

SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF GRANDPA MAX LEBOWITZ (1889 – 1951)

GRANDPA MAX WAS AN UNSCHOOLED GENIUS. AS A TEENAGER FROM HUNGARY, HE WALKED ACROSS EUROPE TO SEEK A BETTER LIFE IN AMERICA. IN OTHER REMINISCENCES, I RELATED HOW HE RECONNECTED WITH THE MARTON FAMILY FROM CHUST AFTER WORLD WAR TWO. SOME OF HIS EARLY LIFE IN AMERICA WAS DISCUSSED IN THE WELKOWITZ REMINISCENCES AND THERE ARE PICTURES OF HIM AT THE PINE VIEW HOTEL. I PARTICULARLY LIKED THE PICTURE OF HIS BUILDING THE HOTEL WITH A TEAM OF HORSES ABOUT 100 YEARS AGO AND THE PICTURE OF HIM ENJOYING THE HOTEL SUCCAH WITH MY GRANDMOTHER MINNIE AROUND 1950. WE HAVE MY GRANDPARENTS' WEDDING PICTURE, WEDDING INVITATION AND OUR PARENTS' JEWISH MARRIAGE CERTIFICATES IN OUR HOME, ALONG WITH THE PAINTING OF GRANDPA MAX WHICH HUNG IN THE HOTEL LOBBY. THERE ARE MANY PICTURES FROM PINE VIEW OVER THE DECADES.

GRANDPA CHOSE NOT TO STAY IN THE IMMIGRANT ENCLAVE ON THE LOWER EAST SIDE, PREFERRING TO BE A PIONEER IN RURAL, UPSTATE NEW YORK. HE WORKED VERY HARD TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN GEOGRAPHIC, CULTURAL AND BUSINESS VENTURES PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN TO HIM. HE WAS SERIOUS BUT FRIENDLY. HE AND GRANDMA WERE LIFE PARTNERS IN BOTH FAMILY AND BUSINESS. HE WAS RELIGIOUS AND ALSO LED THE HIGH HOLIDAY SERVICES IN THE OLD HOTEL LOBBY WHEN I WAS A BOY. AFTER GRANDPA DIED, MY FATHER PUT HIS TEFILLIN PARCHMENTS INTO SMALL BOXES, WHICH I USE IN TRAVEL.

AS A YOUNG BOY, I REMEMBERED HOW MUCH HE LOVED HIS GRANDSON WHO WAS NAMED AFTER HIS FATHER. HE ONCE CHASED AND CAUGHT A RABBIT WHICH HE PUT INTO AN ENCLOSURE AS A PET FOR ME TO FEED AND PLAY WITH.

ONE WINTER, MY PARENTS TOOK ME ON A TRAIN TO HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS TO VISIT MY GRANDPARENTS WHO WERE ENJOYING THE BATHS THERE. I WAS A FEW YEARS OLD AND WAS WALKING UP AND DOWN THE TRAIN AISLES TO MEET PEOPLE AND SAY HELLO TO THEM. ONE OF THEM ASKED ME IF I HAD ANY PETS. WHEN I REPLIED POSITIVELY, THEY ASKED WHAT WAS THE PET'S NAME? I REPLIED YITZCHOK LEBEN, WHICH WAS ALSO WHAT GRANDPA MAX FONDLY CALLED ME. THE ENTIRE TRAIN CAR BURST OUT LAUGHING BECAUSE THE TRAVELLERS WERE ALL JEWISH AND WERE SURPRISED TO HEAR THIS JEWISH NAME DECLAIMED IN ARKANSAS.

GRANDPA HAD CREATIVE IDEAS AND THE ABILITY TO IMPLEMENT THEM:

WHEN MY PARENTS SENT ME TO A SUMMER SLEEPAWAY CAMP, GRANDPA ASKED WHY I WENT AWAY WHEN HE COULD CREATE A DAY CAMP FOR CHILDREN AT PINE VIEW. JACK SABLE WAS HIRED AS DAY CAMP DIRECTOR AND BUILT IT UP TO WHERE IT BECAME A MAJOR ATTRACTION FOR FAMILIES TO VACATION AT PINE VIEW.

THE NEVERSINK RIVER WAS ONCE DEEP ENOUGH FOR BOATING UNTIL THE DAM HOLDING BACK THE WATERS WAS DESTROYED IN THE HURRICAN OF 1938. AFTER WORLD WAR TWO, GRANDPA DROVE A BULLDOZER ALONG THE RIVER TO TRY TO DEEPEN THE RIVERBED SO THAT BOATING WOULD BECOME POSSIBLE AGAIN. BUT THE RIVER FILLED BACK IN AND WE NEVER DID HAVE BOATING AGAIN.

THE MOUNTAIN PATH LEADING UP TO PINE VIEW WAS ROCKY AND BUMPY. SO GRANDPA POURED TAR ALONG THE ROADBED TO FACILITATE TRANSIT TO AND FROM THE HOTEL. UNFORTUNATELY, THE TAR CAUGHT ON FIRE WHICH SPREAD TO GRANDPA. HE HAD TO BRAVELY ROLL HIMSELF ON THE GROUND WRAPPED IN A BLANKET, TO SAVE HIS LIFE.

HE WAS CONCERNED THAT THE NEXT GENERATION OF JEWISH CHILDREN WERE GROWING UP IGNORANT OF THEIR RELIGIOUS HERITAGE, WHICH HE CONSIDERED VALUABLE IN HIS LIFE AND HAD VALUES WORTHY OF TRANSMISSION. HE INSTITUTED A CHARITY APPEAL AT SAURDAY MORNING SERVICES FOR JEWISH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS. HIS MESSAGE WAS THAT, WHILE THE GUESTS WERE ENJOYING THEIR STAY AT THE HOTEL, THEY SHOULD ALSO BE CHARITABLE TO SUPPORT THESE INSTITUTIONS WHICH GAVE SPIRITUAL SUBSTANCE TO FUTURE GENERATIONS.

TO PROTECT HIS CHIDREN IN CASE THE HOTEL FAILED IN THE FUTURE, HE AND GRANDMA INSISTED THAT THEIR CHILDREN GET EDUCATED SO THAT THEY COULD SURVIVE ECONOMICALLY IF THEIR PARENTS' HOTEL WAS UNSUCCESSFUL. THEY ALSO WANTED THE CHILDREN TO HAVE OPTIONS IN CASE THEY DIDN'T WANT TO BE IN THE HOTEL BUSINESS.

AFTER THE SEASON:

WHEN THE HOTEL WAS CLOSED, MY GRANDPARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN LIVED IN THE WINTER HOUSE IN OLD FALLS. THE HOUSE WAS ON THE ROAD CONNECTING SOUTH FALLSBURG TO OLD FALLS AND NEAR THE ROAD CONNECTING OLD FALLS TO HURLEYVILLE. IT WAS ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE ORETSKY'S GARAGE. OLD FALLS CONSISTED OF A U.S. POST OFFICE, SANDY'S BARBERSHOP, A TOURIST GIFT SHOP, AND A FEW HOUSES. WHEN I HAD TO GET SECURITY CLEARANCE TO WORK AT BROOKHAVEN NATIONAL LABORATORY, SAM THE POSTMASTER TOLD MY DAD THAT THE FBI HAD INTERROGATED HIM TO TELL THEM EVERYTHING THAT HE KNEW ABOUT ME. FORTUNATELY I WAS JUST A STUDIOUS BOY. THE NEIGHBORING HOUSE ON THE CORNER WAS OWNED BY THE ALEXANDER FAMILY, WHO WERE THE TOWN GENTRY. THEY WERE SUPPOSEDLY VERY GRACIOUS TO ALLOW A JEWISH NEIGHBOR. I REMEMBER BEING INTRODUCED TO THE OLDER GENERATION, WHO WERE NICELY POLITE AND FORMAL. BUT THEIR GRANDSON WAS VERY WILD AND PUT MY PET CAT INTO A BUCKET OF PAINT, WHICH KILLED HIM. HE WOULD RUN AROUND THE PROPERTY WITH A LONG, POINTED STICK, YELLING THAT HE WAS A CRUSADER. THERE WAS A CHURCH AND ONE ROOM SCHOOLHOUSE ACROSS THE STREET, WHERE I WENT TO SCHOOL BEFORE WE MOVED TO NEW YORK CITY. THE SCHOOL WAS VERY DISORGANIZED WITH MULTIPLE AGE GROUPS IN THE SAME ROOM. THE OLDER, BIGGER KIDS BULLIED THE YOUNGER ONES. MY FATHER'S GENRATION OF RURAL JEWS BECAME QUITE STRONG, BECAUSE THEY HAD TO BE ABLE TO PHYSICALLY DEFEND THEMSELVES AGAINST ANTI-SEMITIC ATTACKS. DURING THE 1930'S THE KU KLUX KLAN WAS VERY ACTIVE AND THERE WERE LARGE WOODEN CROSSES BURNING ON THE MOUNTAINS DURING THE JEWISH HOLIDAYS.

DURING THE WINTERS, AUNT RUTH USED TO ENJOY RUNNING ACROSS THE ICY NEVERSINK RIVER, WITH EACH STEP BREAKING THROUGH THE ICE. UNCLE LARRY WOULD DISABLE THE CAR BRAKES AND WHIZZ DOWN THE ICY WOODRIDGE HILLS. ALL THE CHILDREN DROVE CARS AT THE AGE OF ELEVEN, SINCE THEY WERE ALREADY USED TO DRIVING TRACTORS AND THE POLICE IGNORED THIS BEHAVIOR.

WE HAVE MY GRANDPARENTS NORTHWIND CHAIRS AND STUFFED PHEASANTS IN OUR LIVING ROOM. THE PHEASANTS WERE GIVEN AS A FRIENDLY GIFT TO MY GRANDPARENTS FROM ONE OF THE LOCAL

JEWISH FARMERS. I REMEMBER COWS GRAZING ON THE PINE VIEW LAWNS AFTER THE SEASON AND I THINK THAT THERE WAS A BARTER ARRANGEMENT FOR THIS TRANSACTION.

GRANDPA WAS MENTALLY AND PHYSICALLY VIGOROUS FOR ALL HIS LIFE. IN HIS EARLY 60'S, HE WAS DIAGNOSED WITH METATSTATIC PROSTATE CANCER. HE FOUGHT THIS DISEASE, BUT UNFORTUNATELY DIED OF RADIATION OVERDOSING FROM THE RADIOACTIVE SEEDS IMPLANTED TO KILL THE CANCER CELLS.

MAY HIS MEMORY BE AN INSPIRATION.