

TOUCHED BY AN ANGEL

Recollections from my most fortunate life

Felix Glaubach, D.D.S.



Bal Harbour, Florida

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Felix Glaubach

DEDICATION

*To our parents,
Celia and Baruch Glaubach
Roza and Max Herlinger*

Touched by an Angel

CONTENTS

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	ix
Author’s Foreword.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Prologue.....	5
Chapter 1 - From Whence I Came.....	11
Chapter 2 - The Father of the Man.....	15
Chapter 3 - The Rat Man’s Son.....	29
Chapter 4 - Yeshiva Years.....	49
Chapter 5 - A Time to Teach... ..	55
Chapter 6 - Dental School Days.....	57
Chapter 7 - The Corning Kolbo.....	65
Chapter 8 - Soldier Boychick.....	73
Chapter 9 - My Oral History.....	87
Chapter 10 - When Felix Met Miriam.....	95
Chapter 11 - Be Fruitful and Multiply.....	121
Chapter 12 - The Head of the Fly.....	147
Chapter 13 - The Kings Point Light.....	159
Chapter 14 - Wall St. Whiz Kid.....	171
Chapter 15 - Touched by a Devil.....	189
Chapter 16 - Personal Touch.....	197

(Continued...)

CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

Chapter 17 - Giving Back	223
Chapter 18 - The Great Synagogue	241
Chapter 19 - The Joy of Judaica.....	247
Chapter 20 - Batwings & Butterflies.....	259
Chapter 21 - Gatherings of the Tribe	265
Chapter 22 - Going Places	277
Chapter 23 - Rabbis Are Not Angels.....	307
Chapter 24 - In Their Own Words.....	317
Chapter 25 - Concluding Thoughts	337
Photo Album	345
Glossary	375
Timeline	385
Appendix	389
Family Tree	409
About the Author.....	412

Felix Glaubach

“AND THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CAME AND
TOUCHED HIM, AND SAID: 'ARISE AND EAT; BECAUSE
THE JOURNEY IS GREAT FOR THEE.”

—SEFER MALACHIM, CHAPTER 19, VERSE 7

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AUTHOR'S FOREWORD

Why I Wrote This Book

People write memoir books for all sorts of reasons. They want to leave behind a literary legacy for their heirs. They wish to set the record straight. They might want to just check it off their bucket list. Well, all of that's true in my case, but it doesn't tell the full story. The main reason I decided to write this book is this: I want our children, as well as their children and all the children to come, to know our story. To understand our values. To get a sense of who we are or who we were. What wouldn't I give to have a book like this written by my own beloved grandmother?

Furthermore, I want our heirs to understand their place in not only our family history, but also in the history of the Jewish people. I know that such understanding will afford them a sense of pride at being the keepers of a 3,000-year-old tradition. And it will prompt them to pass on our family's and our people's legacy to their own children.

My goal for this book was also to spread some joy and happiness. So, I have included a fair share of humorous anecdotes that I hope will

bring a smile to the lips of the reader. I have also opened my heart and shared many of my intimate feelings. It is in this way—making my words come from the heart—that I hope to reach the hearts of my readers.

The actual process of producing this book was deceptively simple and straightforward. I would act as a raconteur, simply focusing on and verbally recollecting various episodes and incidents from my 90-plus years. These would be transcribed and (more or less) organized into a running narrative and then fashioned into a literary manuscript by my capable assistants. I would then review the results in order to arrive at a final draft. This process forced me to come face-to-face with people and places I had not thought about for decades. While the memory does tend to filter out the unpleasant, I nevertheless, at times, found such encounters to be unnerving. But, more often, looking at such long-ago events through the prism of experience, I found that I now possessed a far deeper understanding of those situations than I did at the time they took place. In all cases, I felt that the overall process of reliving my life in this way was a cathartic and healing one. In other words, writing your memoirs is something I strongly encourage you to consider doing.

Finally, let me say that I did not write this book to boast about my accomplishments in life. As you will read, I have been extremely fortunate, and for this, I give thanks to G-d on a daily basis. I do feel as though I have been touched by an angel. It is that sense of gratitude at my good fortune that has propelled me and motivated me to complete this book. A book that I now present to you. It is my sincere hope that by reading my words you, too, will feel as though I have touched your heart.

INTRODUCTION

by Rabbi Aryeh Lightstone



My wife Estee and I were looking forward to celebrating a rare evening out. We had three little kids at the time, and we had called in a capable babysitter whom we felt was up to handling all three of them at bed and bath time. We typically called this babysitter only when we needed to attend a particularly critical event. But this night was different. On this special evening, we felt no such obligation. It was strictly a social event, and we experienced only joy at being able to attend a bar mitzvah party hosted by our dear friends, the Glaubachs. So, it was with a rather carefree attitude that we booked the babysitter, kissed the kids goodnight, and took off to enjoy a wonderful Glaubach simcha.

Around ninety minutes into the affair, I received a tap on my shoulder from the family patriarch, Dr. Felix Glaubach. He indicated that he wanted to meet with me the following week and could I please give him one of my business cards. As a matter of habit, I touched the inside pocket of my suit jacket, but it was a phony gesture. I knew that the pocket was empty. I politely turned to Dr. G. and said, “Sorry, I didn’t anticipate that I would need my cards tonight since this was a *social*

evening for Estee and me.” I will always remember what Dr. G said to me next:

“I am 80 years old and I’m proud to tell you that I have a net worth far above anything I could ever have imagined or maybe even deserved. But I still bring my business cards into the shower with me.”

I have had hundreds, if not thousands of interactions with my friend and mentor, Dr. Felix Glaubach. Some before that evening and many more since. But that salient moment stands out in my memory as the most telling such encounter when trying to describe the singularly outstanding individual known to me as Dr. G. Allow me to explain.

The first lesson I learned from Felix was that there was no such thing as a social evening. This does not mean that Dr. G. doesn’t believe in such things as leisure time and family time. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. For Dr. G., family is everything, and specifically because it is everything, there is no special time set aside to engage in it. Doing so would be akin to having, let’s say, a designated evening for breathing. In Dr. G.’s mind, family is part and parcel of everything he does and everything he is. I cannot remember a single encounter where, during the course of our conversation, we were not joined by either his wife Miriam, the love of his life, or by one or more of his children or grandchildren. Note that I did not say “interrupted.” Whereas in conversations with some people, having a family member chime in may seem like an interruption, that was never the case when chatting with Felix. Meeting with Felix and expecting the conversation not to include Miriam or their kids would be like meeting him and expecting him not to breathe. Simply impossible.

The second lesson I learned from Dr. G. that evening was all about potential. I will not dwell on the image of his bringing business cards into the shower (*where does he keep them so they don't get wet?*), other than to point out that his comment was delivered with a sly smirk and a glimmer of the eye. That delivery method worked well, causing me to remember it vividly some ten years later. I have come to realize that he was educating me about what it takes to achieve one's full potential. There is no such thing as a night off. We are all here for such precious little time that we must take advantage of every single opportunity. You may have had a plan for that evening, but you cannot predetermine where opportunities may arise. Hence, you must always prepare yourself to be ready for such golden occasions whenever they pop up. Dr. G. taught me to be ready at all times, and while printed business cards may be less in vogue in these days of "Text me your contact info," I have kept a ready supply in my wallet ever since that night.

The third lesson learned from that bar mitzvah party encounter was that a person ought to be direct—but always with humility. Dr. G. was, at that time, an incredibly accomplished orthodontist and business leader, while I was a young man trying to figure out how to pay for a babysitter. Dr. G. knew all that, but his point was that you can spend your entire time trying to figure out the babysitter problem or you can choose to focus on the big picture. His words were not intended to be a lecture about business cards. The business cards were merely a metaphor for a more important message. He was pointing out that I did not have a big enough vision. If you were to spend enough time with Dr. G., I'm sure you would soon find that such critiques are not rare. I am convinced

that Felix's pointers, always mixed with humor, are never offered to put you down, but rather to show you how to build yourself up. Thinking back to that evening, Dr. G. had no actual reason to ask for my business card. He already knew exactly how to get in touch with me. He sought me out to dispense his wisdom because he saw potential in me. Potential that perhaps I did not even see in myself at the time.

I would like to share one more significant fact I learned about Felix that evening. We were both born on the same month and day (the year is off by a little) and we both share a Hebrew name, Aryeh, which means "lion." As you may or may not know, birthdays are not mentioned very often in the Torah. To the best of my knowledge, there is only one such reference, and even there, it's mentioned in a sort of offhand manner. As recounted in Genesis 40:20, the third day of Joseph's incarceration in an Egyptian prison was Pharaoh's birthday. A feast was held during which two of Pharaoh's servants were brought to him and there the cupbearer recounted Joseph's amazing dream analysis abilities. Yet, despite our Jewish texts placing such little significance on birthdays, I have been told that the renowned Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, regularly allocated a portion of his precious time to inscribing and sending out birthday cards to those who would write to him requesting a special birthday blessing.

I learned that night that Felix knew of the Rebbe's practice and took this matter to heart, as he and Miriam would always make a big deal out of their own children's birthdays, their grandchildren's birthdays and, these days, their great-grandchildren's birthdays.

Yet, the question remains, “Who cares?” Birthdays are really not a focus of Judaism. Nevertheless, sharing a common birthday with Dr. G. brought an important idea into focus for me. An idea that was reflected in the G-d-given dreams of leadership that convinced Joseph that he had an unshakable destiny and a divinely ordained purpose in life.

It is said that your birthday is the anniversary of the day that G-d Almighty Himself determined that the entire world could not fulfill its purpose and destiny without you fulfilling your own. Please take one moment and reread what I just wrote. Understand that your birthday is your yearly reminder that not only does your life have purpose and meaning, but your ability to achieve that purpose will determine if the entire world will succeed in its larger mission.

Everyone has a birthday. Some dread them, but most people celebrate their birthdays. Only rarely do you see people who understand what their birthdays truly mean. Dr. Felix Glaubach doesn't need a birthday to remind him that he was put on this earth for a reason. That he was placed here with a mission and that, come hell or high water, he will always do his utmost to fulfill that mission. Dear reader, be advised. What you are about to read in this book is a revelation of that mission and a declaration of that purpose. It is my hope that you will take them to heart just as I have done.

—Rabbi Aryeh Lightstone

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*Let My People Know:
The Inside Story of the Abraham Accords*
(Encounter 2022)

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PROLOGUE

“And sow fields and plant vineyards, and gather a fruitful harvest.”

—*Psalms 107, Verse 37*



Many know of the Sholem Aleichem character, Tevye, the milkman made famous by *Fiddler on the Roof*. One of my earliest memories was of another milkman. This one had a horse, not a cow, and showed up every morning dressed in a crisply starched white uniform and a black bow-tie. He was the Borden’s man who delivered glass containers of milk, cream, and assorted dairy products to our building each day. As he made the rounds of our Borough Park apartment building, he would leave his horse, Elmer, tied to a tree located in the only strip of green to be found in our concrete jungle neighborhood. We called it the backyard.

I loved Elmer even more than the chocolate milk his owner would sometimes deliver. Chocolate milk was a rare delicacy during those Depression-era days. When I turned seven in 1938, I received something very special from the Borden’s man. It was a potted peach tree sapling. I recall his words as he presented it to me:

“Happy birthday, Felix,” he said as he removed the plant from his wagon. “Here’s something from our farm I thought you’d like. It’s a baby tree. Take good care of it and it will grow into a big peach tree and you’ll have all the peaches you can eat.” Naturally, I was thrilled beyond words.

I found a spot in the backyard just under my window and planted the tree where I could keep an eye on it. I felt that it was my responsibility to nurture the tree till it reached full fruition. So, I showered it with love and plenty of water. Actually, a bit too much water. Not knowing anything about horticulture, I dutifully poured a full bucket of water on the tree’s roots every morning. In no time at all I succeeded in drowning the poor thing. It soon rotted away and died.

While I was crushed at my failure, I came away from the experience having learned several valuable lessons. First of all, there is such a thing as too much love, and showering something with it can lead to a bad outcome. Secondly, it pays to do your homework before embarking on any new venture. I did just that. I went to the library and read up on how to properly grow plants in a city Victory Garden. As a result, my next horticultural mission—planting a tomato vineyard—proved successful. My tomato plants flourished and they were soon yielding baskets of fresh, bright red tomatoes that my mother happily served up in salads and soups.

The most important lesson of my childhood foray into urban gardening was this. With the proper preparation, the words of G-d, as proclaimed by Moses in Devarim—“All that I touch prospers”—may indeed prove true.

CHAPTER ONE

From Whence I Came

“Know from where you come and to where you are going.”

—*Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers)*, 3:1



My story begins with the meeting of two people who, like so many others, came to this country from far-off lands seeking liberty and economic opportunity.

My father, Baruch Glaubach, born on September 8, 1896, was a Galitzianer (a person from the southeastern part of Poland known as Galicia—today, northwestern Ukraine). His home was Bukovina, a distant region located on the eastern side of the vast Carpathian Mountains. At that time Bukovina was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After World War I it became part of Romania.

Rather than allowing himself to be drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army—a bitter fate for any young Jewish man of that era—my father fled his native home in 1917, immigrating to Canada. From there he was smuggled across the Niagara River, near Buffalo, New York, soon making his way down to New York City, where he remained for the rest of

his life. Despite his unorthodox method of entry, my father became a proud citizen of the United States during the Roosevelt administration.

My mother, Celia Bendit, was born on March 15, 1901, and arrived to the United States from Romania at the age of three along with her widowed mother, Fanny, her sisters Tillie and Anna, and her brothers, Sam and Ruby. They lived together on Avenue A on the Lower East Side, an area of first settlement for so many Jews of that generation, and later relocated to Borough Park in Brooklyn.

My aunt Anna was a woman of many talents. Once, when our oil-fired boiler sprung a leak, she cooked up some hot oatmeal and daubed it over the hole. The hardened oatmeal worked better than plaster. The problem was solved, but I declined to eat any more of Aunt Anna's oatmeal after that.

I was reminded of this incident many years later on a trip to Kenya with my wife, Miriam. There I witnessed people building homes out of dried elephant manure. The houses were not only sturdy, but surprisingly odorless.

My mother was introduced to my father by a friend, Mr. Bilinkopf. I vividly recall how, every *Shabbos* (Saturday, the Sabbath) as we returned from synagogue, he would stand on his porch and shout, "*Ut geht a Galitzianer!*" (There goes a Galitzianer!) We remained friendly with the Bilinkopfs throughout their lifetimes, and with their children for the duration of their lifetimes as well.

My parents' courtship was complicated by the disapproval of my paternal grandparents. They wanted their son to wait until his older sisters, Fanny and Sophie, got married, before getting married himself. This was

a common practice in those days, and still persists among many Orthodox families today. Fortunately for him, my father refused to go along with this idea. Had he listened, he would have had to wait forever, since his two sisters remained single their entire lives. But because my father refused to wait, his parents considered him guilty of a great *shandah* (scandal) and cut him off from the family. No visits, no phone calls, no communication whatsoever. This enmity persisted until my grandmother passed away. Up to that time, neither my father nor my mother ever spoke of his parents, and until my grandmother's funeral, I didn't even know they existed. It was at the funeral that I met my grandfather for the first time.

After that sad event, my father and my grandfather reconciled, and from then on, we regularly visited my grandfather, Chaim, at his home on 108th Street off of 5th Avenue in Manhattan. I remember him as a distinguished-looking man with a flowing white beard. Sadly, I did not have many years with him, as I first met him when I was seven, and he passed away just a few years later.

My parents married on June 15, 1930. Like many couples of that era, they did not believe in open displays of affection. I never saw them exchange so much as a kiss. But I knew that they were a happy couple and had a contented life together, despite frequent concerns about money. My father was in the fur business with his brothers, Isaac, Sam, and Morris. They manufactured fur coats.

Isaac was an interesting character. While he worked all his life in furs and in other aspects of the *shmatteh* business (the garment industry), in his heart he dreamed of becoming an actor. Unfortunately for him,

acting at that time was considered a disreputable profession, unsuitable for a nice Jewish man, and so he never realized his ambition. The closest he came to being a performer was entertaining at family events, singing Yiddish songs in a rich, resonant baritone.

Isaac was also responsible for saving Sam during a difficult time. Within their fur company, Sam was the “outside man,” who handled the marketing and sales. My father was in charge of the actual production. The company was paid once a month for the merchandise it delivered. It happened one month that my father called the recipients of the fur coats asking for payment, only to be told that they had already paid their invoices. Upon investigation, he discovered that Sam had taken all of the receipts and gambled them on the coffee exchange, losing all the money betting on coffee futures. It was Isaac who convinced all the partners not to press charges against Sam. My father left the company at that point, going into business with new partners. It took many years for the brothers to make peace.

Like his two sisters, Isaac never married. Sam married late in life, and had no children. Morris married and had one daughter, Evelyn, who moved to Israel, where she continues to reside.

My parents lived at 5607 Fort Hamilton Parkway, a two-family building with two storefronts on the ground floor. In the early years of their marriage, my mother was a homemaker, but during the 1940s she opened a housewares store downstairs from our apartment. A lively and outgoing person, she proved to be a highly competent businesswoman.

CHAPTER TWO

The Father of the Man

“The Child is father of the Man;
And I could wish my days to be
Bound each to each by natural piety.”

—*from My Heart Leaps Up by William Wordsworth*

I made my New York City debut on March 30, 1931, just four weeks before the opening of the Empire State Building and the day before legendary Notre Dame football coach, Knute Rockne, was killed in a plane crash. I entered the world three days before Passover on the 12th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan at the United Israel Zion Hospital. Although it has been known as the Maimonides Hospital since 1947, it is still located in the same spot, 49th Street and 10th Avenue in Borough Park, Brooklyn.

At my *bris*, where I received the name Ephraim Fischel Aryeh, the *sandek* (the person honored by holding the baby during the circumcision ceremony) was Rabbi Israel Schorr. An outstanding scholar and orator, Schorr began his career as the rabbi of a *shtiebel* (small, intimate shul) called Reb Yonah’s on 57th Street and Fort Hamilton Parkway. His next

position was at Congregation Beth Israel on 56th Street and 11th Avenue. Later he became the rabbi of the stately Temple Beth El on 48th Street and 15th Avenue, where he spent the remainder of his career.

By the time I had reached age two, I had developed something of a problem that caused my parents serious consternation. I wouldn't stop sucking my thumb. My mother's sister, Aunt Anna, had the solution. As she sat drinking her morning coffee one day, she spotted me with my thumb planted in my mouth.

"Come over here, Felix," she said invitingly, "and let me see that thumb." I did as I was told and my aunt grabbed my wet thumb. She quickly thrust it into her cupful of black coffee. When I put my thumb back into my mouth, I nearly gagged from the bitter flavor. Yuck! There were two consequences of this bit of "tough love." One, I stopped sucking my thumb immediately, and two, I have never—over the course of my entire life—drunk a cup of coffee. I might have a "*glezel tei*" (a glass of tea) when I'm feeling sickly, but as for coffee? It's strictly thumbs down for me.

Three years following my birth, my sister, Ethel Beverly Glaubach, was born. Tragically, she was permanently disabled, both physically and mentally, the result of a difficult birth. Ethel lived at home her entire life. When my mother passed away at age 81, I said she actually lived to be 162, twice her real age, because taking care of my sister was a full-time, round-the-clock job.

Our apartment on Fort Hamilton Parkway had three bedrooms. One was my parents' room, one I shared with my sister, and one bedroom was rented to a divorced man and his son. The man worked as a salesperson at Bloomingdale's, and his ex-wife was a buyer of women's

dresses at Saks 5th Avenue. My parents rented out the room because they needed the extra income. Times were hard in those days, especially for people who observed the Sabbath. We didn't live the way people do today, with every child having his or her own bedroom and a separate playroom to boot.

Both my mother and father were warm and loving parents. I always felt that I could talk to my father about anything. Anything except sex, that is. Sex was taboo. So was discussing my mother's real age. Whenever I asked her, she said she was 21-plus. In 1976, in honor of her 75th birthday, I threw a modest party at my home in Kew Gardens Hills. After the party, she approached me and said, "You should be ashamed of yourself."

"Why?" I asked. "I thought we threw you a nice party."

"Hah! You call that a nice party for a 75-year-old?" she complained.

"Did you ever tell us your age?" I shot back. "You always said 21-plus. So how can I know how old you are? But for your 80th, G-d willing, we'll put on a big to-do." And so we did. A fancy, catered affair, and she loved it.

Borough Park, in those days, was a blended Italian/Jewish neighborhood. The Italians and Jews were very friendly to one another. There was a spirit of mutual tolerance. The Italians showed great respect for the Jews' observance of *Shabbos* (the Sabbath) and *kashrus* (dietary laws). Incidentally, in those days there was no such thing as *glatt* kosher (the most stringent definition of kosher, whereby there is not even a question of, say, an animal having an imperfection on its lungs). The rule of thumb was, if your friend's mother said the house was kosher, you

could eat there and you didn't have to inquire about who had slaughtered the meat.

In 1945, after World War II, many highly Orthodox Jews emigrated from Eastern Europe to the U.S. and settled in Borough Park. I recall how suddenly everyone was searching for a way to carry a key on *Shabbos*. The sanctions involved in being strictly observant, or *Shomer Shabbos* (watchman of the Sabbath), include not carrying anything on your person on *Shabbos* or on a Jewish holiday. As for me, I didn't even know what a key was because we never locked anything. We left the lawn furniture out, and no one ever took any of it. This was a different era.

Our synagogue was Congregation Beth Israel, which stood on 56th Street and 11th Avenue. When I was too young to go there alone, my father would take me with him. A gentleman named Mr. Gelb was usually standing atop the building's broad staircase, schmoozing with his friends. Whenever we arrived late, which was often the case, he would loudly comment on our tardiness: "Look! It's nine thirty already!"

One *Shabbos* my father, tired of this constant criticism, explained, "I had to wait for my wife to dress my son, and so I'm late. But Mr. Gelb," he added sardonically, "Where are your sons?"

Mr. Gelb sadly shook his head, since his sons were not to be found at *shul*. "You're right, Mr. Glaubach," he sighed.

After *shul*, we had a sumptuous *Shabbos* lunch and then I would hurry outside and join my school friends to play Ringolevio ("Olly, olly, oxen free"), Stoopball (played with a pink Spaldeen ball), Potsy (New York-style hopscotch), and other street games that, in this current age of computers and video games, have been all but forgotten.

When I was a boy, Borough Park was home to some of the greatest cantors in the world. These included the renowned Benzion Miller, Ben-Zion Kapov-Kagan, Moshe Erstling, Moshe and David Koussevitzky, and the latter's predecessor at Temple Beth El in Borough Park, Russian-born Berele Chagy. I was entranced by their voices, and loved attending their *shuls* to hear them chant the services. Back then, most young boys, when asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, would say fireman, policeman, or perhaps a doctor. But whenever I was asked, I proudly announced, "I want to be a *chazzan!*" (cantor).

I was fortunate to have a *chazzan*, along with his wife and daughter, living upstairs from us. When Cantor Osofsky noticed my interest in *chazzanus*, he generously undertook to train me in the *seder hatfilot* (the order of the Jewish prayers). Every day, when I *davened* (prayed), my living room would fill with the sound of the new melodies I had composed for the prayers. I joined the choir at our *shul*, Beth Israel, and soon was hired to lead the children's services for the *shul's* Talmud Torah, whose principal director was named Mr. Klausner.

Despite my pleasant voice and love of the liturgy, I never became a professional *chazzan*. The problem was that my right ear did not function properly, and this severely compromised my "ear for music."

Summers in Brooklyn are notoriously hot and oppressive, and to escape, starting when I was three, our family rented a series of bungalows in Far Rockaway each summer. Once there, my father would take the train into the city each day to go to work. Every evening I would walk to the Wavecrest railroad station to wait for him to arrive home. Before

leaving the bungalow, I always asked my mother, “Was I a good boy today?” so I could tell my father the answer as soon as he arrived.

My Aunt Tillie and Uncle Barney Chaikin lived in Far Rockaway in an area called Grassmere Terrace. Our families were very close, so much so that my parents hosted the wedding for one of their sons who had married a Holocaust survivor. The wedding was held at Congregation Mt. Sinai-Anshe Emeth in Washington Heights, where, by that time, my father was the chairman of the *shul's* board of directors.

When I was about five years old, Aunt Tillie and Uncle Barney bought a candy store close to the Wavcrest railroad station. What a bonanza for me! I'd march into the store and announce: “Uncle Barney, I'm ready for my ice cream!”

“Do you have money?” he'd ask.

“Uncle Barney! Don't you know? Cousins don't pay,” I proclaimed.

This story was brought up to me for many years by the rest of the family, who laughingly mimicked my childish *chutzpah* (nerve).

As an adult I was able to repay Aunt Tillie and Uncle Barney for their kindness by helping their granddaughter, Mimi. She had married her childhood sweetheart but later discovered that he had been unfaithful. They obtained a civil divorce, but a *ghet* (religious bill of divorcement) was never granted. Under *Halachic* code (Jewish law), granting a *ghet* is done solely at the discretion of the husband. Should he opt not to do so, his wife becomes an *agunah* (chained down) and is forbidden to remarry. After a number of years, and despite the absence of a *ghet*, Mimi did remarry and had children with her new husband. According to Jewish law, such children would be considered *mamzerim* (illegitimate)

since no *ghet* had been granted. I was instrumental in having a *Bet Din Torah* (religious court of law) determine that the *mesader kiddushin* (officiating rabbi) at the first wedding was drunk at the time of the ceremony, and this fact invalidated the original first marriage. No *ghet* was needed. As a result, her children were spared the terrible stigma of being branded as *mamzerut*. My help in solving this problem won me the everlasting gratitude of Mimi and her family.

Uncle Barney, unfortunately, succumbed to a heart attack at age 49 and Aunt Tillie later contracted pancreatic cancer. In the later stages of her illness, Tillie employed the services of a caregiver provided by our company, Personal Touch Home Care. When she sensed that the end was approaching, Aunt Tillie asked her aide to say a prayer for her and to call me. "Tell Felix to come," she whispered. "I want to say goodbye." The call came to the Flushing Tennis Center, where I happened to be playing that evening. As soon as I got the call, I dropped my racket, jumped into my car, and rushed to her bedside in a flash. As soon as I said goodbye, Aunt Tillie closed her eyes for the last time and peacefully left us. The next day I had the sad honor of delivering the eulogy at her funeral.

When I was seven years old my parents, my sister, and I began spending our vacations and Jewish holidays at my Aunt Anna and Uncle Abraham Finkelstein's summer home in Hudson, New York. It was there that my uncle owned and operated a dry goods store called The Leader, located at 339 Warren Street. We lived with Aunt Anna and Uncle Abraham and their two daughters, Fran and Rachel (or Rae, as we called her), in a three-story house right above the store.

I have only pleasant memories of that house. It was there, in the late 1940s, that I used to practice dancing with my cousin Fran—twirling and swaying to the strains of our two favorite dance numbers: “Moonlight Becomes You” by Bing Crosby and “Miami Beach Rumba” by the Campos Trio.

Whenever my father mentioned to his business partners that he planned to go to Hudson for the weekend, they always burst out laughing and we kids never understood why. We learned the reason one day when we read how state troopers raided the town and shut down all the brothels on Columbia Street. Unbeknownst to us till then, Hudson was infamous for being a mecca for gambling and prostitution.

Uncle Abraham, an immigrant from Russia, was a brilliant businessman. In addition to running a successful dry goods enterprise, he amassed real estate in the Hudson and Greene County areas and also dabbled in the stock market.

Aunt Anna became so caught up in her husband’s retail business that my mother was forced to step in and help raise the two Finkelstein girls. Both Ethel and I thought of Fran and Rae as our sisters since we spent so much time together. Our two families would always spend our vacation time together in Hudson. Vacations that saw my mother caring for the entire brood. When we were not visiting the Finkelsteins in Hudson, Aunt Anna and the girls would come by train to see us in Brooklyn almost every Sunday. Coming to see us was a real treat for Aunt Anna. Having grown up on bustling Second Avenue in Manhattan before moving to sleepy Hudson, New York, she never adjusted to small-town life, nor to being separated from her sister.

Later, when we lived in Washington Heights, the Finkelsteins would visit us over the winter and spring school holiday periods. Sometimes Fran and I would leave the house at six a.m. to go to Radio City Music Hall. There we would watch the famous Rockettes perform their high-kicking choreography and then stay for a movie—all for only ninety-nine cents. Fran and I also saw our first Broadway shows, *Carousel* and *Oklahoma*, together. The tickets were provided by her parents, who had received them in appreciation of their having purchased United States War Bonds.

In the summertime we all rented a cottage together on Lake Taghkanic, in Columbia County, New York, located just off the Taconic Parkway not far from Hudson. My cousin Fran described the place as a “very terrible cottage containing three bedrooms whose walls didn’t quite reach as high as the ceiling.” The cottage had no running water or electricity. Instead, we made do with an outdoor water pump and kerosene lamps. My mother did all the cooking using a primitive kerosene stove. Worst of all was the outdoor toilet, or outhouse, which of course did not flush. You could locate it in the dark by the smell.

We also had access to an old rowboat moored at the nearby lake. One day, when I was about twelve, I decided to take my sister, Ethel, and my younger cousins, Fran and Rachel, on a boating excursion. As I rowed out on the lake, we decided to visit the state park, a mile and a half away. While the park had nature trails and a playground, the real attractions were its public restrooms with their modern flush toilets and high-quality toilet paper. Fed up with the outhouse, we yearned to use the clean and well-maintained facilities. But the lake was large and our rowing

was slow. Hence, we were gone a long time. Of course, in those pre-cell phone days, there was no way to let our parents know where we were. Fran and Rachel still remember to this day how my mother went crazy with worry about us and how we were all punished once we returned home.

There was also a place on Lake Taghkanic that was called a juke joint because it had a large colorful jukebox containing all of the hit songs of the day. My cousins and I went there to listen to music, especially enjoying Frederic Chopin's *Polonaise*, which was very popular at the time due to a movie about the composer, *A Song to Remember*, starring Cornel Wilde, that was being shown in the local movie theater. Rachel recalls that we also listened to Yankee baseball games there, broadcast live on the radio, all the while munching on jelly donuts we had brought with us. The donuts were made by the Grossmans, who owned a large two-story house on the lake, right across the way from our own tumbledown cottage.

It was in Uncle Abraham's store that I first tried my hand as a salesman. "Look at this," I'd say to a potential customer, while waving aloft a pair of work pants. "Our pants are much better than those of our competitors down the block." I would then twirl the pants in my hand, until the legs twisted around each other in a knot. After they untangled and hung straight again, I pointed out how the crease on each leg remained as sharp as ever.

Many of our customers were temporary residents who traveled to Hudson from islands in the Caribbean to pick apples, cherries, and other fruits in the nearby orchards. A jovial and friendly bunch of men, they

worked hard and sent most of their earnings back to their families in the islands.

One year, on March 30, which happened to be my birthday, there was a public auction advertised in Hudson. The leading surgeon at the Hudson Hospital was selling his home. Situated high on a mountain ridge, the gracious mansion had a glass-walled tower from which you could see a broad swath of the scenic Hudson River.

Uncle Abraham tendered the winning bid and bought the elegant home for about \$20,000, a large sum in those days. This lovely house, in its majestic setting, was like a paradise to me and my family, and, over the ensuing years, we spent as much time there as possible.

My sister and cousins had bedrooms on the second floor, but I was lucky enough to have a room in the tower itself. I spent a lot of time gazing from my glassed-in perch at the many miles of sparkling river below. Being far from civilization, I needed no window shades, as no one could see me. Nor was I disturbed by the early morning light streaming in unobscured. I always arose at 5:00 a.m. anyway. "Sleep is highly overrated," I told my parents. "You accomplish nothing while sleeping." They strongly disagreed, and this opinion annoyed them no end.

Our synagogue in Hudson was called Anshe Emeth and it was located at 14 Warren Street. One of the congregants, a Mr. Epstein, was a generous donor to the *shul*. One day, we learned that he had been arrested for bookmaking and sent to jail. This seemed outrageous since all of the town's other non-Jewish gamblers continued to walk free. Because he was a beloved member of the community, the townspeople got to-

gether when he got out of jail and bought him a small fleet of taxis. From then on, Mr. Epstein was a legitimate businessman.

One day when I was in *shul*, a visitor said that he needed to say *Kaddish* (the mourner's prayer), but was not knowledgeable about how to go about it and needed some help. I was only twelve—not yet a bar mitzvah—but I said *Kaddish* with him anyway. As my reward, he told me to put some money on a certain horse running at Saratoga. I went home and told my uncle, who put down a bet. Sure enough, that horse came in. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

Like many Orthodox *shuls* in those days, Anshe Emeth was in the habit of auctioning off the Torah honors during the High Holidays. The privilege of going up to the *bimah* (pulpit) and publicly reading from the Torah (*aliyah*) during these well-attended services was afforded to the highest bidder. Uncle Abraham would buy *maftir* (the final *aliyah*), which also entitled him to chant the *Haftarah* on the first day of Rosh Hashanah every year. A *Haftarah* is a reading from the Book of Prophets (*Nevi'im*), read after the weekly Torah portion. The Rosh Hashanah *Haftarah* relates the dramatic story of the birth of Samuel the Prophet. When Uncle Abraham was no longer capable of reading it himself, and by which time I was past bar mitzvah age, he bought it for me. Since then I have had the honor of chanting *maftir* on Rosh Hashanah for more than 40 years at a variety of synagogues. These include Young Israel of Queens Valley, Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills, the Cherry Lane Minyan, the Great Synagogue of Jerusalem, and others.

When I was about eight years old, while we were still feeling the lingering effects of the Great Depression, my hardworking father man-

aged to send me to sleepaway camp. This was not a fancy camp for wealthy children such as Camp Monroe or Camp North Star. Rather, it was the well-known nonprofit Camp Deal. It is today called Camp Dora Golding and is now located in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.

Early on a Monday morning, my parents took me from Brooklyn to the Lower East Side, to board a bus in front of Yeshiva Rabbi Jacob Joseph, or Yankev Yossef, as we pronounced it. For the first time in my life, I got to ride through the Lincoln Tunnel, which I thought was one of the seven wonders of the world.

For many years Camp Deal was run by Rabbi Nissenbaum, who did a remarkable job in caring for us kids. Our stays lasted approximately two weeks, which he offered at the rock-bottom rate of eight dollars per week. The food was typical camp fare and kosher, of course. We liked it well enough, and all the kids had a great time.

I vividly recall one particular night activity. My counselor, who later became Rabbi Leo Auerbach, decided that the evening's entertainment should be a boxing match between various campers. Suspense mounted as we waited to see who the contestants would be. As luck would have it, he chose me to fight one of my bunkmates. I was a short, scrawny kid with no pugilistic experience whatsoever. My opponent, William Tepper, was a chubby, well-muscled character from the hardscrabble streets of the East Bronx. Needless to say, I took quite a beating. But I never held William's victory against him. In fact, he and I became good friends and stayed connected till his passing more than fifty years later. Oddly enough, William never grew to be much taller or thinner than he was that summer. As a grown man, I actually towered over him.

Touched by an Angel

CHAPTER THREE

The Rat Man's Son

“Train up a child in the way he should go”

—*Proverbs, 22:6*



Albert Einstein once quipped that education is what remains after one forgets everything that was learned in school. I am fortunate that much of what I learned in my elementary school has stayed with me over the years. My formal schooling began at Yeshiva Etz Chaim, located on 13th Avenue, between 50th and 51st Streets. Founded in 1916, it was the first Jewish day school in Borough Park when it was known as the Hebrew Institute. The first English principal of the school was Max Kufeld, and in later years, his wife.

It is hard to fathom today, but I attended school—all the way through high school—under an assumed name. An alias. A secret identity just like Superman and Batman. This was the result of something that happened on the first day of kindergarten. My mother had brought me to the school in order to enroll me and filled out the necessary paperwork, which she turned in to Mrs. Fry, the kindergarten teacher. My mother had written my first name, Felix, and my middle name, Leo, into the ap-

appropriate spaces on the form. Mrs. Fry looked over the form and asked my mother to sit down.

“This is no good, Mrs. Glaubach,” she said.

“No good!?” my mother replied, taken aback. “What do you mean, no good?”

“The children at this age are merciless in their teasing. Every day I must hear them taunt me with ‘Oh, Mrs. Fry, please fry us some chicken,’ or some similar nonsense.” My mother looked puzzled.

“So having a boy named Felix simply won’t do,” she explained. “Everyone will tease him and call him Felix the Cat.” In those years before Walt Disney introduced a certain animated rodent named Mickey Mouse in the first talking cartoon short called “Steamboat Willie,” Felix the Cat, introduced in 1919, was the most popular cartoon character of the silent screen era. He was still very popular in 1936 when I entered kindergarten.

On top of that, Mrs. Fry pointed out, my middle name was Leo, and that would subject me to even more teasing as they would taunt me with “Leo the Lion,” the mascot featured at the beginning of all MGM motion pictures.

“They’ll make him into a cat and then a lion, and I don’t wish to have a zoo in my classroom.” So, with that she crossed out my names and replaced Felix with Phillip and Leo with Leon.

“Kneel, Felix Leo,” proclaimed Mrs. Fry, “and arise Phillip Leon.” And that became my name until I applied to college. I’ll explain what happened then a bit later.

The following year, when I was in first grade, my teacher, Mrs. Brenner, summoned my parents to school. She told them she was very puzzled about my behavior and began to explain.

“I asked the boys to write down what their fathers did for a living,” she said, “and Phillip wrote that his father sold rats! I think he may be a bit disturbed. Why would he write such an outrageous thing?”

My mother explained that her husband manufactured muskrat coats and in the industry they were referred to as “rats.”

“Little Felix ... uh, I mean Phillip ... has often heard his father say, ‘I sold ten rats today,’” she went on, “referring to the number of coats he had moved.” Satisfied with the explanation, Mrs. Brenner concluded that I was not in fact “disturbed” after all.

Years later, when I was in seventh grade, I left the class one day to go to the restroom. I had barely returned to the classroom when a little white balloon came floating in through the door after me. The teacher, Mrs. Rubin, became very angry and began screaming at me, thinking I was responsible for the balloon. I didn’t know what she was talking about. Later, I found out that it wasn’t a balloon at all, but a blown-up condom that someone had propelled into the classroom after me as a prank. The other boys had to explain to me what a condom was since I had no idea. As mentioned, sex was a taboo subject at our house, and hence, I led a very sheltered life.

Once, while I was in elementary school, I overheard my mother speaking to some of her friends, in our kitchen:

“In yeshiva, the teachers never hit the children,” she proclaimed.

Later I asked her: “Who told you the teachers don’t hit us?”

“Do they ever hit you?” she asked, looking puzzled.

“Of course,” I told her.

She looked at me, shocked, and asked, “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“What, so you’d hit me too?” I shot back.

Some of the more exceptional teachers I remember from Etz Chaim were Mr. Levinson, a tall, lanky string bean of a man who taught photography. In addition, there was Mr. Keane, a very fine gentleman, and Mrs. Minnie Weissman, our eighth grade teacher who was into health food, and kept *hocking my chinik* (literally “banging my teapot,” a Yiddish idiom for getting on one’s nerves) about soybeans. No one had ever heard about soy in those days. She was way ahead of her time.

Many people I know have friendships founded during their early school years. Friendships that have endured for the rest of their lives. Such people are fortunate, but I do not happen to be among them. Starting in my elementary school years, I found it difficult to maintain close friendships with my classmates. Their day-to-day behavior toward me often left me feeling disappointed and ultimately caused me to erect a defensive “wall” around my feelings as a means of protecting myself from emotional pain. This feeling of guardedness lasted well beyond my elementary school years, making it hard, even today, for me to develop one-on-one friendships with people. So it goes.

By the time I reached seventh grade, this defensive barrier I had erected was having an impact on my studies at Etz Chaim. I had become disinterested and disconnected from the curriculum. I found the work less than challenging and I was becoming increasingly bored and blasé about school. Fortunately, in the school’s Hebrew department, I fell un-

der the tutelage of a Rabbi Binamowitz, who was tasked with teaching us about the arcane Hebrew text known as the Talmud. I was clearly disinterested in such scholarly works and made no secret of the fact. The rabbi had a clear understanding of the difficulties I was facing at the time and he knew exactly what to do about it. He called my father and asked him to come see him after school. My father agreed, and I was held after class to await his arrival. Rabbi Binamowitz told me to go sit in the corner of the room while he spoke with my dad, who arrived a few moments later.

“Welcome, Mr. Glaubach,” said the rabbi in greeting my father. “Please sit down.”

“Do you see that boy over there in the corner,” he asked as he pointed toward me.

“Of course,” my father replied. “That’s my son, Phillip.”

“Yes, that’s your boy,” said the rabbi, looking sternly into my father’s face. “Your boy can. But ... he doesn’t want to.” This statement struck my father as a profound revelation, and he made it clear that learning Torah and Talmud were not things I could opt into or opt out of. As a Jew, these were things I had to know. The rabbi’s words and my father’s underscoring them had a transformative effect on my learning path, and you might say I turned over a new leaf. A leaf that saw me serve as the class valedictorian the following year on my graduation from eighth grade. I guess I was considered something of a whiz kid protégé since I actually attended for only six years, having skipped two full grades.

In 1945 my parents sold the house on Fort Hamilton Parkway for \$6,500. Today it is occupied by several Chinese families and has an estimated market value in excess of \$1,000,000.

On April 12th, 1945, which happened to be the day that Franklin D. Roosevelt died, we moved to 615 West 173rd Street, apartment 4A, in the German Jewish community of Washington Heights. We were attracted to the area, located north of Harlem in the borough of Manhattan, because it meant I would no longer have to endure the long, arduous subway ride to my high school, the MTA (Manhattan Talmudical Academy). This was Yeshiva University's prep school for boys. Founded by renowned Orthodox rabbi Bernard Revel, MTA sat at 186th and Amsterdam Avenue and is today known as the Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy.

Before the move, I recall riding the Sea Beach subway line from Borough Park along with some fellow students who made the same trip each day. We would do our homework on the train with all of the boys gathered around me, seated on the distinctive yellow wicker seats while I led these mobile study sessions. After we moved, I didn't miss the subway rides, though I did miss my Friday night learning sessions at Congregation Shomrei Emunah. After moving to the Heights, I began learning with Rabbi Yitzchak Grozolsky, a learned Holocaust survivor, together with Rabbis Stanley Levin and Zvulun (Sidney) Lieberman in the East Bronx. The latter served as rabbi at Congregation Beth Torah in Brooklyn for more than 50 years.

We got the Washington Heights apartment through our wealthy relatives, the Stavitsky family, who owned the entire rent-controlled build-

ing. Before the Great Depression, the Stavitskys were among the richest Jewish families in New York. Despite their having lost most of their money during that cataclysmic period, they were still considered well-to-do. We were related to the Stavitskys on my mother's side. Her uncle William, who lived in Escanaba, Michigan, had a daughter, Esther, who married Morty Stavis (shortened from Stavitsky). It was through Esther that we were able to rent this spacious, seven-room apartment at the unbelievable rate of only \$60 a month. Then, as now, it was who you knew, not what you knew.

On many levels, Washington Heights was vastly different from Borough Park. The population was more diverse, with a large number of Irish residents who were less than fond of the many Germanic Jews with whom they shared the neighborhood. On *Succoth*, for example, they thought nothing of pouring hot water down from their windows into our *Succah*.

On one occasion when I was walking to school, I was surrounded by a gang called the Deacons. They eventually let me go, but not before holding a knife to my throat.

Another time I was standing with some non-Jewish young men, who were discussing a deceased friend who had been killed in a violent knifing incident. They felt I wasn't paying sufficient attention to the discussion and was therefore showing disrespect. They edged toward me, about to beat me up, but just then a group of Jewish guys came by, and the whole thing petered out. I learned a thing or two about strength in numbers that day.

When we first moved to the Heights, my father and I regularly attended services at a European-style *shul* called Beth Hamedrash Hagadol (Great House of Study) located on 175th Street, between St. Nicholas and Wadsworth Avenues. Rabbi Meir Hillel Rappaport and Rabbi Moshe Besdin were the spiritual leaders of that synagogue. Born in Lithuania, Besdin had received *smicha* (ordination) at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), where he was trained by Talmudic giants Moshe Soloveitchik and Bernard Revel. While developing the shul's tradition of scholarship, Besdin became associated with the new president of RIETS, Rabbi Samuel Belkin, a distinguished Torah scholar who would go on to become the head of Yeshiva University and lead it through a period of enormous expansion.

An unassuming, yet highly dedicated individual, Besdin gave up his pulpit and volunteered for military service as a chaplain in the South Pacific during World War II. After the war, Rabbi Besdin helped the synagogue's leadership—made up mostly of assertive German Jewish immigrants—reconstitute, on American shores, a community they were forced to leave behind. In 1950, after eight years at Beth Hamedrash Hagadol, Rabbi Besdin moved on and became the spiritual leader of the Kew Gardens Synagogue in Queens. He died in 1982 at age 69.

Beth Hamedrash Hagadol, founded in 1918, remains in operation today in the same beautiful building that opened its doors more than a century ago and was designed by noted architectural firm Sommerfeld & Sass in the neoclassical style.

With the approaching High Holidays, my father, for the first time, purchased seats at our new *shul*, only to find that they were way in the rear of the main sanctuary. When he said to the *gabbai* (sexton), "I don't

want to sit way in back,” the man sneered, “You come here once a year and you expect to sit up front?” So my father decided that this was not the *shul* for us. Instead, Mount Sinai, on 178th Street and Wadsworth Avenue, became our house of worship.

Mount Sinai was directly across the street from a Greek Orthodox Church, on whose wall was a most intriguing—albeit morbid—sign: “When you pass by, step inside for a moment, so that I’ll recognize you when you are finally carried inside.”

Mount Sinai had three sections—a men’s, a women’s, and a coed section. The rabbi was a graduate of the Conservative movement’s Jewish Theological Seminary, although the *shul* considered itself to be Orthodox. My father rose to become chairman of the board, and in that capacity he convinced the board members to hire an Orthodox rabbi. When the rabbi held a bar mitzvah for one of his sons, he temporarily eliminated the coed seating—but only for that one *Shabbos*. It was my father’s goal to permanently establish separate seating, but the rabbi would not support this idea. As a result, my father and I were not on the best of terms with him. Sadly, my father did not live to see the *shul* become more Orthodox. He passed away on July 9th, 1955.

Seven years later, the same rabbi came to me and asked for my help in converting Mount Sinai to become fully Orthodox by installing a *mechitza* (barrier separating men from women). I told him, “You’re seven years too late, but I’ll help you just the same.” The *shul* became Orthodox, and with the flourishing of Yeshiva University, it grew explosively. Now located on 187th Street and Broadway, it is known as Congregation Mount Sinai Anshei Emes.

While still a teenager, I joined the Young Israel Congregation of Washington Heights, located on 170th Street, between St. Nicholas and Audubon Avenues. And at the age of seventeen, I became its president. I was the youngest president of a Young Israel synagogue in the nation. It was a very poor *shul*, located in a ramshackle wooden house that could have passed for Abe Lincoln's log cabin. The *shul* had about 100 members, and no one had the time or the money to contribute. Before I took over, my friend Sandy Eisenstadt's father was president, but he became ill and ultimately died of leukemia. I was already involved with the shul, organizing the youth groups, and so I was asked to take over as president.

One of my earliest memories of the youth group involves an irreligious young man by the name of Myron Toback, whom I brought closer to *Yiddishkeit* (Jewish culture) through our group's activities. He and I became close pals, and were best men at each other's weddings. Myron and I are still in touch these days. In fact, he just turned 89 in late 2022, and I called to wish him a happy birthday.

I was president of the Young Israel Congregation for several years. My mission was to bring "law and order" to the congregation. I established a rule stating that no one could take to the *bimah* without permission from the rabbi or the president. One day, during services, a member named Buchsbaum got up on the *bimah* and began to make an appeal. I said he was not allowed to do this, but some of the congregants disagreed, and were *baleydiht* (insulted) by my objection.

Determined to discover who was right in this matter, I wrote a letter to the Bintel Brief (an advice column in the *Jewish Daily Forward*

newspaper) describing the incident. The editor, or “redactor” as he was called, said that I was correct, but this did not satisfy the *shul* members. In fact, they became even angrier because I had made the dissension public. I decided that I did not need such aggravation, resigned from the presidency, and left the *shul*. Eventually the *shul* just faded away into the night.

While attending MTA, I affiliated with Betar, a worldwide Revisionist Zionist youth organization founded by Ze'ev Jabotinsky in Latvia in 1923. One of its most famous members was Irgun leader and future Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. The name Betar had two origins. It refers to the last Jewish fortification to fall to the Romans during the Bar Kochba revolt in 136 CE. The word is also an acronym for “Brit Trumpledor” or the “Covenant of Joseph Trumpledor,” the one-armed Betar hero who perished during the futile defense of the Tel Chai Jewish settlement against Arab attack in British Mandatory Palestine in 1920.

Among our activities was collecting guns from returning U.S. soldiers, which were then packed at a Brooklyn pier and shipped to the newly born State of Israel aboard the ill-fated cargo ship, the *Altalena*. The ship, under the command of Begin and containing needed arms plus around 1,000 Betar fighters ready to defend the Jewish nation against attack by five surrounding Arab nations, was ordered—upon its arrival in mid-June 1948—to turn over its cargo to the newly formed IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) under the control of the Ben-Gurion government. When it declined to comply, the ship was forced into Tel Aviv harbor, where it was fired upon under Ben-Gurion’s direction. The incident killed 19 Jewish fighters, ignited the weapons and ammunition onboard

the vessel, and very nearly ignited an Israeli civil war. The explosive situation was defused thanks to Begin's levelheadedness when he ordered his Irgun fighters not to return fire against their fellow Jews.

In addition to Betar, I sometimes went to the Shomer Hadati, an Orthodox Zionist youth group. We met on Friday nights at the Soloveitchik Yeshiva. One of the activities there was Israeli dancing. Boys and girls formed a large circle and danced together, holding hands and whirling about to the tune of various Israeli songs. One of the girls was Doris Holzer, who later became Doris Bryk, my *machateniste* (in-law), when her son, Hillel, married my daughter, Tammy.

Unfortunately, Doris passed away several years ago. When I spoke at her *shloshim* (memorial service held 30 days after the funeral), I mentioned that Doris and I had danced together at Shomer Hadati. My grandchildren were shocked. "What?" they asked. "Saba danced with girls?"

Unlike Borough Park, which despite its name, had no real parks to speak of, Washington Heights had two, Highbridge and Robin Hood Park. It was at the latter where I spent my *Shabbos* afternoons with my good friend Myron Toback and other members of the Orthodox community.

In 1947, I graduated from MTA with honors, having finished in three years. I was an excellent student, but my attitude toward school could be summed up this way: "Go to school in order to be able to earn a dollar when you get out of school." I believed in Torah and *parnassah* (livelihood).

It was as a thirteen-year-old high school student that I first began investing in the stock market, thanks to the influence of my Uncle Abraham. In addition to operating his dry goods store in Hudson, New York, my uncle also drove around peddling his merchandise in the surrounding areas. On days when I had no school, he took me along with him. I provided some company, since he had no sons and his two daughters were very young. I happily rode along in his Dodge sedan, watching as he recorded the small sums he was paid by his customers in his little book. Such was the method of accounting in those pre-credit card days. Aside from his singing Russian-Yiddish folksongs like “Tum Balalaika,” whose melodies I recall to this day, Uncle Abraham taught me the ins and outs of the stock market. Later, he also educated me about real estate.

Each time I returned home from my visits with Uncle Abraham, I shared with my father what I had learned about stocks. He began investing, and most of the time he did quite well. The lessons learned in those early days have served me well throughout my life. Today, I’m proud to say that I’m considered one of Fidelity’s (one of the world’s largest asset management companies) most successful investors. But things did not start out that way for me.

Oftentimes, an early negative experience can turn a person off to an activity for life. For example, shortly after my bar mitzvah, my Uncle Abraham gave me \$25 and invited me to join him in a poker game. It didn’t take long for me to lose the entire stake, and I was devastated. The incident left me so shaken that I have never played cards for money since then.

My first experience at investing in the stock market was likewise a negative one, and it involved a good deal more money. After listening for months to my Uncle Abraham talk about how to profitably play the stock market and observing my father's success, I decided to make my move. I had, at that point, a bank account containing a few thousand dollars in bar mitzvah money. To this I had added cash earned at my various part-time high school jobs. In those days, it was possible for a person to open a brokerage account over the phone. So, posing as an adult, I phoned the prestigious stock brokerage firm my uncle had told me about, Pyne, Kendall & Hollister, and told them I was sending them \$5,000 to open a trading account. They accepted it gladly.

After studying the markets I selected a stock that I was sure would be a great investment, Anaconda Copper. Everybody needed copper, I surmised, and I had read that Anaconda owned the world's biggest copper mine, located in Chile. So, I bought 100 shares at \$49 per share. It promptly dropped by 20%, down to \$39. Fearing it would sink even lower, I put in a sell order and lost \$1,000 in no time at all. This was quite a serious hit for a sixteen-year-old punk kid. One would think that, just like the poker game episode, this loss would sour me on the stock market forever. Well, guess what. It didn't.

Had I been frightened off by this misadventure, I would never have invested in anything risky again. But that's not what happened. I took the money I had remaining and tried it again. Only I played it a bit smarter and diversified by not putting all my eggs in one basket. This time I put together a little portfolio of aviation stocks: Bell Aircraft, Grumman, Curtiss-Wright. And this time the portfolio's value grew

steadily, and by the time the Pearl Harbor attacks plunged our nation into World War II and America began its massive push to manufacture more planes for the war effort, these stocks had all tripled in value. Spotting a trend, I took my profits from the aircraft stocks and invested in U.S. and Republic Steel, once again tripling my investment by war's end. Although not without its mishaps and missteps, those experiences led to a lifetime of successful investing. None of which would have happened had I been paralyzed by fear at my first disastrous foray into the stock market.

As mentioned, I had been conducting all my trading over the phone, and I was curious to meet the brokers I was working with in person. So, when I was 17, I informed them that I was planning to stop by Pyne, Kendall & Hollister's midtown Manhattan office. When I arrived and gave my name, Phillip L. Glaubach, I was escorted into the plush private office of the firm's founder, Percy Rivington Pyne II. What you might call a genuine WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant). Pyne, an overly dignified sort with a little Hitler-style mustache, took one look at me and demanded: "Where's Mr. Glaubach?"

"That's me," I said, extending my hand. "I'm Glaubach."

"Get out!" he gurgled angrily.

"But, but ... I'm Glaubach. I'm Phil Glaubach."

"You can't be," Pyne grumbled. "You're a kid. You're just a punk kid. If Roosevelt and Kennedy's SEC boys find out we've been selling stock to minors, we're finished. You get me?" I said that I understood.

"So, I can't trade stock with you anymore?" I asked.

“Yes, of course you can,” he said impatiently. “We just can’t know you’re a minor. So do everything by phone and don’t come back in here where we can see you until you’re 21. Get me?” I said I did.

“Now get the hell out of here and forget you were ever here. As far as we’re concerned, we’ve never seen you in person. And on the phone you told us you were over 21. Got it?”

“Yes, sir,” I said, heading for the door. “I’ve most definitely got it.”

As a teenager, I escaped the summer heat of Washington Heights by working at three Jewish sleepaway camps: Camp Tel Hai in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, where I led the prayer services; Camp Massad Bet in Dingman’s Ferry, Pennsylvania, where I worked as a counselor; and Camp HES (Hebrew Educational Society) in Bear Mountain State Park, where I was the dramatics counselor and the head of the *shul*.

Camp Tel Hai was owned by Professor Joseph Levitsky of Temple University in Philadelphia. I worked there for two summers. Not a *frum* (observant) individual, Dr. Levitsky did not rehire me for the third summer because I refused to take photos on *Shabbos*.

Camp Tel Hai was remarkable for another unusual reason. It had the most delicious coleslaw I had ever eaten. They prepared it every Friday for *Shabbos* and it was oh so very tasty! One Friday, I happened to walk into the kitchen, where I spotted a hairy heavysset man making the coleslaw in a big barrel. He was half-naked, with sweat dripping off him into the barrel as he aggressively mixed the coleslaw with his bare hands. That was the last time I ate coleslaw in camp. I don’t know if the flavor came from the sweat or from the vegetables, but to this day I never venture into the kitchen of any eating establishment.

I later attended dental school (as you'll learn in the following chapter), and while there I ate in a little restaurant on Delancy Street. One day the waiter brought me soup. I tasted it and said, "It's too salty." He took my soup and dumped it right back into the pot, to serve to other less discriminating patrons.

By way of contrast, at Camp HES in Brownsville, New York, they served chopped chicken liver every *Shabbos*, but I never ate it. One *Shabbos*, Rabbi Landesman, who was the head of HES, was sitting with me. "Eat the chopped liver," he urged.

I told him, "My mother said never to eat chopped liver outside of our house." As things turned out, that happened to be good advice. That afternoon I had to call the state troopers, because everyone—including Rabbi Landesman—was sick with food poisoning. The cook had taken the liver from the refrigerator on Friday and left it out in the heat for hours. It had become completely *tzeloyzn* (spoiled).

There was an easy camaraderie among the counselors at Camp HES, and this meant we didn't always watch our language when the kids weren't around. When we ate our meals together, for example, it was common for the counselors to say things like "Pass the fucking potatoes." One female counselor had a *Shabbos* off and went home to be with her family. By force of habit, she accidentally blurted out, "Pass the fucking potatoes" at her family's Friday night *Shabbos* dinner table. She returned to camp with a black eye, courtesy of her father.

Summer camp was the place where I began to learn what girls were all about. I am still learning.

I had always attended all-boys' schools, though outside of school I socialized with both Italian and Jewish girls. Most of my female companions were not what you'd call religious. As a teenager, I began attending neighborhood parties, where I admired the young swains who knew how to dance. Until that point I had only learned Israeli circle dancing. I decided to teach myself some of the modern steps.

My first dancing partner was a broom, which I spun and dipped in the privacy of my living room. Soon enough I was dancing with real live girls, which was considerably more fun than dancing with my broom-mate. But it wasn't until my second year as a counselor at Camp Tel Hai that I had my first actual girlfriend. I was only 17, and this young lady educated me in the sublime pleasures of female companionship. But, as is often the case with summer romances, when the camp season ended, so did our love affair. She lived in Philadelphia, and I was off to college and the next stage of my life.

As mentioned earlier, I attended grade school and high school under the assumed name of Phillip Leon Glaubach. This name had by now become ingrained and so much a part of my identity that I had completely extinguished the fact that as a young child my name had been something else. So, naturally, when it came time to complete my college application forms, I inserted my name, Phillip Leon Glaubach, in response to the invariable first question. I was shocked to discover that I was roundly rejected by every school to which I had applied. What?!

When I inquired as to why—since my grades should have easily earned me entry—I was stunned to learn the true reason. Before accepting a student, the admissions office made it a practice to check out the

applicant against the census bureau records, police files, etc. They wished to make sure that the student was not an illegal alien or someone with a criminal record. In my case they found nothing. Literally nothing. Not even my name. In other words, according to the official records, Phillip Leon Glaubach did not exist! What the hell?

My first fear was that I was a *mamzer* (bastard) and that's why I didn't show up in any records. I forlornly approached my mother.

"Mama," I asked apprehensively, "was I born out of wedlock?"

"No, of course not," she replied. "Why would you ask such a thing?"

"Because the State of New York and the Bureau of Statistics and everyone else says that Phillip Leon Glaubach was never born and does not exist." My mother pondered this a moment and then recalled that moment twelve years earlier when Mrs. Fry, the kindergarten teacher, had changed my name. She then told me the Felix the Cat story.

"I guess I should have told you about all that before," she admitted sheepishly.

I reapplied under my real name and have been known as Felix Leo Glaubach ever since. I was immediately accepted at several colleges. More about that in the next chapter.