

ROCHESTER HISTORY

Edited by Ruth Rosenberg-Naparsteck
City Historian

Vol. LXIV

Summer 2002

No.3

Growing Up in the Old Neighborhood A Memoir of Joseph Avenue PART TWO

by Ruth Lempert





Ruth passed Danishevsky's Dairy (above) every day on the way to School Number 9. Vicky Danishevsky Potter owned the store on the corner of Joseph Avenue and Herman Street while her brother, Lester, ran the creamery (below, distant building beyond Al's market) on Joseph Avenue and Baden Streets. He made cottage cheese, pressed cheese, butter, cream and milk. People came from everywhere for his pressed cheese. Photograph courtesy of City of Rochester.



Front Cover: The corner of Joseph Avenue and Vienna Street as it was in 1956. Naditz Bakery sold kosher breads and pastries. Orgel's sold religious items and toys. Ruth and her family usually went to Relin's Drug Store nearer to their home.

ROCHESTER HISTORY, published quarterly by Rochester Public Library. Address correspondence to City Historian, Rochester Public Library, 115 South Avenue, Rochester, NY 14604.

<http://www.rochester.lib.ny.us/~rochhist/>

Subscriptions to the quarterly Rochester History are \$8.00 per year by mail. Foreign subscriptions \$12.00 per year, \$4.00 per copy back issue.

PRESSTEK-3

©ROCHESTER PUBLIC LIBRARY 2002 US ISSN 0035-7413

Fish Market

We lived above the fish market, and I never even noticed the smell. My three sisters and I were known as the Schafer girls, and we worked in Schafer's Fish Market from the time we could reach the cash register. Our small apartment over the market faced one of the busiest streets in Rochester. Through the big window by my sofa bed, I could look out over Joseph Avenue and watch the people and horses go by. I could look across the street into the large windows of the Lincoln branch of the public library and watch people as they chose their books. I could hear the clanging of bells as the trolley stopped at our corner to let people off and to take on new passengers. Sparks flew as the trolley stopped.

Every night my sister and I pulled out the couch in our living room, the "front room" we called it. The couch turned into our double bed, and sometimes in the middle of the night, I woke up cold because Marcia had the whole blanket. Esther and Harriet, my two other sisters, slept in a real bedroom, and our parents had the other real bedroom.

Living on such a busy street, it was easy to go shopping. We went to Simon's creamery next door for milk, butter, and cheese. At Applebaum's Kosher Meat Market down the street we bought meat of every kind, mostly chuck, sometimes shoulder steak, once in a great while veal chops. My mother bought meat to grind in a hand grinder to make hamburgers. The fruit store a few doors away had fresh fruits and vegetables. We ate whatever was in season. The most exotic fruit was pineapple. Sophisticated ways to ship produce and preserve freshness were years away. Close by were a number of bakeries, and we bought bread, rolls, cakes, pies, and, on Friday, challah. Sometimes my mother sent me to buy yeast at Sands' Bakery so she could bake her own cakes and kuchen. She made the best blueberry kuchen in the world.

There were almost a dozen fish markets on the avenue. The huge plate glass window of our store had "Schafer's Fish Market" printed in big white letters. We carried a wide assortment of fish. Glittering whitefish came from Lake Erie and Georgian Bay in Canada. There were flounder, round and flat as big dinner plates, silver-scaled bass with their mean mouths, and bony trout. My favorite were the mackerel so beautifully patterned and slim-bodied. There were whiskered catfish, pink-fleshed salmon, and ugly carp. Huge slabs of halibut, pale wide-eyed yellow pike and blue pike-- all lay on beds of chopped ice, in wooden boxes, side by side on a raised platform. As soon as I could write, my

father sat down with me and told me what kind of fish and how much to order from Globe Fish Company in Boston or the Atlantic Fish Company and all the other suppliers. Fish was plentiful, healthful -- and inexpensive. Haddock was 25 cents a pound and whitefish was about 60 cents a pound.

At home we always had fish in the icebox. My mother baked whitefish, pickled salmon trout, broiled salmon, fried haddock, cooked smelts or pike, and made sweet and sour pickerel. Every Friday she made gefilte fish.

My father often said to his customers, "Fish is brain food. If you eat fish every day like me, you'll be smart like me."

"Ice, Ice," yelled the iceman. He came every other day in a horse-drawn wagon full of big blocks of ice. The blocks had indentations showing where they should be cut for differing weights of ice.

The horse knew the route well and stopped at our store automatically. In the store window was a diamond-shaped card with numbers in each corner-- 25, 50, 100, 150. Those numbers showed the number of pounds of ice needed that day. The iceman's customers all had these cards in their windows and turned the cards so that the amount wanted would be uppermost on the card. The iceman would cut the big blocks to the correct size and then, with his huge ice tongs, swing the block onto his rubber-padded shoulder and bring the block into the store, making several trips if necessary.

The children in the neighborhood, including my big sister, Marcia, would clamber onto the back of the wagon when the iceman was in the store. They hastily picked up the slivers and chips of ice that fell to the floor of the wagon when he sawed the ice. They loved to suck and chew the pieces. My father could have arranged to buy the ice already chopped, but that would have cost more money, so he chopped the ice himself and shoveled it into the wooden boxes of fish.

We had a round-faced scale that hung from the ceiling by a thick metal chain. Below the scale and attached to it was a shallow pan into which we slid the fish. The hand on the face of the scale pointed to the number of pounds and ounces the fish weighed, and we figured out the total cost. We didn't know anything about calculators. We didn't even have an adding machine. Most of the time I had to use pencil and paper to figure out what the total came to, but not my father, who could figure out anything in his head.

In the store, there was a pushbutton buzzer in the wall that my father would push when there were more customers than he could handle. Upstairs, when we heard the strident call for help, one or more of us would drop whatever we were doing and rush downstairs. We tripped

over each other trying to get there as fast as we could.

If he thought we weren't fast enough getting down, he would give us a "look", and he would say, "Nu, what took so long?" A glare from him or even a disappointed look would reduce us to a state of dejection.

I had many jobs in the store. My father showed me how to wrap fish for the customers, and he taught me how to make change. Our cash register didn't tell how much change to give. My father never did figure out how to put the tape in the cash register, so it didn't tell us anything. It was just a place to keep money.

When I was a little older I learned how to scale and clean the fish. I would hold the fish by the head and scrape off the scales with a scraping tool, becoming so fast at it that fish scales would fly everywhere--my hair, my face, even my clothes. I then cut off the fins and the tail, slid the knife down its belly, take out the insides, and finally cut the fish into the number of slices the customer wanted. If there were fish eggs or roe, I would save it for the customer because fish eggs were a delicacy. A quick rinse under running water and the fish was put into a pan ready to be wrapped. First the fish was wrapped in a piece of specially ordered white paper, and then it was wrapped in newspaper which I had laid out on our wrapping table. When we were not busy waiting on customers, I sometimes spent an hour or more spreading newspapers neatly on our wrapping table.

"The customer is always right was our store's motto, and my father repeated this often. He also explained to us that it was necessary to understand our regular customers and to know what they wanted even before they knew. I watched as he would tell a very particular housewife, "I got some whitefish in the cooler. It came in two hours ago, and I saved it for you," or he might say to a penny-pinching homemaker who was not too particular, "Here's a good bargain. I bought too much haddock, and it's gotta get sold today."

Most customers would examine, smell, and even feel the fish (when my father wasn't looking) before a decision was made. If he caught a customer squeezing a fish he would say, "Pleeze lady, I don't want you should handle the merchandise. It's not good for them".

One time I remember a woman came in and demanded her money back. "The fish smelled bad and looked old," she reported.

"Where is it? Let me see it," requested my father. "I can't. We ate it all," she answered.

"If it was so bad how could you eat it? I'll give you the money, but I want you shouldn't come back."

After she left, I said to my father, "She must be a customer who isn't always right. Is that why you sent her away, Daddy?"

He answered, "She's always giving me trouble, always complaining and squeezing the fish. Let her better go to Cantor's Fish Market."

Thursdays and Fridays were our busiest days. No meat on Fridays for Catholics meant big sales for all kinds of fish. Haddock fillets were especially popular. Jews bought whitefish and pike for making gefilte fish, traditionally served on the Jewish Sabbath -- Friday night and Saturday. One Thursday I waited on a white-haired elderly woman who lived several blocks away. She walked slowly, with a slight limp. She wanted a slice of whitefish, and I carefully cut where she pointed. The piece weighed one pound and three ounces. After a rapid calculation in my head I told her the amount owed.

She counted out her money and left, but about a half hour later she slowly limped back with the package of fish and said, "You overcharged me."

Too embarrassed to say anything, I silently unwrapped the package of fish and reweighed it, this time using a paper and pencil to figure out the cost.

"You're right," I told her as I counted out four pennies.

Sometimes an amateur fisherman would try to sell my father his catch of the day. Most of the time my father said, "No." One time a proud fisherman wanted to sell a big carp that he had caught that very morning. The carp swam silently in a bucket of water. After negotiations my father bought the carp, bucket and all, and put a "For Sale" sign on it. One of our neighbors, feeling that the freshest fish was the one you purchased live and dispatched yourself, bought it. He thought it would be a generous meal for his wife and five children. The family was delighted with the carp. The children filled the bathtub with water and watched the carp glide and turn so much more easily in its larger quarters. Five pairs of eyes followed its every movement. When mealtime drew near, the children begged for mercy on behalf of the carp and raised such a clamor that Mr. Roxin agreed to postpone the execution for one day. He vowed that they would all have carp for dinner the following night. The next day when it came time to take the fish out of the water to prepare it for the evening meal, the children gathered around their father pleading for the carp's life. Five pairs of eyes, tearful and sad, beseeched him not to kill the carp.

"Look how he's looking at us. I think he trusts us," said one. "He likes us. I can tell," said another.

"I'm not going to eat him. I couldn't," said yet another. The two youngest were mournful and silent.

Mr. Roxin, seeing that there was to be no pleasure in eating this particular carp, put the fish back in the bucket and returned it to our fish

market.

Neighborhood

My father could greet his customers in Russian, Polish, German, Yiddish, or broken English. We were surrounded by immigrants, newly arrived, whose English was halting and heavily accented. The shoppers in our store, the neighbors on the avenue, all the store owners and everyone who lived in the neighborhood were at least bilingual. They spoke their native tongue and broken English. Those who spoke English well were highly respected.

Like my parents, many of our customers were Jewish and had come from Eastern Europe. They had lived in small villages or shtetls. Like my parents, they had fled from poverty, persecution, and danger. Besides their language, the immigrants had brought with them their religion, their customs, and their hunger for a better life for themselves and for their children. Almost all the immigrant parents we knew, no matter where they came from or what their religion, valued education. My father was unusual for his time because he believed in education for women as well as for men. He wanted his four daughters to be financially independent should they not marry (heaven forbid) or should unexpected disaster befall them.

The neighborhood was a mixture of vastly different cultures and ethnic groups, and the stores and houses that lined the avenue reflected this diversity. Tony, who came from Italy, had a barbershop around the corner on Clifford Avenue. There was a red and white striped pole outside his establishment, which was for men only. I remember being sent once or twice to the barbershop with an urgent message for my father. The barber was clad in a white jacket, much like a doctor. He was slapping a razor against a thick leather strap. I can still picture how thick, white, and creamy the lather looked as the barber painted my father's face with a short stubby brush. My father preferred Tony to Leo, the Polish barber, a few doors away. Leo enjoyed a reputation as a ladies' man, and was noted for his many young girlfriends, although he was well into his seventies. Perhaps my father preferred Tony because Tony was a respectable family man. Almost all barbers charged twenty-five cents for a haircut, a shave, and a dusting of talcum powder.

Drugstores were considered first aid stations. When my big sister, Marcia, cut her lip badly on the screen door, my mother held a towel to her lip to soak up the blood. Yelling, "Dy, gevalf", she ran to Keilson's Drugstore with her. If I had something in my eye, or a sliver in my finger I went to Relin's Drugstore who had moved in next door to us. Tearfully I might show him my finger. He was always reassuring and

invariably solved the problem. No one thought of going to the doctor except in a dire emergency, although a doctor lived across the street and had an office in his home. When my father's hand became swollen and infected from an ugly cut, he went straight to the drugstore. If the druggist deemed a situation too serious to handle himself, he would advise his patient to consult a doctor. The druggist charged nothing for his services; the doctor charged at least a dollar or two.

Although we went to the drugstore in times of medical emergencies, more often we stopped there for a treat. Almost all drugstores had soda fountains and sold ice cream novelties. We could buy ice cream cones (three cents for one scoop and five cents for two, with or without chocolate jimmies). We also enjoyed Eskimo Pies, creamsicles, and orange popsicles. My father liked Dixie cups because he could eat them with the little wooden spoon that came with them. My favorite was the OO la la-- ice cream in the shape of an inverted cone on a stick, covered with a thin coating of chocolate, and its flat top liberally sprinkled with crushed peanuts. I always looked at the stick carefully when I finished my OO la la because some of the sticks had the word "free" printed at the top. That meant my next OO la la would be free.

Some drugstores made their own ice cream. Nothing was as refreshing on a hot summer's day as dropping by Keilson's Drugstore for a milkshake or ice cream soda, although frappes, Mexican sundaes, and chocolate phosphates were popular with us, too.

The drugstores sold a variety of foreign language newspapers. Every day my father bought a "Forward", a Yiddish language daily newspaper that came in from New York City. A large beautiful St. Bernard dog came to the drugstore regularly for the "Abendpost." He belonged to two elderly German sisters who lived nearby on Maria Street. The clerk would place the neatly folded paper in the dog's mouth and with great dignity the dog would turn and leave the store. He then proceeded to his home to deliver the paper to his two mistresses.

Cohen's Kosher Restaurant was a mecca for many people, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who enjoyed the ethnic foods served. My mother and father did not believe in eating in restaurants. "You should better eat at home. Why pay Cohen those prices?" my father would say. However, once a year he would go to Cohen's to buy my sisters and me "specials" --a boxed meal consisting of a thick corned beef sandwich on Jewish rye bread with mustard or mayonnaise. It was cut into quarters and came with a kosher dill pickle and a generous amount of thin, crispy potato chips. All this cost thirty five cents. A "special" was always our first meal after Passover, a week long holiday in which we ate no bread and adhered to a strict and limited diet.

Morgan's Barn, a few doors away from our store, was actually a stable for horses that were employed by the city of Rochester for snow plowing, garbage collecting, and street cleaning. There were water troughs all over the city for horses, and one of these large metal containers full of water was in front of our store. I enjoyed watching the horses drink at the trough. One time a horse broke out of Morgan's Barn and went racing down Joseph Avenue past our store. He was chased by his horse handlers until he was caught and brought back. Next door to Morgan's Barn was a little cottage. One spring morning the woman living in that house awoke to find a horse, his head poking through the open bedroom window, peering at her intently.

Half a block away was Platock's Tailor Shop. Mr. Platock, short and round, usually wearing a tape measure around his neck, could press pants, make alterations, and mend tears. He went out of business, and Lou, a seller of fresh poultry, moved into the former tailor shop. Luckily, we were far enough away from Lou's Chicken Store so that we did not hear the chickens clucking or the roosters crowing. Lou's customers came away with freshly slaughtered poultry. The people who lived next door to Lou were awakened about four in the morning each day by the roosters' crowing. The neighbors complained to Lou. "There ain't nuthin' I can do. When a rooster's gotta crow, he's gotta crow," said Lou.

The tired and hapless neighbors finally complained to the city authorities. The city officials in charge of such problems said that roosters do not crow at four o'clock in the morning. The problem was not resolved until Lou closed the store and moved away.

The most important place on the avenue to me was the Lincoln branch of the Rochester Public Library which was directly across the street from our store. It had a children's section and an adult section which children could not enter until they were in junior high school. If we needed to use an encyclopedia or other reference book we had to get special permission to go into the adult section where the reference collection was housed. Although library rules stated that I could take out only two books at a time, I could easily race across the street before closing time, return the two books I had finished and take out two others. It did not matter that we had no books at home. I had hundreds of books; only they were all across the street. Books were a glorious entry into other worlds. I was a frequent user, usually going to the library three or more times a week.

The librarian looked very "American" to me. She was fair, cool, and distant. We patrons were mainly immigrants or children of immigrants, and I felt she disapproved of us. She rarely smiled or helped us find books. Once when I returned two books she looked accusingly at me

and said, "You didn't read these books. You just took them out two days ago." I was confused, and hurt by this accusation.

"I did read them both. I read one to my little sister and the other one was for me." I faltered and could say no more. She quizzed me on the contents of the books.

"What are they about?" she asked.

I was glad to oblige her by going into great detail describing the stories, thus vindicating myself. I was happy when a new librarian replaced her. The new one was helpful and kind, showing me new books and suggesting titles that she thought I might like. She allowed me to use the adult section although I was not yet in junior high school. [Ruth Lempert grew up to become a librarian].

Nearby was a dry goods store which sold aprons, underpants, notions, stockings, umbrellas, garter belts, pajamas, suspenders, babies' clothing and other sundry items. The proprietor repaired umbrellas and was therefore known to us as "the umbrella man". A German sausage shop down the street drew customers from all over town.

Further down Joseph Avenue was a shabby store with hundreds of items stocked on shelves in what appeared to be a haphazard manner. The very pious Orgel family that ran the store could put their fingers on any item asked for with unerring accuracy. On one side of the store they sold religious items such as menorahs, mezzuzahs, skullcaps, books, and candles. On the opposite side of the store were toys, crayons, and games. I often thought later that the store exemplified two of the most important parts of its customers' lives --children and religion.

From across the ocean the immigrants in our neighborhood brought with them their religious practices and customs. Important to everyone's life were the places of worship. I remember three imposing Catholic churches not far from us. Saint Michael's looked like a fortress, an impressive stone structure. I watched nuns in long flowing black dresses with tight starched wimples walk in and out of the church. On the hottest days of summer they were all covered up.

"Do they have hair?" I asked various friends. I thought not, but no one was sure. I decided they didn't.

The most beautiful church to me had six tall columns across the wide entry and a high bell tower at one side. Way up at the top of the facade was a panel with the carved and painted figure of a woman holding a baby. She had rays of gold color emanating from her head. I liked the name of the church, Our Lady of Perpetual Help. I liked saying it to myself, but I whispered it very softly so no one would hear me.

There were numerous synagogues in our neighborhood, some quite small, each with its loyal adherents. My father was a charter member of

B'nai Israel, a new orthodox synagogue with a long, wide series of brick stairs leading to its front entrance and thick columns across the front entryway. Its membership included many neighborhood people. It was located within easy walking distance of us, which was very important because my father and other observant Jews would not drive on the Sabbath or religious holidays. He served as an officer of the congregation and participated in the politics of its everyday life. Because he enjoyed being with people and taking charge, he eventually became president of the congregation. He went to worship services every day and three times on the Sabbath --Friday night, Saturday morning, and late Saturday afternoon. Ten men, (a minyan) were required at each service in order to perform the prayers. If the group did not reach the minimum number, someone would rush outside to try to haul in a passing Jewish male over the the age of thirteen. In our neighborhood it was not too hard to make up the quorum. Women were not allowed to sit with the men, nor could they be counted in the minyan. They sat in the balcony, and I and my sisters often waved to our father as we sat with our mother and looked down at all the men below. Only very little girls were allowed to sit with their fathers.

During the High Holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we children spent more time in the synagogue than we did at any other time. Participating in the prayer service on those holidays was an all day affair. The most exciting moment for me came when the shofar (a curved ram's horn) was blown in a series of shrill compelling blasts. Was it a warning to all of us to mend our ways? Was it a call to alert everyone of the peril all around us? Or was the blast to remind us of our ancient heritage stretching back thousands of years? I made sure I was present for the blowing of the shofar.

At other times I slipped into the hallway to talk to other boys and girls milling in the corridor. Sometimes we children, tired of the long service, went outside.

The boys ran around chasing the girls and teasing them. The boys picked up chestnut burrs that fell from the trees lining the street. Opening the burrs they extricated the shiny, reddish brown chestnuts and tied each one in the corner of a handkerchief. Twirling their chestnut weapons and threatening to hit us with them, the boys ran after the girls they liked, trying to frighten them. I kept hoping at least one of the boys would chase me, but hardly anyone ever did. After a while we all went dutifully back inside.

The various holidays came only once a year. The Sabbath came every week, but it was more important than all but Yom Kippur. On Friday afternoons well before sundown, the Jewish-owned stores on Joseph

Avenue would all close. My father would hasten to get the boxes of fish back into the walk-in cooler, take the cash out of the cash register and lock up. He needed the time to bathe and dress before going to prayer service. My mother who worked side by side with my father in the store, took Friday off to work at home, dusting, cleaning the rooms, and scrubbing the linoleum kitchen floor. She would lay newspapers over the clean floor so that it would be clean when the Sabbath started.

She must have cooked all day, too, making chicken soup and noodles. She bought a fresh chicken and had to pluck the pin feathers, then cut the chicken apart, removing the insides, saving the neck and liver. Sometimes she found an egg inside the chicken, and we were all amazed at this phenomenon. She also prepared gefilte fish, chopping the fish by hand and adding the other ingredients as she chopped. She formed round balls which she placed in a big pot of water and cooked. On top of each ball of fish she placed a round carrot slice to make the fish look more attractive. The main course was often a roast with "smashed potatoes". We had challah, the Sabbath bread, and for dessert perhaps a sponge cake that my mother had made. My father liked it with a glass of Sweet-Touch-Nee tea and two lumps of sugar.

All four of us children scrambled to finish whatever we were doing to help, and then we made ourselves look presentable for the Sabbath meal. We made no other plans for the evening because our attendance was required. Dinner was preceded by the lighting of the Sabbath candles by my mother with the appropriate prayers, and by my father chanting the traditional prayers. In winter when sundown was early we had our Friday night dinner when he returned from the synagogue, but in summer we ate before he went. Nothing, absolutely nothing altered or interfered with the Sabbath rituals. I came to understand later, that the Sabbath was a framework for our lives, one that was to shape and mold our destiny more than I ever would have imagined.

Christmas Memories

I knew quite a bit about Christmas because I had seen "A Christmas Carol "when it was playing at our neighborhood theater, the Empress. Even before that I knew it was a cheerful time of year, a happy holiday that brought smiles to people's faces, and friendly greetings to everyone's lips.

When I went downtown with my mother I stared at the decorations in Sibley's, McCurdy's, Formans, Edwards, National's and all the other stores. The windows of every store were alive with sparkling lights, col-

orful scenes, beautiful models wearing elegant clothes. Inside the stores there were garlands of evergreens festooned against the walls. Wreaths hung everywhere. Little twinkling Christmas trees graced the counter tops. Beautifully wrapped packages with velvet or satin bows showed shoppers how their gifts might look if they would only buy their gifts right then. I longed to receive such gifts. I knew I would open the gifts slowly to savor the excitement and to save the gorgeous paper and bows. On Sibley's fourth floor we marveled at Toyland--a tableaux of holiday-fun, storybook figures, winter scenes-- amazing to us and dazzling.

I didn't tell anyone how much I loved Christmas because I wasn't Christian and most of the people I knew weren't either. I didn't think I would ever have Christian friends because my parents discouraged it.

"If you have a fight with a Christian, she will start to call you names. She might even hurt you," they said. I knew that each of my parents had fled to the United States to escape persecution and danger.

My mother told us (when we were much older) how she and her sisters had huddled in the cellar of their small home in Poland during pogroms. Marauding villagers ran through the streets looking for Jewish girls to rape. When we were older my father told us he had witnessed the murder of his father from the bullet of a Cossack. As a child I only knew that my parents were distrustful of Christian people. I saw that they were respectful and courteous to all our customers, and my father joked and laughed with everyone. Still they warned us that harm might befall us if we tried to be friends with other kinds of people. I thought it best to say very little of how much I liked Christmas.

During the holiday season I enjoyed listening to Christmas carols on our radio, a large floor model Philco. The carols all had such lovely melodies.

My favorite was "Little town of Bethlehem." It filled me with a sense of mystery and wonder. Another favorite was "Oh Holy Night" the way Kate Smith sang it on her radio show.

Unfortunately it was the Christmas carols that caused my friends and me a great dilemma every Christmas. During the month of December all we sang in music class in our grade school were Christmas carols. Should we Jewish children sing the carols, too? Would lightning strike us if we did? If we didn't would our music teacher be angry? Would we draw attention to ourselves? Would some of our classmates be mean and pick fights with us on our way home if we didn't sing? I asked some of my Jewish classmates what they were going to do.

"I'm not going to sing any carols, but I'm going to make believe I'm singing. I'll move my lips and no one will know the difference," Irwin answered. He demonstrated by forming words with his mouth silently.

"That's a good idea," I said. "What are you going to do?" I asked another.

"I'm going to sing everything except the parts we shouldn't sing," Estelle said. "I'll sing 'Away in the manger no crib for a bed the' and then I'll keep quiet until we come to'sweet head.'"

"That's a good idea," I said.

Somehow or other we got through music class.

When I was a young child Christmas represented for me a great big party that everyone else was having, and I was on the outside looking in-- except for one year. Maybe my sister and I had heard the poem, "The Night Before Christmas." Maybe we had heard a radio program during December that gave us the idea. Whatever the impetus, we both approached our parents the night before Christmas and begged them to let us hang up our stockings. I think Marcia might have said that practically every child in the world was hanging up stockings, and we felt bad that we didn't. Maybe I said that we would never ask again if we could do it once. Perhaps our mother and father looked at our imploring faces. With unbelieving ears I heard my father say, "All right."

We had no fireplace, mantel, or hearth in our flat above the fish market, but we did have a great big coal stove with an oven on top. Across one side of the top was a metal bar. On this bar Marcia and I carefully hung our thick woolen knee socks.

I think we slept badly that night. Early in the morning we jumped out of the bed we shared and ran to the kitchen to look at our stockings. They were bulging. Shouting and laughing we took our stockings from the stove and turned them upside down. Out rolled some bright, round oranges, a handful of walnuts, and some hard candy wrapped in cellophane. We jumped up and down with excitement. We hugged each other in our delight. In my mind's eye I still see those two little girls jumping with joy. In my ears I still hear their laughter.

Groceries

On Saturday nights after sundown the Sabbath was over, and we reopened the store for business, as did most of the other Jewish shop owners. Although the avenue was quiet all day Saturday, at night it burst into life. People thronged the streets, and often a line was waiting to get in before we opened. Some customers might be shopping for lox or herring for Sunday breakfast. Others might be looking for dill pickles or our big black olives from the barrel. We had schmaltz herring and pickling herring in barrels, too. Every day and Saturday night my father rolled out the huge barrels from our cooler to the sidewalk, and lined

them up alongside our storefront. Sunday was a busy day, too. Even years later when the neighborhood had already changed, women came with their husbands or grown sons who drove them to the store. My father enjoyed talking to everyone. He was an excellent salesman, and would frequently point out special bargains "for this week only."

In the late thirties a trusted salesperson from a large wholesale house encouraged my father to begin selling groceries in addition to the fish.

"Sam, people are going to want to do more shopping in one store. I think you have the room here to build shelves and stock items like cereal, some bulk food and some canned goods.

At first my father was doubtful. "Do you think people will want to buy groceries from a fish market? Maybe they will be afraid that everything will smell like fish."

"No, Sam, I don't think anyone will worry about that. Canned goods won't pick up smells, and you always wrap the fish up with plenty of paper, anyway. When you give people their order, put the fish in a separate bag. People are going to be glad of the convenience of buying some grocery items when they shop here. The salesman was astute, and my father agreed with him. He recognized a good idea when he heard one.

It did not take very long for the carpenters to come in, and cut the wooden shelves right there in the store. We made extra bargains and specials while the renovation was going on, in order to help customers ignore the flying sawdust and the noise of the saws. The carpenters measured the wall and nailed the shelves into the wall as high as they could go. My father was barely five feet four inches, and I was catching up to him. He bought a long handled "grabber" to reach cans on the top shelf. It wasn't easy for me to grab a can on the top and clench the handles so that the can was firmly held. Sometimes my grasp was so poor that the can came hurtling down on me. I became adroit at ducking Libby's purple plums or Lily of the Valley baby peas as they fell.

We began the grocery line modestly with displays of Maxwell House Coffee, Del Monte peaches, and a basic inventory of groceries sent in by the wholesaler. The salesman made up the list of merchandise because my father knew very little about what to buy. Now we all had new tasks to do: stock shelves, make displays in the window on all the available floor space. We built pyramids of cans-- a pyramid of Del Monte's creamed corn, another of Campbell's cream of mushroom soup, a large display of jars of Postum, another of jars of Bosco Chocolate syrup. I varied the height of the pyramids by putting some of the displays on top of a carton. We cut paper into little pieces and wrote the prices of items on the pieces and then taped these scraps of paper on the top can of each

pyramid. I and one of my sisters wrote out the signs because our handwriting was more legible than my father's. I usually wrote as dramatically as I could, putting SPECIAL! TODAY ONLY! at the top with one or two exclamation points. There the sign stayed until it became too fly specked or fell off.

Some items such as sweet pickles came in glass jars. those always went on the bottom shelves. None of us wanted to take the chance of dropping a jar. We had enough to do without mopping up pickle juice and shards of glass. Large cardboard containers of powdered laundry soap like Oxydol or Rinso were too heavy for high shelves, too. Kellogg's corn flakes and Wheaties were light enough for any of us to grab from the top. I gave much thought to the placement of our groceries.

My father kept adding new items all the time. He bought fifty pound burlap bags of dried navy beans, rice, green split peas, yellow split peas, and lima beans. All of these had to be scooped out of the bags and weighed into one and two pound paper bags and labeled. Spices came in five or ten pound containers, and using a little scooper we weighed the various spices into four ounce packages. It was tiresome, and I was often bored measuring five pounds of paprika into little paper bags and making sure each bag contained four ounces.

At first none of us could remember all the goods that we had so recently purchased. A customer came in one day shortly after we were newly stocked and asked for spaghetti. I looked at the shelves, and I noticed my father was looking somewhat blankly at the shelves, too. I had the feeling he didn't know what spaghetti looked like.

"We don't carry spaghetti," he said. After the customer left I kept looking, and I spied boxes of Mueller's thin spaghetti on a lower shelf. We should have put it on a higher shelf, I thought to myself. My father was very upset that he had sent the customer away, and he immediately began looking at the shelves carefully, scrutinizing the merchandise. He spent extra time walking up and down in front of the shelves memorizing what he saw. I don't remember his making a mistake like that again.

We began selling soda water. We called it pop. Par- T -Pak was popular. Nehi beverages sold well. We carried Miller's pop, made and bottled in town not too far from our store. In addition to moving big boxes of fish and huge barrels of herring, my father now carried heavy crates of pop to and from our storage room, leaving some in the store for display.

With the expanded lines of products that we sold came more work for everyone. Now we had more unpacking of cartons to do, careful checking of incoming orders, more bills to pay, more inventory to keep track

of, more letters to write about items damaged in shipment or orders not accurately filled. My father worked sixteen or seventeen hours a day, my mother at his side, the rest of us scurrying about at his direction. He enjoyed the added pressures and decided to buy as much as his credit would allow.

"Volume," he said. "We make money on turnover. We can buy cheaper if we buy a lot."

Our back storage room was soon so full of boxes, I could hardly get in to retrieve merchandise for our displays. Still my father felt we needed to improve our sales. He began visiting the new Star supermarkets, a larger grocery with many weekly specials to entice the shopper. There were no Stars in our neighborhood. My father drove to various areas to spot the supermarket specials and to see what the new competition was doing. He bought as many cartons of featured items at Star Supermarkets as they would allow and, as he could pile into his car. The store became crowded with cartons of the Star Supermarket specials which he then sold for a penny or two more.

His philosophy seemed to succeed. He watched his profits climb, but my mother was not happy. She did not approve of buying in volume, of spending so much time working. Her own health was deteriorating and she wanted more time with my father at home. They had both worked with all their strength, but now that she had to slow down she resented the enormous investment in time and energy my father still expended. As we grew older she began to argue with him openly. I heard her angry remarks and his replies.

He said, "I can't slow down. The girls need to go to college some day." His answers did not appease her.

She called him stubborn (farakshund). "Talking to to him is like talking to a wall," she said. Her anger piled up like storm clouds. Soon she would burst into a flood of invective. He was not deterred, although he was chastened when she turned on him with her shrill words and hostility.

Who's right?, I wondered. I believed in the way my father ran his business. I learned from him the importance of constantly searching for ways to improve. My sisters and I learned from them both the value of giving ourselves completely to the task at hand, and we inherited from them some of their endless capacity for work. I appreciated my mother's desire for the family to spend time together away from the fish market.

It took years before I came to understand that she had talents and aptitudes that she had never really expressed. She was lonely when her children began to need her less. She wanted my father to stop working so

many hours, to stop buying so much, and to spend more time with her. She needed someone to talk to. The four of us were busy with school, and still helping in the store.

Why didn't I ask her about her struggles as a working mother, her sacrifices, about her own hopes. We had never talked about feelings or emotions. Could any of us even recognize our feelings? During my childhood there had never been enough time to talk to either of my parents. They were both too involved with the fish business, raising a family of four children, and following the dictates of their religion. As we grew older we were busy with high school friends. Even when I went to the University of Rochester and lived at home, I still helped in the store. There was no time to sit down down and talk to my mother. She continued to argue with my father. The conflict between them was never resolved.

Hollenbeck Street

I didn't want to move from Joseph Avenue, but everyone else in the family did. In late spring of 1941 my father purchased a large, attractive double house on Hollenbeck Street near Avenue A, a ten minute walk from the store or four or five minutes by car. The owner who had had it built lost the house to the bank. It was up for sale. My father knew the owner and felt sorry that he had been foreclosed. "I won't buy it if you don't want I should," my father said to the owner.

"Go ahead, Sam. Someone else will buy it if you don't. I can't keep it. I'd be glad for you to get it."

The house had two large eight room apartments. We moved into the downstairs apartment. The tenants, a family of four, lived upstairs. We had shiny hardwood floors, gum wood trim, beveled glass windows, and built in bookcases with leaded glass doors. My father was proud of his acquisition. The house, spacious, surrounded by trees and grass, demonstrated his rise in the world. In his eyes Hollenbeck street embodied the better life for his family that he and my mother sought. With this move they were realizing their aspirations. I think he wanted us to be as happy as he with our new home.

My sisters and I walked through it with him several times when it was empty, and he asked us what we wanted in the house. All of us said, "A fireplace." A gracious fireplace with a mantel over it was aristocratic. In so many books I had read, grand houses had a fireplace. I could picture myself curled up in a chair, reading in front of it. A real wood burning fireplace could not be built in our living room, so the carpenter must have fashioned a make-believe fireplace that looked authentic to us.

Above the fireplace he hammered into the wall an attractive piece of wood to serve as the mantel. We had make-believe logs that glowed red at the touch of a button. All of us enjoyed the effect. We put a large replica of an oil painting above the mantel. It was a still life of magnolia blossoms arranged in a vase. In winters to come, my sisters and I gathered around the fireplace, and turned on the logs so they glowed red. I could almost believe we were well-born ladies enjoying an evening in our generations-old manor house.

The rooms were big and the kitchen almost had cupboards enough for all the sets of dishes my mother had --milchig and fleishig for every day as well as milchig and fleishig for Passover. Still, some of the pots, pans, and utensils had to go in the basement. Even with four bedrooms two of us had to share a room until Marcia married and moved out. There were closets in every bedroom and a closet in the entry hall for coats. The space for living and for storage amazed us. One closet even had a door with a full length mirror on it. I was fascinated by my image and spent time talking to the mirror.

My father hired a painter to give every room a fresh coat, and allowed us to help choose the colors, Esther liked all shades of pink, and enlisted our influence in securing a promise to paint the bathroom hot pink. Once it was done, the bathroom vibrated and pulsed with the bright color. It was hard for me to see what I really looked like when I looked in the bathroom mirror. My face looked bright pink. Even if I was pale or slightly sick, even deathly ill, I would only have to look in the bathroom mirror to feel better. It was hard for me to believe I was as sick as I felt because I had such a healthy glow. We all appeared amazingly healthy all the time until we changed the color of the bathroom walls.

Outside of the house, to keep the garbage cans hidden from sight, there was a small brick garbage shed in the backyard. And what a backyard it was. Our double house on a modest city street was built on a huge, deep lot that took up almost a whole city block. We had never had a backyard before, not with grass, trees, shrubs, and flower beds. I felt as if we had moved to a park. For the first time I heard birds twittering early in the morning outside my bedroom window. I enjoyed hearing the birds, but I missed the sounds of traffic.

It was a traumatic change for me --a street without stores. Only houses with front yards and back yards lined the street. The front yards were small, but they had grass all over. There were trees along the curb, birds flew about-- birds I had only seen in picture books. I missed the dozens of people walking along the sidewalk, shopping and visiting. I missed the clang of the trolley, the library across the street, the creamery and the drugstore on either side of us. I liked being in the middle of all the bus-

tle and activity. I missed everything familiar. I didn't want to be in the country-- with no stores right next to us.

I missed my school where everybody knew me and my teachers thought I was smart. I liked everyone asking me hard questions. In my new school the boys and girls looked different. They dressed better, and they all seemed smart. I eventually found that most of their parents spoke better English than the parents of the friends I had had. I heard one of my classmates whisper to the person next to her, "Ruth's father has a fish market on Joseph Avenue. She probably smells like a fish."

I knew this snobby person's family had a hat shop on East Avenue, an elegant shop on an elegant street. It wasn't very nice to be a snob, so I told myself not to pay attention to her, but I felt uncomfortable. I was unhappy for months, and I cried myself to sleep many nights. It took me a long time to get over growing up on Joseph Avenue. I wonder if I ever did.

My father now had a huge expanse of grass that needed to be cut. He acquired a small hand mower that worked well, but it took hours to complete the job of cutting the lawn. In winter it took hours and prodigious energy to shovel the snow from the front and side door, as well as the driveway and along the walkway to the doors. He decided not to shovel the whole driveway to get to the garage which was at the back of the yard. He kept his new Chevy just a little way into the driveway close to the street. The car never knew the protection of a garage in the winter, and every morning my father had to scrape the car windows clear of ice, and with an old broom he swept the snow from the top and sides.

We began to hold family picnics in our backyard in the summer, inviting aunts, uncles, and cousins. We had by far the largest piece of land of anyone. My parents bought lawn chairs, a hammock, and a table to better enjoy their outdoor life. We played croquet and badminton in the yard. My mother planted flower beds. Even on Joseph Avenue she had tried to plant pansies in a little tiny postage stamp of earth. Now she could plant roses, all kinds of border plants along the walk to the house, and of course, more of her favorite pansies. We even planted vegetables during World War II, our victory garden. A big chestnut tree next to the shed dropped spiky burrs every fall.

When we moved away from the store in 1941, we still came to help my father, but without the buzzer to call us downstairs, we were not so much at his beck and call. He used to telephone us instead, urging us to get over to the store as quickly as possible. With business improving, my father needed more help than family members could provide. He started to hire people. Ignatz, who spoke only Polish, could talk to no one but my father. Ignatz mostly cleaned fish or swept the floor. A small wiz-

ened little man, he worked in the store for years. Trying to figure out his age was useless. He might have been 40 or possibly 70. None of us knew if he had friends or a family. He rolled his own cigarettes, taking a small pouch of tobacco from his pocket and tapping some tobacco into a square of thin paper. After he rolled the paper up to form a cigarette I expected the whole thing to come apart, but it never did.

My father hired Mr. Menton to deliver fish orders. He was short, round, and friendly. He rode a motorcycle on his rounds, and Schafer's Fish Market was, no doubt, the only store that could claim orders would be delivered by motorcycle. Mr. Menton put the orders in his sidecar. He carried a black pouch with a long black strap and a metal clasp slung over his shoulder and chest to carry the money he collected. Mr. Menton wore a black visored cap and looked somewhat dashing racing off to deliver fish on his motorcycle.

One of the men my father hired was a refugee who had no skills and had recently come to this country. My father taught him how to clean fish and all about the fish business in general. He was generous in giving his time, and was shocked when his employee left without notice two days before Passover, the busiest time of the year. The whole family put in extra time to help make up for it.

As soon as I turned sixteen my father taught me how to drive a car so I could deliver fish orders, too. Mr. Menton had by then probably gone on to a more lucrative job, and my father needed someone to get the orders out. He gave me driving lessons whenever he had a few extra minutes he could spare. Later in life I had to unlearn much of what he had taught me about driving.

Most of our customers were not far away --Gladys Street, Conkey Avenue, Buchan Park, Vienna Street, Dorbeth Road --all streets I knew. I rarely drove for pleasure. I took a bus if I had to go somewhere.

Our move from Joseph Avenue signaled a slow shift away from our intense involvement in the store. I had time to make new friends, and after a while I came to love our house on Hollenbeck Street. My sisters and I brought our friends over often, and sometimes we had parties at our house. When I was old enough to go out on dates, I occasionally sat in the backyard with a beau.

One summer night I had a date that ended early. I bid good-night to my escort on our front steps, and after he left I found the house doors were all locked. My parents and younger sisters had probably gone out for a rare ride together, maybe to get ice cream. Because it was so warm and pleasant I lay down on the hammock and gazed at the sky. The night was dark, and I looked at the stars, trying to trace the constellations. It

was a sky that I had not seen on Joseph Avenue. The Chevy soon rolled up the driveway and into the garage. I heard my parents and sisters get out of the car, talking and laughing as they walked toward the house. I got up from the hammock and stood waiting for them. My father stopped. All talking and laughing ceased when they saw me standing. I heard my father say in a low voice, "Stay back, Kate, with the children."

His hands were clenched into fists. He walked slowly and menacingly toward me -- all five feet, four inches of his stocky frame tensed and ready to fight. "Who are you? What do you want?" he said as he advanced. He couldn't see me well enough to make out who it was. "Father, it's only me. I got home early and couldn't get in," I said. I could almost hear the exhalation of everybody's breath. My father unclenched his fists, and his whole body relaxed. We all started to laugh. Later I thought to myself of how he had been willing to protect his family against an unknown assailant. Strong as he was, he knew nothing about fighting. It had been instinctive in him to step forward, to guard my mother and sisters from perceived harm. The one time he had been physically attacked and left for dead, he had pretended to his assailant that he was unconscious before he had actually lapsed into unconsciousness. He had not fought back. In his hospital room and later, he sometimes wondered if he could have saved his eyesight by fighting off his attacker.

"Father, you said that man was young and big and strong-looking. He might have killed you for sure, if you tried to hit him or strike out. You did the right thing to save your life. He thought you were a dead man when he ran out," I answered.

My reassurances could not stop his replaying the scene in his mind. For a long time he had nightmares. He called out and screamed. When he was awakened, he invariably was upset, almost breathless.

"I was fighting with that man. I was punching him," he said each time.

War

The earth-shaking events of the world did not seem to have a great impact on my life. World War II must have been of grave concern to my parents. They both had many family members still in Poland, but they didn't talk about it. They listened to the radio, sitting with their bodies perched forward on their chairs. They gave the radio broadcasts their full attention. We heard Walter Winchell and his rapid fire delivery. He opened his news program with "Good evening ladies and gentlemen and

all the ships at sea." He spoke rapidly and I think I remember the staccato sound of a telegraph punctuating his remarks. Edward R. Murrow was more to my liking. He had a way of saying "This is London" when he started his news program that was a portent of dramatic events to come. My parents also read the daily "Forward" and they must have discussed the war with their friends and our relatives.

My first cousin, Bernie, was a soldier and our neighbor from upstairs was in the army, but as far as I was concerned the fighting was taking place far away.

Most of my ideas of the war came from the movies. Just as I watched the screen to find out how "Americans" were supposed to talk and behave, I now sat in the darkened theater and watched what the Hollywood film industry showed us of the terrors of war. Explosions in the trenches, wounded soldiers, gunfire, submarine warfare, bombs falling, crumbling buildings, Japanese suicide attacks, hungry civilians --the suffering and waste of war were revealed to me, but I did not despair.

The Good always won. American soldiers like John Wayne, Tyrone Power, Randolph Scott were brave. I knew the American soldier was strong and would be victorious. When a lone American was left to defend a stronghold against overwhelming odds, he would either be rescued at the last minute, wipe out the enemy, or he would go down fighting, a hero, his death vindicated by all that he had been able to accomplish.

Beautiful, brave women in the movies were role models to me. I wanted to be like Lana Turner or Esther Williams, so beautiful and patriotic. They played heroic women who joined the service. Not only did they don uniforms to serve their country, they even found romance. Claudette Colbert saved lives as an army nurse, even as she struggled with her own personal problems. I told my mother that if I were older, I would join the WAACs or the WAVES. She became agitated and said, "Nice girls don't join the Army or Navy." I argued with her, but not with much spirit, because I was too young, anyway. I couldn't figure out what was not nice about helping the war effort, and she could not explain.

Most of the war movies were full of action and violence. I avoided them as much as possible, but there were so many of them that some weeks that was all that was showing at the RKO Palace, the Loew's, or the Paramount. By chance, my girlfriend, Joyce, and I decided to see "The Sullivans." Maybe we thought it was better than the other movies that were showing. Perhaps we thought it would not be too upsetting, and at first we seemed to have been right. We saw the five little Sullivan boys as children, growing up in a loving family, getting into scrapes.

They were all such nice boys, and they were funny. We laughed at some of their misadventures. They came of age during the war, and they all wanted to join the Navy together and stay together during the whole conflict. We were not prepared to have them all perish when their ship went down. I stared at the screen uncomprehendingly; then when I understood the terrible tragedy, I started to sob, and so did Joyce. When the naval representative came and knocked on the Sullivan family door, I wanted to look away. Mrs. Sullivan knew when she saw the serious face of the messenger that something was wrong.

She asked haltingly, "Which one?" I couldn't bear to listen. What were Joyce and I doing in this movie theater? Why were we here watching? I had my hands over my face, but I looked between my fingers. Mrs. Sullivan was waiting for an answer to her question. When the messenger said, "All of them" Joyce and I were overcome with emotion. At the end of the movie we got up silently, unable to speak. We went outside in the daylight, our eyes red, our hearts too heavy to comfort each other. We walked home without saying a word.

Looking back I am shocked at my lack of awareness of my own aunts, uncles, and cousins who were probably in concentration camps. What became of them? How is it I did not even know of them? My father had no pictures of any of the Schafers. Well after the war I found a few old pictures that we had of my mother's family. One of the pictures taken when Uncle Yitzrak went back to visit the family in the late twenties, showed my mother's sisters, their husbands and their little children. My cousins were young. Curling dark hair framed small serious faces. One of my little girl cousins stood next to her father, her hand resting on his knee. A boy of four or five sat on the floor, with a mischievous half smile on his face. Wearing a dress with a big collar and a bow in her hair, my cousin looked out at me. I never found out what happened to any of our relatives.

Because of the movies that brought the war to my consciousness I wanted to do something useful. Children in other places were directly helping the war effort. I knew that because I read about them in my "Current Events", a newspaper to which all the seventh graders subscribed. Campfire Girls in one city placed over one hundred collection cans in their town so patriotic citizens could drop old keys in them. The Campfire Girls collected the full cans and turned them in for scrap.

In North Adams, Massachusetts, the Junior Red Cross staged a patching party in which members collected used patches to mend work socks to make them last longer. They also darned torn socks.

School children in Seattle made games for our men in the armed forces; checker sets, chess sets, and Chinese checkers. In our own home-

town a five-year-old Junior Commando, by tirelessly scouring his neighborhood, single-handedly (unless you count his mother) collected an estimated 500 pounds of worn-out kitchen utensils, broken tools, discarded lengths of steel pipes and rusty bed springs. Doubtless other worn-out and outmoded objects were also dragged home in his little wagon to be turned over during one of the scrap iron drives.

The only memory I have of doing something constructive is attending War Bond assemblies in school. Famous movie stars came to our schools to talk about why we should buy bonds. Naturally we had to ask our parents ahead of time what, if anything, we could buy. When Franchot Tone came to our school I cajoled my parents into allowing me to buy a twenty-five dollar bond. Dorothy Lamour was another big fund raiser.

My family also tried to plant a victory garden. We now had our block-long backyard, and with much effort by my father we converted a small plot of grass into a vegetable garden. I was an indifferent gardener, and helped when necessary. I do not recall that we ever had much of a crop.

My biggest contribution to the war effort was helping my father count the ration books in the store. Fish was not rationed, but our groceries were. Everybody had to do with less. Items such as ketchup, sugar, and canned goods required ration stamps. Blue stamps were for canned food and red stamps were for meat, butter, and fats. The government issued ration books that were good for 52 weeks. The idea was to keep inflation down and to spread scarce food evenly throughout the population. My father told me he was never part of the black market, but his accounting system of stamps and ration books was far from precise. I remember government inspectors coming into the store admonishing my father that his record keeping was very poor, and he had to do better. An inspector told him, "You can't give anybody anything that's rationed without getting the necessary stamps."

My father argued, "What if a man comes in and says he needs more food for his children. What would you do? Wouldn't you give him what he needs?" Although inspectors came in from time to time, my father continued in his belief that it was his duty to help parents feed their children whether they had the right number of stamps or not. Perhaps his years of hunger and want had left an indelible mark on him, for all through his life he threw caution to the winds to help anyone who needed food.

The war ended during the week of my fifteenth birthday. We saw the celebrations of victory in the movie theater. I was also celebrating my birthday. My parents and my sisters took me to see a show to make the day extra special. Probably my parents had wanted news of the end of

the war, too. The fact that all of us were in a movie theater together was itself a special event. Everyone in the theater clapped, cheered, and stamped their feet when the RKO Pathe News showed our boys in uniform being feted in the streets of whatever towns they were in. I was moved by the scenes of jubilation. The war was finally over, but I was not completely happy. Many girls my age had a boyfriend who would have taken them to the movies on their birthday. Boys weren't even looking in my direction. I didn't feel jubilant about that.

Garage Sales and Bikes

The bad news was that Lake Erie was dying, and so were the white fish in it. There was a time when the finest of whitefish came from Lake Erie. Shipments of fresh whitefish from Buffalo had been frequent. They had come by truck, or often my Uncle Yitzak would drive in to get his order and my father's too. We were getting fewer shipments from Boston and Canada. Because of pollution in so many bodies of water, fish was getting expensive. It was no longer a cheap meal. There were fewer customers buying fresh fish and there was less fish to sell. By the sixties the Joseph Avenue customers who made gefilte fish and those who ate fish on Fridays had moved away. It was not the immigrant neighborhood of my childhood. The avenue had changed. That whole section of the city had changed.

My father moved from Hollenbeck Street because our big back yard, which almost took up a whole city block, abutted a local supermarket chain. His land was attractive to Star Supermarkets. The Star officials offered my father a small sum of money for the right of way through his back yard. The company wanted their trucks to enter from Clinton Avenue, which the supermarket faced, drive through our yard and exit at Hollenbeck Street. My father felt that if big trucks came lumbering through his back yard to load and unload merchandise, the value of his house would decrease dramatically. He told the negotiator, "Buy the whole property, with the house, or don't buy nothing." The house and land were sold to Star Supermarkets in 1962.

My father bought another double house not far from me on Harvard Street. He lived on one side and rented the other side. I, of course, did the renting of the other side.

It was a big change for my father, moving to another part of town. He could no longer walk to his synagogue on the Sabbath or holidays. He had been a charter member of B'nai Israel. It had been his sole place of worship for over thirty years.

He continued to go there during the week, but he joined a synagogue within walking distance of Harvard Street, Beth Shalom. There he went on the Sabbath and all the holidays. Eventually he went there for every prayer service.

In the late Friday afternoon of July 24, 1964, my father closed early enough to prepare for the Sabbath. As usual, the whole family gathered at his house, bringing our prearranged contributions to the Sabbath dinner. I enjoyed our times together. My sister, Esther, was in top form. She had recently finished a theatrical run of a play in which she had had a significant role. Her descriptions of the misadventures behind the scenes were hilarious. She was unsurpassed as a mimic and raconteur. She picked up facial expressions and nuances of voice. We were breathless with laughter.

None of us knew that within hours a violent uprising bringing destruction would crash down, engulf Joseph Avenue, and change it forever. The race riots started that night. We did not know that thousands of people were rioting in the streets. In the ensuing chaos people smashed store windows, throwing bricks and rocks. They vandalized the stores, emptying them of merchandise. Fires were started. When the police chief went down to survey the scene, his car was overturned. In the middle of the night the city manager declared a state of emergency. The state troopers were called in at 3 AM. They, along with the city police and sheriff's deputies, could not quell the rioting from spreading to the Third Ward. I didn't know what was happening until a friend called me Saturday morning to find out if we knew whether the store had sustained much damage.

Saturday morning my father went to Sabbath services as he always did. He would not drive to Joseph Avenue to assess the damage on the Sabbath. Even if he had wanted to he couldn't have gone because the police had set up a twenty-block perimeter to contain the rioting. By Sunday night the National Guard had been called in. When I saw pictures of Joseph Avenue beset by the police with dogs on the front page of the *New York Times*, I felt a stab of deep pain. The avenue which I remembered as a street of hope and vitality was now littered and devastated, the embodiment of despair and hopelessness.

When we finally got to our store we saw that it had not been touched. My father was relieved and happy. "You see," he declared, "my neighbors like me. They know I treat everyone the same."

"Father, what's happening is bigger than just having your neighbors like you. I think the rioting didn't spread as far as Clifford Avenue. Most of the trouble stopped a block or two away from the store." He thought I was wrong, and his store was untouched by design.

After the riot many businesses left the area. My father saw no reason to move away. He liked his neighborhood and he liked his customers, whoever they were and as few as they might be. With less fish to sell and fewer customers, my father did make some concessions. He began going to work later in the day. There was no need to get up at dawn to chop ice, and ready all the boxes of fish. He no longer rolled the big barrels of herring or pickles or black olives outside to line them up at the store front. Indeed, who would have bought the schmaltz herring or olives or dill pickles?

A new generation of shoppers did not want to come down to Joseph Avenue to shop. Many younger housewives bought their herring and pickles and olives in jars from the supermarket. They bought their gefilte fish in jars. Most men his age would have retired and enjoyed their leisure. We daughters encouraged our father to retire, but he brushed such suggestions aside. He was in his mid-sixties and still strong and full of energy. He may have spent fewer hours in the store, but he still enjoyed going there and talking to customers, both old and new. He told us, "I open the store when I want to. I close up when I want to. I'm not working hard."

It must have been about this time that my father's enjoyment of buying and selling found an outlet in garage sales. He discovered all kinds of bargains that he brought to the store to sell. His shelves slowly began to fill up with dishes, wearing apparel, appliances, knickknacks and an odd assortment of merchandise. The customers responded positively to his new line of goods by buying much of what he put up for sale. He had developed his own method of searching out bargains.

Early on Sunday he surveyed the garage sale scene, and if the price was right, he made his purchases. If the prices were not right, he returned at the end of the day and bought the items he wanted, most often reduced in price by then. His strategy was to come by just as the last browsers of the day were leaving a garage sale. The garage salesperson might have begun to tiredly pack up his leftovers --the articles that had not sold.

"How much do you want for all the stuff on this table?" my father told me he asked. Sometimes a little negotiating was required, but a deal was usually struck with both sides pleased. My father would scoop up his bargains and take them all to the store. He had room to tastefully display his garage sale wares because there were fewer boxes of fish and fewer grocery items. In front of the remaining fish boxes where raw fish stared in amazed surprise, he had lined up shoes-- men's, women's children's. Some were a little run down, but others were in fairly good shape.

A housewife might come in for some Campbell's tomato soup and

leave with a pair of leather gloves, a little frayed at the finger tips, but still quite wearable. Perhaps a young matron would ask for five pounds of sugar and my father would take the opportunity to show her a set of drinking glasses and say, "I'm selling it cheap, Missus, because one is missing and one is chipped a little bit. you can't hardly see where."

To a customer coming in to buy a can of peas, my father would hold up a sweater and say, "I think you need a new sweater. What you're wearing is looking very bad."

He might question a housewife, "Do you need a toaster? This one works very good."

A slight, somewhat shabby looking older man came in one time and asked my father if he had any pants to sell. My father, undoubtedly using long dormant skills from his days in the clothing industry, assured his customer that he could outfit him perfectly. Rummaging through a pile of neatly folded pants that he had next to the display of Maxwell House Coffee, my father pulled out a navy blue pair of pants.

Holding it up and measuring his customer with his eyes, my father suggested the customer try it on over his old pants to see if it would fit. I watched this transaction as it evolved. The pants, even over the customer's clothes, were a little loose, but the customer seemed pleased. Here's a belt. I'll throw it in for nothing," my father said. "You already look better from when you came in."

Customers began bringing him articles they hoped to sell. Some of them might not have had very much cash and wanted to barter. He might accept a pair of men's work pants or a few pairs of socks, if they met his not too exacting standards, in exchange for a fish or grocery order. By the late sixties the store began to resemble a second hand store or thrift shop. The special of the week was prominently displayed in the store front window. The special was always a bicycle.

My son, David, who was then thirteen, was building bikes in our garage and bringing them to my father to sell. David had listened to his own father tell of how he had put together his first bicycle from bits and pieces of old bicycle parts. Dan had often reminisced about the Great Depression and had told David that "in my day" he had had to figure out how to make what they could not afford to buy.

David began to spend many hours trying to put together a bicycle from parts.

He found the bike parts in the trash people left in front of their house for the garbage collectors. He rode around the neighborhood and beyond, looking for discarded bicycles. If he could not get these bicycle skeletons to our house alone, he enlisted our help. We drove over and picked them up in our car and deposited them in our garage. Several

times he found a pile of bicycle frames near the railroad tracks where he walked to East High School (which was also a junior high at that time).

He wondered why there were so many frames there. He brought home whatever he found. Suddenly there were no bike frames left near the tracks. Their appearance and disappearance remained a mystery, although someone suggested long afterward that those bike frames might have come from stolen bicycles. David saved all the parts he found and had a large inventory of parts from which to choose. At one point he had several big boxes of parts and twenty complete bikes. With every bike made, he grew more expert. Occasionally neighborhood children came by to buy a bike.

Like all the grandchildren, he had worked in his grandfather's store on Sundays from the time he was eight or nine. All of them, boys and girls alike, spent some time in the store learning a little philosophy and salesmanship from my father. He told them all "You got to give the customers what they want --good, cheap merchandise, good service." He taught his young helpers to say "Thank you, call again" at the end of every transaction. David wanted to say "Thanks a lot", but my father demanded that everyone say it his way --Thank you, call again. Nobody argued with Grandfather.

David loved unpacking cartons of groceries and displaying the merchandise in a more decorative arrangement. Not for him simply piling cans one on top of the other. All the children dusted displays, cleaned the display cooler, swept the floor and sometimes waited on customers. Gail's favorite job was sitting behind the cash register, making change. She still remembered, years later, that at the end of her "shift" a can of purple passion pop was her reward. Alan recalled weighing out one pound bags of dried split peas from a fifty pound bag. Jeff, Paul, Maureen, and Randy also served their apprenticeship. In a year or more most of them became too busy or found other interests, and they no longer found much time to go to the store. David, however, now had a lucrative business partnership with his grandfather. He searched for old bicycles, repaired or remade them, and gave them to his grandfather to sell. Whatever the bicycle could be sold for was turned over to David. My father took no commission.

My son said he never forgot the lessons he learned from his Grampa. One of my father's axioms was "You gotta spend money to make money," David did not hesitate to buy a needed part if the part would make the bike work better.

"It didn't take me too long to figure out that if I spent the money to buy a necessary part, the finished bike would bring more than enough money to pay for the part and still make a profit. Grampa wanted me to

find out what a second-hand bike was worth, and what we could sell it for. He told me his customers could not pay a lot. I learned to cover my costs and then ask for a little more. The bikes in the window never stayed there more than a week."

Once when David delivered a bicycle to the store and it didn't sell fast, my father brought it back to David. He told David that it wasn't selling because the wheels were rusty, They needed to be cleaned. He made David understand that seeing rusty wheels turned people off. It didn't look good, and maybe people felt there were other things wrong.

"If you want to sell your bicycles for the right price you have to do everything you can to improve it," my father told him, This advice annoyed David at first. He wanted to sell his bikes as quickly as possible, but he knew his grandfather dealt directly with the customer. He respected his grandfather's experience and wisdom. David told me much later, "I learned to "detail" the bikes."

He came to appreciate how important it was to pay attention to details. He was becoming a craftsman. So, as David spent Sundays working on bikes, my father spent Sundays driving around looking for garage sales. Business was booming and their partnership was thriving. On July 9, 1972 everything stopped.

Editor's note. Sam Schafer was blinded in a robbery of his store as was 19-year-old Robert Paro as he worked at a gas station on West Main Street. The two male assailants were never caught, but both Sam Schafer and Robert Paro continued to work and raise families in Rochester. The Joseph Avenue and West Main Street neighborhoods are undergoing aggressive renovations as new families and businesses move in. Entire streets like Cuba Place and whole blocks of West Main Street have been rebuilt. New homes have been built where once delapidated housing stood. What has remained constant is the strength and vitality of the neighborhood's people.

Ruth Lempert is a retired librarian who grew up in the Joseph Avenue neighborhood and is writing memoirs for her family.

Back cover: Ruth Lempert returned to her old neighborhood to work with the city of Rochester and Habitat For Humanity on new homes. She knew the neighborhood as a vibrant, healthy place to live and believes the area will be restored. She remembers that her father's fish market just north of Clifford Avenue on Joseph Avenue was near Simon's Dairy and Union Trust bank on the corner. Horses drank from a trough in front of the bank. Straight across Clifford Avenue on Joseph Avenue, a few doors away, the City boarded their horses at Morgan's Barn. From her house Ruth could see through the storefront windows of the Lincoln Branch Library. Photograph courtesy of City of Rochester.



