

·MEMORIES &  
REFLECTIONS·

Esther Feldberg



Memories & Reflections  
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Esther Feldberg

•DEDICATION•

*To my family, Beth, Michael, Ellen, Mollye\*,  
Jimmy,\* and my multiple grand and great-grand-  
children.*

•*In memoriam*

## Memories & Reflections

Esther Feldberg

“WORK AS IF YOU WERE TO LIVE A HUNDRED YEARS.  
PRAY AS IF YOU WERE TO DIE TOMORROW.”

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

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Memories & Reflections





·PROLOGUE·

## Opening the Gates of Memory

**T**his is a book about my life. A life which I am sure is not very different from yours. But simply because I am still above ground at age 97, I decided I would try to entertain you with my collection of stories drawn from my own life.

Since the world we now live in is getting more advanced, with so many electronic miracles (such as AI) becoming part of our daily lives, it seems that the old facts of history are getting lost. So, in order not to lose the story of my parents' immigration to America, I have started my little life story with accounts of how my family arrived to the land of plenty and freedom. The families of my two parents, although both Jewish immigrants, had very different backgrounds. They eventually met and came to be as one. Their fascinating stories of their early life in America, set in their antiquated living accommodations served as the backdrop for my own old-fashioned upbringing. I believe that sharing such stories would

serve as a real history lesson for all to read. An interesting reality, to say the least.

I was born and grew up in the 1920s and 30s. There was no television, no penicillin, no polio shots, no frozen food, and no nylon stockings. Credit cards and ball point pens had not yet been invented. I recall that the term “time-sharing” meant to be together, and did not refer to using a computer. Hardware, in my time, referred to hammers, screws and kitchenware and we went to the hardware store to buy what we needed. And of course we never heard of the word “software.” Closets were for clothes, not for coming out of, and being gay meant everyone wanted to be with you. It was a time before electric washing machines, dishwashers, clothes dryers, and the Jefferson nickel. Our nickel had a buffalo on the front with the American Indian on the backside. And, oh, what you could buy with just a nickel: a public telephone call and a long ride on the streetcar. It even covered the cost of changing to another streetcar. A nickel could buy a Milky Way candy bar at the movie theater, a double ice cream cone at the drug store, and a 3 cent stamp to mail a letter with enough change left over to pay for 2 penny postcards.

We did not yet have M&M candy, scotch tape, pizza or air conditioners. But we did have tobacco. It was fashionable for all adults to smoke cigarettes with names like Chesterfields, Lucky Strikes or Camels. Back then grass was mowed, not smoked and a pot was a vessel used to cook in. We wore saddle shoes and penny loafers, and rode in a small car with a rumble seat attached to the outside back for extra passengers. A new car could cost as much as \$600.00 and gas was only 11 cents per gallon.

Handwriting was taught in our elementary school class each week with the teacher showing us the proper way to write each letter of the alphabet. We wrote using fountain pens and bottles of ink. The nostalgic image of those ink bottles set into a circular inkwell located in the upper right corner of each wooden desk brings me back to another incident that has left an unpleasant ink stain on my memory. It was the time that I accidentally knocked over a bottle of ink resting on the desk in our home's library. The ink spilled on my mother's newly-installed wall-to-wall carpeting. At first, I was afraid to tell her what I had just done. But, after gathering my courage, I finally admitted to the crime. Her response surprised me. She said "Don't worry, dear. I will have the installer repair it tomorrow."

As you will learn in the upcoming chapters, my mother was a bountiful, loving person, involved in community organizations as a leader and a served as a true philanthropic example. As her daughter, I was taught by her, and have followed in her footsteps.

Today, as I look around my independent living facility, I see lots of grey hair, canes, walkers, and electric scooters. The onset of old age has advanced from 69 to 75, with great medical science extending lives to well into their 90's and 100's. Assisted living centers have become widespread and well-accepted in every major city. There are so many intricate parts of today's civilization that we older people just cannot understand how to manage it all. How to use the new Apple phones. How to navigate the many channels on our smart TV's. How to surf the internet. And then to try and understand today's youth. It all forms a new way of life that does take a lot of effort for us to absorb. Call me old-fash-

ioned, call me quaint, but I still prefer to have a couple marry before they live together and have a child.

At this point I ask you to return to those early days and view my world as I lived it. In these pages you will find stories that are fun to read, stories that are sad to read, and stories filled with unbelievable situations that you will wonder how it all could have happened..

So without further ado, I invite you to begin the journey and open Chapter One to learn about “My Younger Days.”

—Esther Feldberg  
West Palm Beach, Florida  
June, 2024

## ·CHAPTER ONE·

### Grandpa Jacob

**W**ho were my grandparents and where did they come from? I will start from what I learned about my father's father, my grandfather, Jacob Granofsky. He was born in Russia in 1884 in the district of Kiev. In his early years he moved to Zhivotov where he had met a girl he hoped to marry. He wed Esther Schwartzkopf in the year 1896 and they eventually had 5 children. The couple was very poor. They lived in a *shtetl* (village) and were victims of pogroms that came around far too often. Grandpa wanted to leave Russia and go to America, but he did not have the money to take his entire family with him. He would take only his eldest daughter, Celia.

Grandpa Jacob was determined to get to America to make enough money so he could return to Zhivotov and bring his family back with him. It was the summer of 1899 when he sailed with Celia in third class on the Cunard Steamship S.S.Saxonia. Like most immigrants in those days, they arrived to New York's Ellis Island. Grandpa wanted to go to Boston because he was told by someone on board the ship that he could find employment there working on the railroads. So he and Celia headed for Boston. Grandpa applied for work at the B&O Railroad Company and was hired as a laborer laying tracks. He worked very hard and put in

long hours. After two years, he had accumulated \$200.00. Now he had enough money to buy a steamship ticket for himself to go back to Russia and bring his family back to the land of plenty. He left Celia in Boston.

Grandpa sailed again on the bottom of the same ship, the S.S. Saxonia and landed at Amsterdam. All went well until he boarded the train in Warsaw, Poland en route to Russia. The train was filled with criminals waiting to rob those they thought were carrying money. My grandfather was probably wearing American clothing and the thieves must have correctly thought that he had just come from America. They attacked him but found Grandpa to be too strong to overpower him. They did not want to cause a commotion and quickly left. The thieves then decided to chloroform him after he had gone to sleep. How easy it was for them to steal the money he had earned through his labor.

When Grandpa awoke his clothes were all ruffled and his shoes gone. He realized he had been robbed and was now penniless. What a dreary thought having worked so hard for two years while being separated from his family, only to now go back to them with no money to carry out his American dream.

Eight years later in 1910, Grandpa had accumulated enough money to take his now six children and wife and set sail for America aboard the S.S. Saxonia once again. The tickets were expensive, but if the passenger was under two years old, the ticket was free. The couple's youngest child was now three, but Grandma was determined that she was not going to pay for another ticket. During the crossing, she would keep little Phillip hidden under her skirt every time the ticket manager appeared. Phillip was running everywhere and talking to everyone on the ship, but he was

always under his mother's skirt when necessary in order to avoid paying for another ticket. In this way he "skirted" the issue of not having a ticket and succeeded in arriving in America "under cover."

After a long and stressful voyage, the family finally sailed into Boston Harbor. It was a hard job leaving the ship with all their belongings. They had no money and could not afford a horse and buggy to their new home in Chelsea. One of their children, Harry, eventually became my father. He was ten years old and a beautiful child. He had been dressed up by his mother for the arrival to America. Wearing a blue silk shirt and a little cap on his head. Harry was assigned to carry the family's prized possession, the big brass samovar. As the family made their way on foot, they encountered a gang of rowdy neighborhood kids who followed them shouting: "Greenhorn, greenhorn. Popcorn five cents a bag" This was one of the many stories my father told me that illustrated how afraid he was to be in this strange new country. But, like most immigrants, he did manage to survive.

As stated, my grandparents had six children. They were named Celia, Morris, Goldie, Harry, Annie and Phillip. Aged three to eighteen. Grandpa had a horse and wagon and found work selling rags, but this did not earn him enough money to support his family or feed his children. Harry was told that he should go to school like all American boys. So, Harry enrolled in the fourth grade at the nearby Chelsea public school. He was very bright and tried for a long time to learn the lessons the instructor was teaching. But, Harry was unsuccessful because he was unable to understand English. He left school and proceeded to teach himself to understand to speak, to read and to understand the English language.

During the family's first year in America, 1911, Grandma, now in her forties, became pregnant. She had a baby boy they named Barney. When Barney was 18 months old, Grandma became very ill and died. Goldie, Harry's 13-year-old sister, now was placed in charge of taking care of Barney and Phillip, who was now six. Goldie became the cook and the family caretaker. She was a true "*balabusta*" (housekeeper).

Harry, now 12, wanted to help his family and went to work in a grocery store. He was a good worker and well-liked by everyone. Morris, Harry's older brother, who was 14 and quite lazy, could never hold down a job. Harry was always trying to help Morris by taking him with him to work. He took him to the grocery store, but Morris was soon fired. Harry then went to work in a flower shop and again took Morris along with him. It was not long before Morris was fired again. Harry decided that if he were ever to help his family, he needed to find a well-paying job by himself. He succeeded in eventually finding a wonderful job in a New Hampshire sweater factory, the Pandora Mills. It was owned by Mr. Cohen who was very impressed with Harry's industrious work habits and his friendly personality. He was very happy to have Harry on board. Harry worked there for two years earning a respectable salary. But he eventually became frustrated because he wanted to be his own boss. He left the sweater factory on good terms with his employer, Mr. Cohen, who will appear on these pages in a future chapter.

At age 17, Harry, along with his brother Morris and a friend from the old country, started a business selling bloomers and aprons. Years later, Harry, who was by that time my father, would have a serious busi-



ness issue with his brother, Morris. But, for now they were working together to make a few dollars selling their wares.

