

THAT'S MY STORY!

*the art of being in the right place
at the right time*



by

Jim Ackerman

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DEDICATION

*To my wife and life's partner, Lois
and to my family,
past, present and future*

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INTRODUCTION

It's been said that we all have but one life to live, but I don't buy it. I feel that if a person is willing to open a book and read, there is no limit to the number of lives that may be lived. I invite you to read the pages of this book, to sit in my place and, for a time, see the world through my eyes. Why do I want you to do this? That's a darned good question.

I did not write this memoir to satisfy my ego or to boast of my success. As you will discover, most of my good fortune in life was the result of being in the right place at the right time. In other words...luck. Certainly I made decisions that helped me to take advantage of these lucky situations. But I really don't believe that my story is suitable as a blueprint to be followed by someone wishing to achieve business or personal success. If it does so, that's fine, but establishing myself as some sort of role model is not the main purpose of this book.

I did not write this biography to reveal insider gossip about some of the well-known individuals I've known over the years. I'll leave that to the tabloids and to others.

Except for a bit in the Conclusion, I'm really not interested in expounding on my political and religious views or promoting my personal philosophy of life. This book is no manifesto. It's simply one man's story. One very fortunate man.

My true and fundamental purpose in putting pen to paper and chronicling my life is this: I want my family to know who I am and, in some way, to learn who they are as well. Our family background can be traced back to the early Jewish communities of central Europe. This fact doesn't make me any better than anyone else, but it does provide a context of where I stand in the flow of history. I believe it's important for all people to understand how they are linked to those who went before. I hope this book will serve this purpose for the members of my family and any others who may be interested.

In the mid-nineteenth century, our family immigrated to the United States and settled in the unique Midwest community of Ligonier, Indiana. Unique because at one point, the town's population was nearly fifty percent Jewish. I possess precious childhood memories of this vanished world and I believe they are worth sharing. I hope that you'll agree.

Like many young Americans, after having completed military service during World War II and the Korean War, I saw myself standing at the threshold of a new era; one full of promise and opportunity. Like many of my peers who sought to establish a new postwar reality, I became part of what some have called the Greatest Generation. I married Lois, my life partner, and began raising a family. As I established my business career I soon came into contact with an emerging technology that would serve to influence the remainder of my life, Cable Television. As my activities in this

industry led me into the world of finance and investment banking, I was fortunate to have a ringside seat to one of the most explosive business phenomena in American history. As a result, I hold memories of unforgettable episodes that I wish to preserve in an honest historical record. This book seeks to fulfill that purpose.

Finally, I have a few personal reasons for creating this testimony of my life's odyssey. Like most men who reach age eighty, I have started to consider my own mortality. If an interest should exist, after I depart this world, in my life and in my career, I'd like to be the author of what future generations read about me. Not because I'm trying to sweep anything under the rug, but because I believe that no one can better tell my story than me. I have tried to be complete and concise in recounting my life's journey. I've included both the good times and the not so good and can honestly say, I've presented the whole story. As you hold this volume, it's no exaggeration to say that: "My life is in your hands!"

So, thank you for trying on my life for the short time it will take you to read these pages. I hope that you'll find it stimulating and of some value. And, if any of it sounds unbelievable...as it says on the cover, *That's My Story*...and I'm sticking to it.

Jim Ackerman

August 2003

PROLOGUE

The backseat was our domain. My little brother, Danny, and I had by now surveyed every square inch of the big Buick's spacious backseat — from the armrests to the ashtrays. While we could, if we so chose, listen in on Mom and Dad's conversation in the front seat, we somehow believed that the backseat was our private territory and that they were unable hear our chatter. As a curious nine-year old, I was constantly bouncing from one side of the Buick's backseat to the other, — pointing out a water tower on the right, a painted barn on the left to Danny, five years my junior.

By now, the road had become a familiar one. I knew almost every turn of the 104-mile journey from our home in Lima, Ohio to the Indiana hamlet of Ligonier where our family had first laid down roots after emigrating from Germany back before the Civil War. My Dad, Joe Ackerman, would pack us all up on the second Saturday of each month to make the three-hour trip to visit his parents, Ferd and Blanche back in Ligonier. Although as I got older, this monthly ritual became something of a chore, at this point I was excited by the lure of the open road and considered it an adventure. In those days before auto A.C., I loved feeling the wind in my face as the Buick sped westward along Highway 33 through Ft. Wayne and towards Ligonier, a picture post-

card of a town that seemed, even to my young eyes, to have been more or less untouched by the ravages of the Great Depression.

Pulling up to the house, I could see my grandfather waiting for us on the porch. He'd instruct us to wash off our road dust and hurry to the kitchen where my grandmother had laid out her home-baked cookies and coffee cake. Both Dad and Grandpa were businessmen — descended from the Schloss and Mier families who were among the founders of Ligonier's renowned Jewish community. Along with the Straus family they had founded a large portion of the town's business, financial and civic institutions. Grandpa Ferd had traded in real estate until his early retirement some eighteen years earlier. Dad was a merchant like his uncle Ben who ran the Ackerman Mercantile Company, a mini-department store in nearby Albion, the Noble County seat. Dad was in the wholesale seed business, doing business with the local farmers in Lima, Ohio. Both men shared a passion. They loved to invest in the stock market.

So it was that after downing the last cup of coffee and some of Grandma's delicious "schnecken" (*round yeast cakes*), both men would retire to the parlor and discuss Wall Street and share their latest investment tips. I loved listening in on these chats and although there was much I didn't understand, I got the general idea. First you picked an industry and studied it. It helped if it was an industry you worked in, but part of the fun was making money in businesses you'd never get mixed up with like motion pictures or cattle breeding. Next you selected a few companies and studied them from top to bottom. You might even buy a single share just so you'd be sent the company's quarterly reports. Then you studied the numbers: the P & L, the balance sheet, the history of the stock price, how much money the president was paid and so

on. Finally, you selected a stock and held on to it. There were no hit-and-run profits here. If you bought a stock that meant you believed in the company and you were in it for the long haul.

I guess I absorbed a thing or two sitting there listening to Grandpa and Dad every month because by the time I was fifteen I had saved up enough money from my magazine route to make my first purchase — twenty shares of Sinclair Oil. It turned out to be a good investment — just as I had anticipated — and I was delighted when I was able to sell it years later at a substantial profit.

Those Saturday afternoons in my grandparents' parlor ignited a passion within me that burns to this day. It's the excitement you feel when you've picked your favorite team and they score the winning point. It's the thrill you feel when you've spotted something that others have overlooked — and that something turns out to be profitable. It's learning that sometimes you play a hunch and other times a hunch plays you. And it's believing that as long as you put a limit on your downside and place no limit on your upside, anything is possible.

And of course, what made the whole process so fascinating was the unknown element. No matter how much you prepare and study, when you put your money at risk, you have to expect the unexpected. And that requires a share or two of luck. I soon discovered that sometimes being lucky was better than being smart. The trick was always to maximize your odds of getting lucky by positioning yourself properly. I learned to cultivate my good luck by being receptive to it. I came to learn that you can't expect something to fall into your lap if you're always standing up looking the other way.

In the years to follow I would often exercise the investment principals I first absorbed from my family in Ligonier. These principals served me well and contributed to whatever financial success I have managed to achieve over the years. How much of that success was due to sound thinking and how much to sheer luck, I'll leave that for you to decide. As you read the pages that follow, you'll discover that at several key points I managed to be in just the right place at just the right time. That much was, of course, good luck. But, recognizing my good fortune at the time and then acting upon it— well, maybe that required some skill and even a bit of what may be termed art.

I was a fortunate son in many ways. I was blessed with parents who I loved and respected and who taught me values that have served me well in life. They ingrained within me a strong work ethic and a sense of common decency that molded me into the man I was to become. As I reflect on the business deals in which I participated over the years — mergers, IPOs, acquisitions — I can't help but think back to that couch in Grandpa's parlor where I sat listening and wide-eyed and developed my earliest appreciation for the art of being in the right place at the right time.

CHAPTER ONE — GOD’S ACRE

Like many American families, ours is deeply rooted in the earth of central Europe. Exactly how and when the first Ashkenazi Jews arrived to the fertile Alsace region of what is now Germany is not clearly known although a Jewish presence is believed to date back to Roman times. The oldest Jewish tombstone from the area is dated 1224. Agriculture was developed by this time and many of the French and Germanic words spoken by Alsatians derived their meanings from the cultivation of the soil. The German word “acker” referred to the amount of cultivated land a single ox could plow in a single day. “Acker” is the equivalent of the English word “acre” and in modern German means “plowed field.” The courtyard surrounding a German church became known as “Gottsacker” or God’s Acre. Although it was the word “acker” that our family selected as the basis for a required family name during the first decade of the 19th century, it was unlikely that they and the other Jews of Kerchberg, Lindenscheid, Colmar, Gemünden and other villages near Cologne actually engaged in much plowing of the earth. Since the Emancipation decree of 1791,

which allowed Jews to once again reside in the cities, they were giving up their agrarian pursuits and transforming into small merchants. By the time that the Jews of Alsace were ordered by Napoleonic decree to adopt so-called “Christian” names to facilitate the state’s ability to tax them, “Ackerman” was already an established surname.

While in some parts of Europe Jews were required to “purchase” a surname, in the Germanic regions of Alsace this was not the case. In the spirit of the Emancipation, Jews were permitted to freely choose a name from an approved list. These names were intended to meld Jews into the Germanic population and were often common Christian names. So when our family’s earliest known ancestor, Joseph of Kerchberg, selected the name Ackerman, it was probably not because he worked at plowing the fields. He probably liked the sound of the name. Or quite possibly he was demonstrating his disdain for the whole practice and simply selected at random one of the first names on the alphabetically arranged list. Whatever his reasons, Joseph Ackerman’s name appeared on the tax records of Kerchberg, Germany beginning in 1808. With the exception of a few years in the 1970’s during which time I was able to enjoy the tax sheltering benefits of the Cable TV business, the Ackermans have been paying taxes ever since.

Sadly, the history of the Jews of Alsace is written mostly in blood and tears. Since their arrival to the region during Roman times, through the persecutions of the middle ages up through their decimation during the Holocaust, the Jews of this region have endured more than their share of religious hatred and abuse. One of the earliest recorded outrages actually took place twice. The entire Jewish population of Rufach,

some 650 souls, was massacred by sword and fire on January 13, 1298 and again on Jan. 25, 1338 after the community had been re-established. The killing ground where the bloodletting took place is still known as Judenmatt Meadow today.

On February 14, 1349, St. Valentine's Day, the entire Jewish population of Strasbourg, 2,000 men women and children, were publicly burned alive. A few managed to save themselves by agreeing to be Baptized. Children were snatched from the flames by onlookers and Baptized on the spot. A similar mass murder had taken place in Colmar on December 29 of the prior year.

Between 1336 and 1339 a terrorist band of peasants, under the leadership of a vicious Jew-hater who dubbed himself Koenig Armleder (*King Leather-arm*), attacked and plundered Jewish communities throughout Alsace.

For the next five hundred years the Jews of Alsace, along with their fellow Jews in many areas of Europe, endured alternating waves of acceptance and repression at the hands of their Christian neighbors. Pogroms, blood libel, inquisitions forced Jews out of urban areas into the countryside where they could secretly construct synagogues and continue their traditions in hiding. During these long centuries, political control of Alsace changed hands many times between Germany and France, with the region falling under French control in 1648 under the Treaty of Westphalia.

It was into a period of relative tolerance into which Joseph Ackerman, my great-great grandfather was born. Under the Emancipation, in the wake of the French Revolution, Jews were, for the first time, to be afforded citizenship, although their rights to own property and enter into certain professions was still highly curtailed.

Joseph Ackerman no doubt witnessed the construction of Kerchberg's first synagogue — one of the over 175 such “shuls” to go up in the area during this period. While Jews continued to gain more civil rights during the first half of the 19th Century, they were still subjected to religious hatred and discrimination. They also became subject to taxation, military conscription and other unpleasant aspects of their new-found citizenship. Instead of being “emancipated,” most Jews began to feel chained down by the limits imposed on their economic freedom. By the 1840's, oppressed Jews from throughout central Europe began a wave of migration that brought 150,000 German Jews to the shores of the “goldeneh medinah” — known as America.

Most immigrants from Alsace were young, educated and entrepreneurial members of established families, not the transient poor known as the Betteljuden (*begging Jews*) that filled the steerage compartments of the transatlantic vessels of the day. Rising anti-Semitism in Germany after the Revolution of 1848 fueled an expanding exodus of Jews from all strata of European society. Jewish flight from central Europe was also hastened as a result of the Irish potato famine in the mid 1840's. Starving Irish immigrants flooded the towns of Alsace and were given jobs that had been taken away from Jews. Finally, the Matrikel laws prevailing in southern Germany set a quota on the number of Jews permitted residence in any given district, forcing those who wished to start a family to leave their home communities. In all likelihood, it was one or more of these factors that prompted one of Joseph Ackerman's sons, Isaac, my great-grandfather, to bid farewell to the Old World and to join the “huddled masses, yearning to breathe free.”

CHAPTER TWO — FROM LAUFERSWEILER TO LIGONIER

Isaac Ackerman was born in 1836 in the town of Kerchberg that, by this time, was considered part of Prussia. He arrived to the U.S. in 1850. Given his youth it may be presumed that he was fleeing conscription into the Prussian military that was known to forcibly induct Jewish boys as soon as they reached the age of 14. The migration from Isaac's community to America had begun two years earlier, in 1848, when two men, Solomon Mier from Kerchberg and Frederick William Straus of nearby Laufersweiler, first arrived on American soil.

While many German Jewish immigrants (*about 65,000*) settled along America's Eastern seaboard, wealthier émigrés could afford to probe further inland, avoiding the crowded cities and seeking out cheap farmland and this bustling new land's many other economic opportunities. Mier and Straus quickly understood that the country's rapidly expanding railroads were carrying the future of the American economy. They

believed that fortunes could be made by following the long steel tracks that paved the path of America's westward expansion. At this point the major industrial centers of the country were being linked by a new network of railroad lines. The two newcomers observed that the rail route from New York to Chicago had reached Toledo and had to now pass through northern portion of a place called Indiana — so that's where the two headed. Selecting a region of the state that reminded them of the topography and climate of their Alsatian homeland, Mier and Straus settled on the relatively flat, lake-studded region of northeast Indiana, probably arriving first to Fort Wayne where the town's first formal synagogue had just opened its doors in 1848.

Once settled, the two men sent for their families and as word spread back in Alsace of the vast opportunities available in the new world, they were soon joined by other Jewish pioneers — among them, my great-grandfather, Isaac Ackerman.

Working as business partners, Mier and Straus began as pack peddlers, calling on the remote farmhouses that dotted the Indiana landscape. Young Isaac joined the enterprise and soon met Solomon Mier's attractive young sister, Harriet, who had recently arrived to America from Lindenschied. The two would marry before the outbreak of the Civil War, but not before an important event would profoundly effect the direction of their transplanted community.

One hot summer's day in 1853 the two young and ambitious pack peddlers, Mier and Straus, found themselves in the small village of Wawaka, Indiana. Having both studied English while still in Europe, they were able to read the local newspaper with no difficulty. The headline heralded the news that the Lake Shore and Michigan

Southern Railroad, currently constructing a rail line towards Chicago, would soon open a depot station in nearby Ligonier. Advertisements solicited railway workers to help build and work at the new station. It appeared to Mier and Straus that tiny Ligonier, population 300, could easily become a staging area for Chicago's burgeoning meat processing industry. Ligonier was going to become the next railroad boomtown. This was their opportunity to "get in on the ground floor" and they decided to investigate. Solomon Mier and F.W. Straus walked the six miles to Ligonier and after one look decided to move their little German Jewish colony to this sleepy village — soon to be awakened by the whistle and rumble of steam locomotives. The two peddlers arrived in Ligonier in 1854, along with family members and countrymen — including 18-year-old Isaac and his bride-to-be, Harriet, my great-grandparents—and thereby founded a Jewish community that was to flourish for the next hundred years.

The village of Ligonier itself had been founded by a German Mennonite or Amish farmer by the name of Isaac Cavin in 1835 who named the new town after his birthplace, Lingonier, Pennsylvania. (*the latter having been named after the commander of British military forces during the French and Indian War*). Amish westward migration, driven by the search for affordable farmland, had brought them to Northeast Indiana where their descendents still live today. Mier and Straus's assessment of Ligonier's growth potential turned out to be correct. The railroad, connecting Toledo to Chicago, was completed in 1857 and spurred rapid agricultural and industrial expansion. By 1865 the town's population had almost quadrupled to 1,100.

The German Jewish families who re-settled in Ligonier found an atmosphere of religious tolerance among the Amish of Noble County. This fact, no doubt, had influ-

enced Mier and Straus's decision to settle there. As the town grew, F.W. Straus soon opened a small general store on Calhoun Street and by 1860 his enterprise had grown sufficiently to allow him to bring his brothers Mathias and Jacob to Indiana from Prussia.

Meanwhile, Isaac Ackerman, continued peddling pots and pans to the rural residents situated around Ligonier. My father used to tell the story about the time his Grandpa Isaac called upon the Yoder farm one day. Isaac, who had been suffering with a lame horse, spotted a fine healthy animal belonging to Farmer Yoder.

"Why not we trade horses, Mr. Yoder," suggested Isaac.

"Sure, why not?" came the reply. "Of course, you'll have to pay me a little something to make up for the difference in value."

"Oh, sure," said Isaac. "What about two dollars?" Yoder agreed to the price and Grandpa Isaac wrote out an I.O.U. slip and handed it to Mr. Yoder. Yoder looked at it and handed it back to Isaac with a laugh saying: "I don't need a blessed thing to remind me when somebody owes me money. You better keep that slip to remind yourself and make sure you don't forget my two bucks!"

As the Jewish community of Ligonier grew, so did its assimilation into the mainstream civic and cultural life of the city. Instead of engendering resentment, as it had done in Europe, the Jews' growing prosperity gained the respect and admiration of their gentile neighbors. This excerpt from a tome called **A History of Noble County** written in 1882 by a Weston A. Goodspeed (?) illustrates the prevailing attitudes of the day:

Soon after the growth of the village underwent a revival thanks to the ...railroad that now passed through town, quite a number of the shrewdest and business-like and prosperous class of people, known as Jews, established themselves at Ligonier and the population and business within five years quadrupled. The Jews with plenty of money have continued to come until no town in Indiana of the same size contains as high a number of these excellent people. The beauty, amiability and grace of the (Jewish) Ligonier ladies is proverbial. Myers (*sic*) and Straus dealings in clothings and dry goods began business about 1854.

Like F.W. Straus, Solomon Mier also opened a dry goods store directly across the street from Straus's. Arriving to town as business partners in 1854, the two founders of the Ligonier Jewish community had a falling out during the early 1860's and became bitter rivals and lifelong enemies. Both achieved success and prosperity during the Civil War and by 1868, the Straus brothers founded the Citizens Bank of Ligonier on Cavin Street. Not to be outdone, Mier countered with the Banking House of Solomon Mier just a half-block south and catty-cornered from Citizens Bank. The two men eventually became the city's foremost financial figures as their rivalry fueled the town's economic and cultural development. As the Straus Brothers Co. moved into real estate; so, too, did the Mier-Ackerman-Schloss contingent. Later both parties began to manufacture carriages and buggies - and just after the turn of the century the Strauses moved on to newfangled automobiles — producing the classy “Runabout” touring car.

The rivalry between Mier and Straus took a personal turn. There were no marriages between first and second-generation members of the two families. While the Straus good fortunes were largely due to the joint efforts of the three brothers, Mier was not assisted by any family members until his sons reached maturity and instead formed

alliances with other immigrant families — most notably the Ackermans and the Schlosses.

Great-grandfather Isaac Ackerman became successful at buying and selling farm real estate and soon sent for his brothers Solomon, Michael and Simon to join him in America. In 1865 Isaac was elected Vice-president of the newly founded synagogue, Congregation Ahavath Shalom (*Lovers of Peace*) which aligned itself with the emerging Reform movement in America. Reform Judaism is a progressive denomination that does not demand strict observance of Jewish Talmudic law and seeks to adapt historic Judaism to the needs of the modern world.

Despite the feuding during this period, with the Straus family on one side and the Mier-Ackerman-Schloss families on the other, both factions managed to agree on their devotion to Reform Judaism and were instrumental in building, in 1871, a small frame synagogue on Main Street. In 1888, they again underwrote the \$15,000 construction cost of a larger and more elaborate brick temple. Today the Temple building houses the museum of the Ligonier Historical Society. The Mier and Straus families each donated one of the four stained glass windows that may be seen in the building today.

Isaac and Harriet Ackerman settled in nearby Spencerville where they raised six children including my grandfather, Ferdinand, who was born in 1862. Ferd's two brothers were Simon and Ben and his three sisters were named Hattie, Tillie and Fanny. Ferd and brother Simon continued in their father's farm real estate business and became quite successful during the years leading up to World War I. They operated in Indiana, Ohio, Michigan and Canada with their headquarters office in the Penobscot

Building in Detroit. Shortly before the outbreak of the Great War, Ferd, at age 51, decided to retire from the business. He walked into Simon's office one summer's day in 1913 and announced:

"I'm getting out, Simon. I'm cashing in my chips and going fishing."

"But, why!?" asked his incredulous brother.

"Lots of reasons, but mainly because of the McClinton Farm deal up in Canada," replied Ferd.

"What do you mean?" demanded Simon.

"We just brokered a sale of the place for \$250 an acre. We also loaned the buyer \$200 an acre to buy the place and took back a mortgage note."

"So what's the problem?" asked Simon.

"The land is only worth \$125 an acre! We made a great sales commission, but now we've got all this exposure. If the buyer should default we'll be left holding the bag. You can keep this up if you want to, but I don't want to take these kind of risks with my money."

Ferd was as good as his word. He cashed out for \$25,000 and spent the next 27 years fishing at nearby Lake Wawasee. Between fishing trips, Grandpa built up his net worth by making a series of smart investments in the stock market throughout the Depression years. He left behind a small fortune that enabled his widow, Blanche (*née Schloss*) to live in luxury until her death in 1961. Simon was able to stay in business without his brother Ferd for only two more years before going bankrupt.

Blanche was Grandpa Ferd's second wife. Ferd's first wife was Blanche's sister, Bella — my biological grandmother. Ferd married his first wife, Bella Schloss on June 21, 1892. One year later, almost to the day, Bella gave birth to my father, Joseph Ferdinand Ackerman in Ligonier. Eight years afterward, on February 3, 1901, Bella, aged 31, was set to give birth to her second child. As Ferd and little Joseph waited for the new arrival, they sat in the family parlor listening to Bella read aloud from her favorite novel, **Little Women** by Louise Mae Alcott. Bella stopped reading suddenly, put down the book and gave Ferd a look that said "Now's the time." Ferd sent for the doctor who arrived and, after examining Bella, quietly advised Ferd that there were serious complications. Given the state of medical science at the time and the resources they had at hand, there was little hope. Neither mother nor baby survived the childbirth.

Bella was survived by her two twin sisters, Blanche and Hattie Schloss. The three sisters were the daughters of Leopold and Amelia Schloss. Amelia was born Amelia Straus in Gemunden, Germany and was the cousin of F.W. Straus, one of the founders of the Ligonier Jewish community. Amelia married Leopold Schloss who had been born in Lindenschied in 1842 and emigrated to Ligonier during the 1850's — in the same wave that brought my other great-grandfather, Isaac Ackerman, to America. Leopold Schloss was actually born Leonard Schloss, but upon his arrival to American soil he was informed by an immigration official that the name Leonard was "too Germanic." The officer advised Leonard to change it to something more American-sounding and suggested the name "Leopold." Great-grandpa agreed and from then on

became known as Leopold Schloss. After a few years in America, Great-grandpa Leopold invited his brother to join him. The brother soon arrived from Prussia and made his way to Ligonier where Leopold Schloss introduced him to the community as his newly arrived brother named...Leopold Schloss! Born as "Leopold and Leonard" back in the old country, here in America both brothers now were named Leopold. Evidently the situation became entirely too confusing and, after a few years, Leopold the Second returned back to Europe.

In the wake of their anguish over the loss of their daughter, Bella, during childbirth, Leopold (*the First*) and Amelia maintained a close relationship with their widower son-in-law, my grandfather Ferd Ackerman. They encouraged Ferd to become friendly with one of their remaining twin daughters, Blanche. In a twist on Jewish Talmudic law that requires an unmarried man to wed his brother's widow, Grandpa Ferd courted and married the sister of his late wife. Ferd married Blanche Schloss two years after Bella's death. They had one child together, my uncle Alfred.

Now here's where it gets a bit confusing. Ferd's brother and erstwhile business partner, Simon Ackerman, decided to marry the other Schloss twin sister, Hattie. So, at the end of the day, two brothers wound up marrying three sisters, two of whom were twins. And, oh yes, Hattie Ackerman became her very own sister-in-law! (*see family tree in Appendix*).

With the passing of Mier and Straus, leadership at their respective banks passed to their sons. A.B. Mier took over as president of his father's bank, which had been renamed Mier State Bank. It proudly announced in November 1919 that it had become

a "million dollar bank," with assets of \$1,005,486. Likewise, Isaac 'Ike' Straus, son of Jacob, became president of Citizens Bank.

In a move that finally ended the long rivalry, Citizens and Mier State Bank announced on Nov. 29, 1928, that the two institutions would merge to form the American State Bank with assets of approximately \$2 million.

The two leading officers of the new bank were A.B. Mier, who was named president, and bachelor Abe Ackerman serving as chairman of the board. Abe, born in 1867, was the son of Isaac Ackerman's brother, Solomon. Interestingly, Abe was aligned with the Strauses at Citizen's Bank and not with the Mier family. Their joining forces marked the end of an era of animosity. It also served to produce a very strong financial institution. The new American State Bank, unlike many of similar size, remained solvent and kept its doors open through the darkest days of the Depression.

It was during this period that Abe's brother, Ben Ackerman, born in 1879, expanded the family's business activities to the town of Lima, Ohio, 104 miles to the east of Ligonier. It was there that he, along with a cousin, Max Hyman, founded the Ackerman Seed Company, a wholesale grain elevator that purchased wheat, corn and seed from local farmers and re-sold it to buyers across the country. It was this company that would draw our family to Lima, Ohio — the town where I was born.

CHAPTER THREE — FROM LIGONIER TO LIMA

Starting in the 1920's the "Diaspora" or dispersion of Ligonier's Jewish community picked up speed. As the second and third generations reached maturity, and as their families developed the means to send their children to boarding schools and universities, fewer and fewer chose to remain at the Ligonier homestead. My father, Joseph, always hungered to get out and see the world. As a teenager he would ride horseback the 15 mile stretch to Albion, the county seat, to visit with Grandpa Ferd's brother, Ben (*not to be confused with cousin Ben Ackerman in Lima, Ohio*) and his family. Ben operated a very successful department store in Albion, the Ackerman Mercantile Company, and that's where Dad picked up much of his strong salesmanship ability. After attending Howe Military Academy in Howe, Indiana during his final year of high school, Dad was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1917. He was sta-

tioned at the remount station in San Antonio, Texas where he was responsible for breaking in horses for the U.S. Cavalry.

After the Great War, Dad spent one year at the University of Illinois in Champagne and then went to work for one of the family businesses, the Wertheimer Seed Company. The Wertheimers followed founders Mier and Straus to Ligonier in 1854. They had married into the Mier family and prospered in the grain, seed and wool trades. Their business territory stretched across Indiana and Ohio and Dad was sent out on the road selling seed and feed grain to Midwestern small-town grain elevators.

In 1922 Dad found himself calling on buyers in the hard-bitten farm town of Defiance, Ohio. As he did in most towns he visited, the young man sought out whatever Jewish community he could find. In Defiance he met an older seed dealer, Daniel Lieberthal. Mr. Lieberthal, aged 66, had emigrated from Minsk in Latvia as the second wave of Jewish immigration, this time from Eastern Europe, reached America's shores in the late 1880's. He traced his family roots back to Holland where they were known by the name Van Lieberthal. At some point the family settled in Latvia where the name was changed to Vonlieberthal and upon coming to America, Daniel dropped the "von" and the name became simply Lieberthal.

Sadie, Daniel's wife, aged 58, was born in Syracuse, New York as Sarah Wendell. They wed in 1880 in Michigan City, Michigan and lived for a time in remote Iron Mountain where Daniel operated a department store. The couple found the climate in Iron Mountain disagreeable and made their way to Defiance, Ohio where they set to work building a successful seed business. Dad was impressed with Mr. Lieberthal's varied business activities that included trading in cattle hides and scrap iron as well as

his interests in scrap paper. As Dad and Mr. Lieberthal roamed the large scrap iron yard behind the expansive family home, Dad learned that Mr. Lieberthal's brother was the well-respected Chicago dermatologist, Dr. David Lieberthal, and became even further impressed by this family's many achievements since arriving in America. But Dad was most impressed by one of Daniel and Sadie Lieberthal's three children — their strikingly beautiful 24-year-old daughter, Miriam — who would become my mother. Joe was smitten with this small-town beauty with her polished and cosmopolitan demeanor. Miriam, for example, was an accomplished classical pianist and was quite proud of the fact that she had studied at the famed Chicago Conservatory of Music.

As Dad got to know the family he became familiar with some of Mr. Lieberthal's habits. As they strolled and chatted, Dad observed Mr. Lieberthal's ever-present tobacco pouch emerge at regular intervals from the older man's pocket. Mr. Lieberthal smoked the equivalent of three packs of cigarettes daily, deftly rolling each one by hand. Despite this lifelong habit, Grandpa Lieberthal reached the ripe age of eighty-eight.

Dad learned that the senior gentleman still made the daily walk to his office and warehouse some two blocks from his home. He would walk home for lunch and take a quick nap before returning to work in the afternoon. Most evenings Mr. Lieberthal, a 33rd degree Mason, would stroll over to the Masonic or to the Elks Lodge where he would play cards until 10 or 11 PM. Upon returning home, he would often engage Sadie in a round of pinochle for another hour or so before retiring. One evening, as

Dad and Mr. Lieberthal were strolling back to the house, Dad asked for Miriam's hand in marriage.

"Aren't you rushing things a bit?" asked Mr. Lieberthal as he grabbed a clump of Turkish tobacco and rolled it into a piece of tissue thin paper.

"I'm almost thirty years old, sir and Miriam just turned twenty-four," Dad replied, "I figure it's about time for both of us to settle down."

"She's used to a pretty comfortable life and loves new clothes, Joe. She's not going to be cheap to keep up with. Do you have any prospects?"

"Well, sir," answered Dad, "I've got quite a bit saved up and there's an opportunity for me to buy into a terrific grain dealership in Lima. It'll be a lot of work, but if it's handled right, it could turn into a real gold mine."

Grandpa Lieberthal thought highly of the earnest young man who had proven himself to be hard working and honest in all their dealings. He gladly extended his blessings to the young couple without hesitation.

Within six months of their meeting, Joe had married Miriam in Defiance and they settled in Lima, Ohio. Two years later, on March 12, 1924, Mom gave birth to me, their first son, James Ferdinand Ackerman. I was a third generation American on my mother's side and a fifth generation on my father's — I guess that made me the All-American boy. My Dad soon began calling me Jim and it stuck. I've been just plain Jim ever since.

As he had discussed with Grandpa Lieberthal, Dad had bought out the interests of his cousin, Max Hyman in the Lima grain elevator business. Thus he found himself in

partnership with another cousin, Ben Ackerman and together they renamed the operation the Ackerman Seed Company. The company dealt in farm seed such as clover, timothy and alfalfa and soon became respected as an industry leader and innovator. In the 1930's the Ackerman Seed Company was one of the first to import soybean seeds from China and Manchuria. A move that launched an entirely new American agricultural market as the wonders of this product were uncovered.

After the fall harvest, local farmers in and around Lima would typically sell off the seeds they did not require for their own use to a nearby small-town grain elevator. The Ackerman Seed Company purchased this product from dozens of small-town dealers and then stored it in their large storage elevator in Lima. There it would be cleaned, processed into 180 lb. bags and placed into their storage bins for the winter. As the market for seeds re-emerged in the spring, the company sold its inventory to national distributors such as Scott Seed as well as back to the same elevators they bought from. to growers around the country. Normally, the re-sale price contained a profit margin that covered their expenses and left them a small profit. Farm seed, however, was a commodity item. This meant that the business was always exposed to market fluctuations. There were several years when seed prices would drop dramatically over the winter leaving my Dad and his partner with a painful loss for the year.

Eventually the company branched out into grain, purchasing corn, for example from local growers and re-selling it to large food processors like Kellogg's. A Christmas gift package from the Kellogg's company was annual fixture in our kitchen as I was growing up. The Ackerman Seed Company also offered a grain cleaning, sizing and separation service. For seed to become suitable for sale or storage it first had to

be processed. Farmers would pay a service fee to have their grain, which was often mixed with unwanted other grain as farmers switched crops, rendered uniform. Bits of earth, small pebbles, plant and insect waste, seed cases and the like were also filtered out.

While Lima may have been a tough place to be a seed and grain dealer, it was a terrific place to be a boy. One of my earliest memories is watching the circus come to town each summer. I'd wake up at 4 am just to watch the wagons make their way past our home to the big field near the grain elevator. I would then join the other kids as we watched the circus crews pitch the big top tent. Wandering the circus grounds with my buddies, I was totally mesmerized by the panthers, elephants and other exotic animals.

Our family's first home in Lima was half of a double on High Street. It was tiny with no room for even an upright piano. This was not really a problem since my mother had abandoned her visions of becoming a concert pianist and Dad, I'm afraid, was not much of a music lover. When I was two years old we moved to a three-bedroom home located at 720 State Street. It was a typical post-war American home, across the street from a gigantic city park. The 1930 Federal Census appraised the value of that home at \$10,000 making it the most valuable one on the block. The census report also revealed the fact that we owned a radio and that my parents were both literate and able to speak English. It listed my Dad's profession as "Jewish Proprietor" and his business as "Grain Elevator." The census incorrectly reported the ages and birthplaces of both my parents and went on to state that my father was not a veteran, when, in fact, he served in the U.S. Army during World War I.

In 1930 Lima, Ohio, the county seat, enjoyed a population of over 40,000 with over 100,000 living in Allen County. The town was originally settled in 1831 and incorporated in 1842. Located in a fertile farm area 70 miles north of Dayton, it soon became known as a processing and marketing center for grain, dairy and meat products. The town's first synagogues, Temple Beth Israel, a Reform congregation, as well as the Orthodox Shaare Zedeck synagogue both opened their doors in 1903. The two congregations merged in 1966. Lima had been a major oil and natural gas producing center at the beginning of the twentieth century, but this industry declined as richer oil fields were discovered in Texas.

Our life in Lima could only be described as mainstream, middle-class and, for a young boy growing up, mostly marvelous. I had a cadre of loyal school chums who stuck together and looked out for each other. Most of my friends' had parents who worked for one of the big companies in Lima such as Sohio Refinery, Buckeye Pipeline, Lima Locomotive or Westinghouse.

Our home on State Street was situated near a series of open hills that my buddies and I would attack with our snow sleds every winter. Flying down the snow-covered slopes with my pals every winter remains one of my warmest childhood memories. Summertime brought a steady schedule of softball with games held in the city park. There was no such thing as Little League in those days — in fact, no parental involvement at all — and that's the way we liked it. Teams were decided by choosing up sides from among the 15 to 20 neighborhood boys that would show up each day bearing their treasured baseball mitts. Disputes were settled the old-fashioned way — by the kid who owned the ball. Summer was also a time for building elaborate tree

houses — sometimes stretching two to three stories — in the park across the street. In the fall, our baseball diamond was converted to a football field and things proceeded pretty much the same way.

As described in the Prologue, regular monthly visits to my Grandpa Ferd and Grandma Blanche's large white home in Ligonier were a consistent part of my childhood experience. In addition, we religiously spent another weekend each month calling on my mother's parents back in Defiance, some 38 miles away. As it happened, Grandma Sadie's birthday was on Christmas Day and of course, we were bound to visit her on her birthday. This always resulted in some serious grumbling from me and my brother since we would have much rather stayed at home playing with our new Christmas toys.

While it wasn't an uphill hike both ways, I still walked or rode my bike to and from Lowell Grade School each day — regardless of the weather. I was considered a good student and managed to skip fifth grade altogether. This got me into Lima Central Junior High a year ahead of my classmates which was fine with me. Throughout Junior High and High School, I developed strong friendships with my classmates, only a few of whom were Jewish. I can honestly say, that despite the worldwide epidemic of anti-Semitism that plagued the world during those years, in our little corner of it, we remained untouched. After five generations in America, our family had become so assimilated into mainstream American life, we could not discern much difference between our lifestyle and that of our gentile neighbors. My boyhood experiences were identical to that of my friends. Some kids were Catholic, some were Methodist and a few of us were Jewish. It simply meant that we went to a different

house of prayer on the weekends. Although it was common knowledge that membership in the Shawnee Country Club was “restricted” and that meant “No Jews,” I can recall no cases of discrimination directed at our family or me during those years. We received no differential treatment despite the fact that Father Coughlin and others were broadcasting their venomous anti-Jewish diatribes on the radio on a regular basis. Of course, we heard about the suffering of Europe’s Jews after Hitler came to power, but all that seemed a world apart from the innocent Andy Hardy lives we were living in Lima.

In those days we were legally able to obtain a driver’s license at age fourteen, but I was in too much of a rush to wait that long. I convinced my Dad to teach me to drive as soon as I was tall enough to reach the pedals. He agreed to let me behind the wheel of the family’s big LaSalle roadster, but only on the backcountry roads where we were less likely to collide with another car. He would often let me drive during our regular monthly visits to a family farm owned by my grandfather Ferd in nearby Yoder, Indiana, located south of Fort Wayne — some 70 miles from Lima. My Dad and my uncle would inherit the farm upon Grandpa Ferd’s death in 1940, each brother receiving a fifty percent interest. Dad and Uncle Al owned and operated the farm for the next twenty-five years — leasing it to a tenant farmer who raised feed corn and milk cattle.

In 1966, Dad rather suddenly decided that it was time to sell the farm. He pressured Uncle Al to agree and finally convinced him to place it on the market. After the farm was sold, Dad confided in me and explained his reasoning for the sale. Dad said he realized that after his death, I would inherit an interest in the farm along with my

brother, Danny, and Uncle Al's two sons. He reckoned that I would be saddled with the job of managing the farm since my brother and cousins did not have much know-how in this area. Dad felt that this situation would become a burden for me and decided the best thing to do was to liquidate now. Shortly after the sale, Dad was stricken by a stroke and succumbed on June 15, 1967. I believe that the sale of the farm indicated Dad's perhaps subconscious understanding that his health was waning and his desire to get his affairs in order before the end.

About the time that I started at Central High school, we moved again to a four-bedroom brick home at 1700 Lakewood Avenue, located about two miles from the school. I would either ride my bike to school in the morning or Dad would drive me on his way to work. On those days I would trek back home on foot after school. Once a week, due to Mom's regular Thursday Bridge game, I was instructed to walk the 5 or 6 blocks to Lima's downtown area and buy my lunch. Mom would give me 25 cents that I would use to purchase two hamburgers and a milkshake for 20 cents. With the remaining nickel I would purchase a Coke at the soda fountain located inside Matthews Drug Store across the street from Lowell Grade School.

Since I was a year younger than most of my classmates, I never became much of an athlete in high school. I managed to make it on to the freshman football team as a second-string guard, but I didn't see much active duty. Despite all this, I still held a passion for sports and worked hard to become the student manager of both the varsity basketball and baseball teams for several seasons. My love of sports drove me to take a position on *The Mirror*, the school newspaper, where I served as sports editor during my senior year.

Although Dad made a comfortable living in the seed and grain business, it never really turned into the gold mine he had envisioned. My familiarity with the business was put to good use in 1946 when I was working towards graduation at Purdue University (*see next chapter*). I was offered the opportunity of receiving six credit hours if I submitted a suitable thesis and thereby earn my diploma a full semester ahead of schedule. The title of my thesis was: “Analytical Business Study of the Wholesale Seed Industry” and it examined the financial records of the Ackerman Seed Company over the years 1922 through 1946. The study revealed that the company earned a meager average net profit of only 3 percent per year and suffered through wide up and down swings in earnings. So, it was not too surprising that in 1947 Dad and his partner, Sheldon, who had taken over from his father, Ben Ackerman, decided to sell out to the Northrop King Seed Company (*now named Novartis Seed*) for the sum of \$100,000. Northrop King changed the name of the company to Central States Seed Service. As a relatively small operation, Ackerman Seed Company could not effectively compete against the farm bureaus and farm co-ops whose profits were distributed to its members and therefore not subject to federal income tax. After selling the Ackerman Seed Company, Dad went to work as a commercial real estate broker in Lima for a company called Fishel & Fishel.

My working life began at age fifteen when I applied for and was accepted as a sales clerk at the Leader Store, Lima’s largest department store. I worked every day after school and all day on Saturdays. I learned to sell shoes and men’s clothing in the store’s haberdashery department and assembled bicycles in preparation for sale. My pay was fifteen cents per hour and this simply did not bring in enough money each

week to suit me. I found that I could supplement my income by taking on a magazine route. In those days magazine subscribers received their issues hand delivered to their homes, rather than through the mail. I would sell subscriptions and then deliver copies of the Saturday Evening Post, Ladies Home Journal and Country Gentleman to dozens of neighboring homes. This job added an additional one dollar per week to my income.

Both my parents stressed the importance of hard work and thrift, but the most lasting and profound value they transmitted to me had to do with ethics. My parents certainly were not paragons of moral rectitude in the conventional sense. As a child during Prohibition, I snuck peeks after my bedtime as my parents drew the shades, joined friends and enjoyed some bathtub gin...that they had cooked up in our own bathtub. My father believed in demystifying alcohol to me and so, after Prohibition was repealed, he invited me to join him and mother whenever they would partake in a cocktail or a cordial at home. He believed, correctly, that by allowing me to have a drink with him in our living room, I would be less inclined to engage in wild drinking when I was away from the house. Evidently the strategy worked since I cannot recall ever having drunk to the point of intoxication.

Neither was my parents' moral code defined by strict religious observance. In fact, I recall my Dad pronouncing on several occasions that if Rabbi Dorfman continued inserting more Hebrew into our Temple services: "...I'm going to quit that place and join a Unitarian Church!"

Our family's lack of adherence to Jewish ritual sometimes resulted in problems. For example, we were pressed to conceal our family Christmas tree if we were ex-

pecting to a visit by Rabbi Dorfman. Concealing that tree reminded me of a “family legend” that I had heard many times as a child. As the story goes, back in Ligonier, whenever Great-grandpa Leopold Schloss would come to visit his daughter and son-in-law for dinner, Grandma Blanche would rush to conceal the big baked ham they normally kept in the kitchen. They say she used to cover it with a dishtowel and then shove it under the sink.

Despite our family’s distance from Jewish tradition, my parents, nevertheless enrolled me into the Temple’s Sunday School program. We were taught a bit of Hebrew along with teachings from the Old Testament. In 1939 I was “Confirmed” along with the other 4 Jewish boys in my Confirmation Class. This ceremony marked the completion of my Judaic studies and was celebrated in lieu of a Bar Mitzvah. Bar and Bat Mitzvah observations were not in fashion at Reform congregations in those days, so it was my Confirmation that marked this traditional life-cycle passage from childhood to adolescence.

While I learned some valuable lessons through Sunday School, the moral compass I inherited from my parents was not forged through sermonizing or religious training but rather by example. In my father, I observed a businessman who treated everyone fairly and with decency and respect. He could easily have taken advantage of the uneducated farmers whose seed and grain he bought and sold. He taught me that dishonesty — even if you get away with it — was dishonorable. Based upon his example, I entered young adulthood believing that it was possible to achieve success while at the same time conducting your business affairs in an ethical manner. I still believe it today.

The Ackerman Seed Company managed to hang on during the darkest days of the Depression. But like everyone else, our business and family were deeply affected by the nation's "hard times." When my parents could no longer afford to pay the three dollars per week salary to our live-in Catholic housekeeper, Monica, for example, she agreed to stay on just for the room and board we provided. The one hardship that stands out in my mind is a childhood memory of my father's refusal to buy me a pair of coveted long pants. I was forced to continue wearing childish knickers until my job at the Leader Department Store provided me with enough money for a \$3 pair of tweed trousers.

As related in the Prologue, it was during this time that I was introduced to the stock market through my father and grandfather's passion for investing. Thanks to the thrifty habits transmitted by my parents, I was able to save most of my salary and soon had accumulated enough money to make my first purchase: twenty shares of Sinclair Oil when I was 15 years old. In those days stocks were not purchased for speculation or anticipated appreciation. Rather a winning stock was considered one that paid out a handsome dividend to its shareholders. As the profits of Sinclair Oil grew — and were distributed — over the ensuing years leading up to World War II, I enjoyed a steadily growing return on my investment.

While school and work consumed most of my early adolescent years, I did find time for a two-week visit every summer to scenic Lake Wawasee, near Ligonier. Fishing, boating and hiking with my Dad and Grandpa Ferd provided some of the most idyllic and cherished memories of my youth. The rustic living quarters, nestled

in the lush pines surrounding the Lake, implanted a sense of connectedness to the soil of this region that would stay with me for life.

I entered high school in 1936 as a fun-loving typical all-American kid. The world would be a much different place when I graduated four years later. Like most teenagers, the most important part of my life was the relationships I enjoyed with my pals and buddies. We formalized our little circle of friends by creating a high school social club and adopting the preposterous name (*partially borrowed from the "Amos 'N Andy" radio show*) of "The Royal Order of the Mystic Knights of the Brotherhood of Screwballs," known simply as The Screwballs for short. The club's membership consisted of 13 boys and every year we would elect a senior girl as the club mascot. Affinity among the Screwballs was so tight, that we even engaged in group dating. Beginning in our Sophomore year, one of us would call a different girl for a date every weekend. If a girl accepted the date she was told simply that "One of the Screwballs will pick you up at 7:30 P.M., Saturday evening." She would never know with whom she had agreed to go out until her Screwball date — randomly drawn by lot — showed up at her doorstep.

The Screwballs were a real amalgam of the American melting pot. Arnie Greenberg, Phil Holstein and I were the only Jewish members while most of the kids, including my next-door-neighbor and best friend, Larry Kidder, were Protestant. There were a several Catholic boys in the group as well. Aside from Arnie, Phil and me, the Screwballs consisted of Dick Hill, Wally Renz, Paul Newman (*no, not that Paul Newman*), Bob Baker, Bob Gilmore, Dan Sullivan, Bob Zumbrum, Bob Parmeter and

Bill Hire. The Screwballs demonstrated that people of differing backgrounds and religious heritage could get along amazingly well.

In 1940, during the summer between my Junior and Senior years at Central High, I traveled by bus to Doylestown, Pennsylvania — a rural community ten miles north of Philadelphia, near Quakerstown. I had agreed to spend the summer working on a sixty-acre farm owned by my cousin Helen (Ackerman) Caro and her husband, Bernie. I was hoping to build myself up physically in order to qualify for the football team when I arrived at college. Helen, who was cousin Simon Ackerman's sister, worked full-time as the Women's Clothing Manager at the celebrated Gimbel's Department Store in Manhattan where she commuted by train every day. Bernie was a journeyman butcher who managed the working farm in her absence. I was told that the well-known author, Pearl S. Buck, owned the neighboring farm. The area was dotted with farms owned by the Mennonites, or Pennsylvania Dutch, easily identifiable thanks to the decorative hexagons that marked their barns.

The Caro farm's primary crops were corn, asparagus and poultry. I received no compensation other than room and board and worked six days a week from sun-up till sundown. The work was rigorous and often monotonous. Candling the chicken eggs each morning was one of my daily tasks. Each egg had to be inspected, by shining a light through it, in order to detect any impurities or fertilized embryos. I was also put to work regularly mucking out the barn where the animal manure had accumulated and hardened into a rock-hard consistency.

My most disagreeable experience was harvesting the farm's twenty acres of asparagus. The harvest period lasted for six weeks beginning in late June. My job involved

getting down on my hands and knees in order to snap the asparagus spears off one inch below ground level — careful not to break off any spears that were under a quarter inch in diameter. These smaller spears were left in the ground for re-fertilization. I also had to avoid any plants that were wilted or rusted. The variety of asparagus we raised was a hybrid called “Jersey Giant” and yielded over 1,000 pounds per acre. After a day’s cutting, the asparagus then had to be wrapped and transported to the City Market in Philadelphia for sale. It was back-breaking work that provided me with a deep sympathy for farm laborers. As I sweated, crouched down like some beast amid the asparagus furrows, I knew that by the end of the summer I would be returning to my comfortable home back in Lima. Realizing that there were many whose lives were filled with this type of work year in and year out, gave me a true appreciation of how fortunate I was. The experience also had another profound effect upon me. I have been completely unable to eat asparagus to this day.

The summer at the Caro farm had its desired effect. I returned to my senior year tanned, healthy and considerably more muscular. I became more studious and serious about my school work and managed to graduate fifth in a class of 212 students in May of 1941. During that year I corresponded with a number of colleges that offered advanced agricultural programs. Cornell and Purdue University were considered the top Ag schools in the country at that time. As I scoured the catalogs I focused on those schools offering a wide range of Agricultural Economics courses. I imagined that, once out of college, I would be joining my father in the seed and grain elevator business. A college degree in the Economics of Agriculture would be of great value. By the time I graduated from high school I had received acceptance letters from both

Ohio State and Purdue Universities and was required to choose between the two. Ultimately, I rejected Ohio State because I did not care to live in a big city like Columbus.

That summer of 1941 was — for both me and for America — the final season of innocence. While war had erupted in Europe and in the Pacific, our gang was living the dream of isolationism. It is hard to imagine from today's vantage point, but much of Jewish secular and religious leadership did not favor the U.S.'s entry into the war. Our own Rabbi joined many of his colleagues and argued against US intervention — this despite the knowledge that the Jews of Europe were suffering unprecedented persecution. To most Jews, Franklin Roosevelt was seen as a friend and a protector. To vocally advocate American intervention in behalf of European Jews might be viewed as betraying Roosevelt's paternalistic protection of the vulnerable community of American Jews. So as the storm clouds gathered in faraway places, our family clung to the familiarity of our everyday lives.