goodies to the upper deck and I asked him for some of the goodies, Mother slapped my mouth so that I began to bleed. I am sure that there was no malice behind that slap. But the thought, the humiliation that a child of hers should beg for food was too much for her, and she gave vent to her emotions in that slap. I don't know whose cries were the loudest, my mother's or mine.

But childhood's troubles do not last. I was soon running around the deck, playing with other children and finding new surprises at every turn. My good times were not to continue for long, for new responsibilities arose, and I was the only one who could assume them. Our voyage was an especially rough one and many people succumbed to the dreaded sea-sickness, my mother and the rest of the family among them.

I was the only one who could withstand the terrible lurchings of the boat and the lashing of the monster waves on the port holes. There was not much that I could do for them, but since the passengers in the steerage did not have the help of stewardesses and nurses that the more fortunate on the other two decks had at their command, the members of the different families who were good sailors were kept busy emptying basins and carrying water.

And so the uneventful voyage was soon coming to an end, and we were anxiously anticipating a sight of land for which we were hungry after eighteen days of rough sailing. There was

only one topic of conversation: the Statue of Liberty. If we could only catch a glimpse of her, we would then be approaching the land of freedom and opportunity.

But there was a lot of trouble in store for us before that moment of moments would arrive. A day before our scheduled landing, I was taken desperately ill and the ship's doctors diagnosed the case as that of measles. As was to be expected, I was isolated in the ship's hospital and put ^{under} strict quarantine.

One can well imagine my mother's consternation. Especially, when she was informed that the boat was docking at N.Y., then continuing on to Baltimore. If I did not recover ^e before that time, I was to be deported. Horror of horrors! What could this poor frightened woman do under these circumstances? It is a wonder that she did not go insane. This was a climax to her load of troubles.

I can frankly say that what I am to relate now few will believe. But it is the truth. I cannot yet understand how such a feat could have been accomplished under the strict surveillance of so many officials. The mere fact that I was not deported---though sick---proves the truth of the story. And this is where Mr. Wolf came to the rescue. For a rescue it was, though unbelievable. This is where he atoned for his former atrocious behavior. I am eternally grateful to him, wherever he may now be.

Somehow he found access to the quarantined hospital, kidnaped me in a dark blanket, and deposited me on the floor of the baggage room amid the other bags and trunks. He admonished me to be very quiet. I did not need much admonishing, for I sensed that this was a turning point---not only in my

life, but in the lives of Mother and the rest of the children.

I still remember vividly my fright and terrible suspense when I somehow joined the long line of steerage passengers, waiting to be cross-examined and questioned at the desk prior to leaving the boat and entering Ellis Island, that famous gate to the new world through which all must pass who would enter the land of the free. To this day, I cannot understand what prompted the officials not to keep their promise of taking me to Baltimore.

I was ordered to a contagious hospital, while my family were to await my recovery at Ellis Island. I remember vividly my stay at that hospital. The nurses and doctors were so kind and understanding that my first encounter with Americans was a very happy one.

I must have resorted to the sign language a great deal, for how could they all understand me otherwise? I was introduced to American oatmeal there and consumed a lot of it, making it more palatable by the addition of spoon upon spoon of sugar.

I couldn't have been very sick, for I was soon out of bed, helping the nurses with their other and sicker charges. One day as I was busily engaged with my several duties, I was amazed to see a man standing in the doorway with a blue-coated child in his arms. I recognized the coat before I saw the child. For it was none other than my sister Lucy, who had contracted the measles from me. I don't know how I did it, but I informed the nurses that she was of my flesh and blood, and being the older and more Americanized of the two, soon quieted her fears and her tears. It was natural that with my presence there,

her stay was a happy one and her convalescence a rapid one.

In the meantime, the officials ordered my mother to proceed to Boston, our destination, with Fanny, Sarah, and the baby Eli. Can anyone imagine her feelings? Having to leave two young sick children in a hospital whose language they could not understand and with 350 miles between them.

But time is a wonderful healer. Lucy and I soon found ourselves in a train heading for Boston, clasping bags of bananas and doughnuts, which were given us by a kindly passenger. That was our first encounter with real ~~realy~~ American goodies.

We were shipped like baggage. For a long time we saved the baggage checks that were attached to our coats, to which at every new station, the conductors would punch a hole and inspect them, making sure that we were on the right road.

We landed in Boston September, 1891.
We were met at the old Providence depot by Father and Mr. Sandberg. Father must have felt neglected, for we were more occupied by the bananas and doughnuts, which we had never eaten in Russia, than by meeting Father, whom we hadn't seen for such a long time.

We soon found ourselves at Mrs. Sandberg's home, happy in the arms of our dear mother. This was also the first time that the family was reunited since the ill-fated ukase drove my father out of Russia in twenty-four hours.

Mr. and Mrs. Sandberg were very kind to us and housed the family of seven for I don't remember how long. But they were themselves struggling for a livelihood, and we couldn't take advantage of their hospitality.

Our first home in the new world found us at Cusson Place off South Margin in the West End. I am sure that the reason

for settling there was that the rent was the cheapest we could find. I don't recollect the tenement, but I do remember that it was dark and very hot in the summer---so hot that sleep was impossible, except when we lugged the few mattresses up three flights of stairs to the roof and there the whole family would snatch a few hours sleep until dawn would awaken us. Privacy was an unknown word then, for did not the families living on the other two floors do the same?

We were all immigrants and there was no class distinction, but we did not all come from the same parts of Europe. The children's quarrels would begin by calling each other, "Litvak, Galitzianer, Hazersher Rusheshe." I was a husky in those days and would defend my family honor with my fists. Fights with Maxie Cohen and his sister Annie would terminate only when fat Mrs. Cohen would stick her head out of the window and call, "Maxie, Hindele, ich will aich Kailen!" Years afterwards I had occasion to meet Hindele and her mother. Old feuds were forgotten and we had a most wonderful time reminiscing.

My father had to find some sort of employment to keep the many wolves from our door. As you remember, the reason for his being in America was that he was not an artisan. What could he do? Through the efforts of Jake's brother, he found himself in Portland, Maine, in a men's hat factory. Naturally, he would see us only on an occasional Sunday. But the agonies of that first job! In the process of their manufacture one had to dip the hats into boiling water. Father would come home to us with both his hands red and blistered. Before his hands were cooled, back to Portland and the boiling water. But those were the days of a depression. Work was hard to get. Father soon lost

that job. He tried ringing door bells to fix broken umbrellas. I don't know how long that lasted, but I do remember those days of real suffering. There never was much to eat, and as for clothes---How happy we children would be when Mother saved up a few cents to buy us a pair of second hand shoes that the rag man would bring to the door. Mother paid the munificent sum of 35 cents for a pair. But even at that price we had to wait our turn for weeks at a time until Mother had saved a few more pennies. Oh, the joy and rapture that those patched shoes would give us!

In the meantime, Fanny was not idle. Between looking for work, trying to teach herself the English language, and making over clothes for the children, she was kept busy into the wee hours of the night.