

The Biography of Betty Cassorla, (continued)

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Ages 12 - 22

The move to 221 New Lots Avenue, at Hinsdale, in Brooklyn, NY

Age 9 - 14 1931 - 1936

My parents were getting fed up with the inadequate heat at our Alabama Avenue apartment. I would sleep on orange crates, atop a red, scratchy wool blanket (Kolcha) brought from Kastoria, Greece, by my grandmother as part of her treasure. The blanket was covered by a sheet, but it was still itchy and pinchy. I didn't know that I was bad off. Who knew to complain? And if I knew to complain, it wouldn't have done any good anyway.

Then we moved to 221 New Lots Avenue, where we didn't have to freeze anymore. It had steam heat! I enjoyed it because my mother didn't have to boil water anymore. Sunshine came into the rooms now. The old apartment had been so cold and dreary, but the new one was warm and sunny.

Julie Pessarillo used to come up to the third floor where we lived, just to warm himself before going to school. He had a cold-water flat, and he'd arrive to meet up with Jack before going to school. He would sit on the radiator to warm himself up. He was a red-headed kid, full of freckles, and we all adored him. He looked like he belonged in our family, because we were all redheads! I always looked up to him, because he was a friend of my older brother.

Cousin Joseph Elias remembers

1930

We, (Jack Camhi and I) spent swimming together, and we were boy Scouts in old Troop 272. We operated out of the basement of old Malta Street Synagogue. We used to jump into the dirt from the top floor, and jumped maybe two stories. We were lucky to survive our childhoods!

We went on hikes. As Brooklyn Boy Scouts, we took subways to the Bronx and then went to the Dikeman Street Ferry crossing the Hudson River. Then we'd hike up the Palisades and into the woods. We'd sleep overnight. We had a volleyball, and the ball hit a tin on a fire and put dinner into the dirt. It was just fun!



1929 - Betty lures customers to Hymie Eli's Bear Mountain Fishing Game

When I was a little girl, maybe 5 or 6, I used to go sometimes with Hymie Eli's to help him with his concession at Bear Mountain. Hymie Assael was an uncle, his wife was Anna Assael, who was my father Chaim's sister.

Bear Mountain, a skit resort on the Hudson River, accessible by ferry from Battery Park, Manhattan

My job was to win at a game of fishing for plastic fish, to encourage others to play. I would catch a plastic fish with my little rod, and shout

with joy. My cousins would also come along and cheer every time I won.

The day would go like this...

My parents would send me off with Hymie for the day. Hymie took us by subway to the Battery. He had three daughters too. We all had fun playing.

We took the boat at the Battery. My brother Jakie was 9 years old then, and he would sometimes come too. Hymie picked us up at 221 New Lots, Avenue, at Hindsdale.

Dad: (When the Cassorla children went to Bear Mountain) we had melons, five kids, and they all went under a turnstile to avoid paying.

There was live a carnival there at Bear Mountain. His daughters also had to be skills.

He had maybe 7 or 8 relatives, all kids, cheering. Hymie was nice and clean-shaven.

After I caught the fish and everybody cheered, he would give me a big stuffed bear and everybody would see what I'd won.

He'd say "Go away and come back later."

So Jakie and the cousins and I would go sit on the grass or watch the carousel.

Then we would go back around the back entrance and return the stuffed bear. Then we'd do it again.

I didn't like it, because I knew it was a game.

Then he closed the concession and would take us out for a sandwich and ice cream. Charlotte Aldorati also took us once and that was a nice trip.



Summer Work: Ages 7 or 8,

221 New Lots

During the summers while I was living at 221 New Lots, I'd go to P.S. 190. I would walk: Snediker, Hinsdale, Scheffield, and other blocks, maybe 6 or 7 long ones.

They'd have little hammocks in the school yard, with babies hanging and swaddled with light blankets. There was asphalt paving below the babies. The teacher would tell us to go to this woman's baby or the other's, and swing the baby while the mother was out shopping.

We'd get very tired after swinging the baby. They didn't have any chairs for us, so I'd sit on the cement. We'd try to stay in the shade, but didn't always succeed. Sometimes I would see my friends or I would talk to the teacher - who were always very nice.

I'd work there for as long as the baby was asleep. When it awoke, I'd get the teacher to tell me what to do, such as rocking some more, or feeding it a bottle. I would put a little diaper or rag around the bottle to hold it upright.

For this work, I'd get a penny per day. My parents were very loving, but poor and couldn't afford to give me pocket money. Therefore, I could spend this penny per day on whatever I wanted.



My sister Sally in 1926.

When the mothers would come, they'd give me the penny, say, "Thank you very much," and I'd be free to do whatever I wanted. I would eat my bag lunch, say fruit and a sandwich. Then I'd stay in the school yard, playing at the little camp they had there for kids. The teachers were in charge of this play time.

The relay races were in the school yard. They'd line up maybe 8 girls. She'd blow a whistle, and we'd run. We'd touch the fence and come back, and I'd be way ahead of the other girls! I would always win because Jack and I used to chase each other a lot. At the park, such as Prospect Park, we'd always roll down the hillsides. Jakie and I would lay down and race to the bottom, then run up the hill and start again, screaming and laughing!

During the winter months, it was very cold out and Mama gave us "fireman's rubbers" to protect us from the snow. They'd buy them from the fire department. They had red rims, which I would polish and clean nightly to make them extra shiny. My folks would laugh adoringly while watching me polish my shoes.

When I walked to school, I'd be crying from the cold because I never had gloves. Maybe my mother didn't know much about cold weather protection -- Kastoria never got cold, after all. There was a lot of snow, big hills of it, more than there seems to be around these days. There would be WPA workers who would shovel the snow into the sewer.

One teacher, who felt sorry for me while I was crying, brought me to a water fountain and put more cold water on my freezing hands. It burned me more! I howled! The teacher thought she was helping, of course. Then she

held my little hands in hers and rubbed them, and wiped my tears. All of this was in the boys and girls gym.

After school, I would go to the corner dairy store and get fresh milk and chocolate cupcakes every day for my family. My brother and I would have a glass of milk and chocolate cupcakes with chocolate icing in the inside everyday. My mother would pay for these items purchased from the dairy store. We were always very big on milk. Milk, milk, milk! We enjoyed it so much.

Age 11: The Terror of P.S. 190 -- Mrs. Kreegen

One day, I was walking from girls' gym to the boys' gym, to get to our upper classrooms. Julie Pessirillo called to me, saying, "Becky! Becky!"

I turned, and I waved my little hand to him. Suddenly, Mrs. Kreegen came out of nowhere. She was a fat woman with orange hair, thick lips, heavy jewelry, and growl in her vocal cords. She had thick arms and hands and sounded like a man -- you could always hear her coming from far down the hall. Everyone feared her.

She grabbed the top part of my hair and flung me against the boy's bathroom doors. My body flung the door open, which had a heavy spring. I collapsed onto the floor with my head in the bathroom and my body crumpled in the doorway -- the door locked between my jaw and my neck.

I gave out a big cry!

All the kids were in shock. Three other teachers, including a male teacher ran to pick me up. They reprimanded Mrs. Kreegen about what she had done. They said, "What did you *do* that for?! What did you *do* that for?! She's only a child!"

They took me up to the nurse's quarters. The nurse comforted me and washed my face. Then she told me to go home for the rest of the day.

Mazalto gets furious!

Every day, I walked to and from school. So walking home was not unusual -- but doing it in the middle of the day was. When I got home, my mother was in the kitchen doing her household chores.

She looked at me and immediately knew something was wrong. How could I be home so early? I started to tell her what happened, and she saw my jaw and neck. It was purple and bruised, with blood from my cuts made by the brass fittings of the door.

She stopped what she was doing, looked at me and said, "*Lo que con tusio?*" ("What happened with you?") I spoke to her in Ladino, our form of Spanish. She got so upset that she immediately stopped what she was doing.

With her apron and all, she and I walked back to school. She walked into the main office and started yelling, "I want to see that teacher! I want to see that teacher who hit my daughter!"

I was terrified that I was going to get in trouble because of all the fuss she was making. I said, "Mom, don't worry, I'll be all right. Please, don't do anything!" But knowing my mother, she was determined to get to the teacher who gave me those bruises.

Mazalto didn't want to listen to me. She said, "No, no. I want to see who did this to you!" In those days, we weren't as friendly to our teachers as we are today. Back then, we were all terrified of teachers, we thought they were Gods. And we never even saw a principal.

Anyhow, she kept yelling, "I want to see the teacher who did this to my child!" She was very loud - I had never seen her this angry. She terrified me.

Out came the Assistant Principal... and then the main Principal, Mrs. Gertner, who wore a big gray wig. She was crippled, used a cane, and always wore a black dress.

She yelled, "Who is making all that noise?"

I was shivering. I never saw the principal, and her wig scared me -- it was so big! Oy God!

The assistant was trying to tell her it was Mrs. Camhi. Meanwhile, my mother kept repeating over and over, "I want to see the woman who did that to my daughter. I want to do the same thing to her, what she did to my little Becky! The same thing! No different. The same thing!"

The Principal said to the Assistant, "Call Mrs. Kreegen to my office." Then Mrs. Gertner said to my mother in a quiet voice, "It's advisable that you leave. We will look into this and I assure due punishment to the teacher who did this to your child."

Then I started to cry, because of fear and embarrassment. My mother took her apron and wiped my face, soothing me. She said to me in a quieter voice, "All right Becky, don't cry. And don't be frightened. This Principal is going to take care of that bad teacher. Let's go home."

Within a few days, and due to many other complaints and incidents, we never again saw Mrs. Kreegen. There were many complaints, but this incident was the last straw. That was one of the worst days of my life (my mother breaks into tears at the thought of it.) I can see my mother right now. She was so brave!

At Woodburn, NY -- Almost Drowning, Age 10

One very special summer, my father treated us to two weeks in the country. We were at a *kuchelaine*, where many families live in one building, but we'd all eat in a big dining room. My mother would cook in a big kitchen with other women, and would bring the food to the Camhi table. Every family had a table.

A friend of mine -- much older, Daddy's sister's friend named Sarah Cohen -- suggested that we (Jack and I) walk with her to the Neversink River. That was where everyone went to swim. She took care of me and my brother Jakie. She was about 18 with long, wavy blond hair, and Jack was maybe 13 then.

My brother knew how to swim decently, but I did not. The Neversink was a river that was about 75 feet wide, and no one knew how deep. The riverbanks were all rocky, and filled with pebbles. Higher on the banks, further back, weed, grass and trees grew. Maybe a dozen families were there, mainly men, boys and girls while the women were back at the *kuchelaine*, busy cooking.

My brother swam across to the other side of the river and sat on a big rock. I couldn't go across to join him because I couldn't swim, so Sarah asked me, "Becky, would you like to go across to join your brother?"

I said, "Yes." She said, "Get on my shoulders and I'll take you across, since you don't know how to swim."

She waded in, and about half-way across, she went down into a hole and held my legs. I went down with her. The water was above my head -- that's how deep the hole was. Because she was under the water, she was gasping for air.

I was screaming to my brother, "Jakie!! Jakie!!," but he was frozen and just looked. He was maybe 30 feet away from us on the rock. He had a black over-the-shoulder wool bathing suit and flaming red hair. He just stared at us, his mouth shut.

When Sarah would surface, "She'd scream, "Help! Help!" and then go down again.

All of this was over about 5 minutes. Without my seeing it, some woman came running in and clutched me around my waist. She had no idea that Sarah was beneath me and it was therefore too heavy for her to pull me up. So she started to slip.

Then two men came and grabbed me and the woman. The men yelled, "There's somebody underneath Betty! There's somebody underneath Betty!" We were both turning blue, and it was very bad. I gulped more and more water, trying to yell, "Jakie!"

It took maybe five more minutes to get us all out. All of a sudden everyone was standing on the banks of the beach, watching.

The woman was coughing her head off. She was a big woman, big-breasted, who weighed about 250 pounds. She wore a big, dress-makers' bathing suit with floral patterns. Her extra weight had caused her to sink more.

They put us all on the embankment, and the woman coughed badly for a long time. The men were very kind and soothed us. They did not need to give resuscitation.

Then my brother Jakie swam across fast the lake to get my mother. My father would only visit on weekends and was not around. My mother ran up to see what had happened.

She was screaming, "*La Muerte! La Muerte, la Becky mia!*" She hugged me, kissed me and held me. It was a very bad scene. This was one of the worst experiences of my life.

The woman who tried to save me was maybe in her thirties. When we were all on the beach. The woman hugged me and kissed me, "You darling, darling, darling." Sarah was very upset and kept saying, "Oh my God, oh my God." Later she said, "If I hadn't held onto your legs, I would have drowned." My legs were all scratched up and bleeding.

Jakie was just very quiet, holding my hand. And then his arm was around my shoulders. He was maybe a head taller than me.

My mother walked us back to the *kuchelaine* and gave us some sugar and water to drink -- a Sephardic custom after experiencing a fright. Then she gave us homemade bread and some hot soup.

There were no telephones back then. My father came up on a Friday night, two days after the incident. My mom prepared vishonies and chicken soup. Then afterwards, mama told papa what had happened.

He made me sit on his lap and kissed me. He was very upset. Then he bought some chocolate candy for us later. I became very quiet and pensive and suffered from bad dreams for quite a while. During my dreams, I was under the water and I would see the lights up on the surface but couldn't rise up to them. They would swirl above me, with the pressure of Sarah's hands pulling me down. I'd wake up in a fright, and tell my mother, "I see the water with the sunshine on it, ma!"

My mother would soothe me, "Close your eyes and try to go to sleep." But my father would get up and cover me with the blanket again, saying, "*Chica mia* ("my little one"), try to go to sleep again."

Growing up -- Ages 10 -14: New Lots

Days were very nice while we lived at 608 Williams Avenue in Brooklyn. My brother would hang out at a corner candy store on Georgia and Newport Avenues, at a store named Jigg's. He met my future husband there, Louie, and Hymie Batruch, Benny Elias (Flash, because he was so slow), Elie Rouso, and Moishe Copio. Later, Callie Zacharia and Louie Calderon, and Itzy Horowitz became part of the group. They all hung out there, and all went to PS 190. I went to PS 190 till I was about thirteen and one half.



My P.S. 190 Class. This was taken in June of 1935, when I was 13.

We had to sew our own graduation dresses. My sister Esther had a beautiful cape with ruffles. Dresses had to be white, but hers was pink. I copied the pattern from her cape, to make my own cape and matching dress. The dress had something like a fishtail in the back. I sewed the ruffled cape onto the back of it, all in white. It was in organdy, but I molded it on Esther's cape, which was in chiffon. I was the only one in school with a cape and dress.

Since I was the only one in a cape and a fishtail, my teacher sent me around to all the other eighth grade classes. My teacher Mrs. Langston, was so proud of me! (Dad adds, "She was cock-eyed.")

My mother then took me to the beauty parlor to get my hair set for graduation day. They used a heavy paste. There was no hair spray back then, they only had a gel.

My mom took me to a photo studio in my graduation dress to have my picture taken. I have that picture still, and it's up on the wall in my den.



We had a graduation ceremony at PS 190, at about age thirteen. My parents came, even though it was on a weekday. My father took a day off from work to come. That was very unusual. He was working at the time Lloyd Sports, a store in New York City, in Manhattan. He got to work each day by walking to the station, taking a train to 34th street, and working at the factory for 8 hours. The factory is still there!

P.S. 190 was a wonderful school, very homely, and I had a lot of friends. The teachers were friendly, and the atmosphere was terrific.

I loved summer school there because I enjoyed going to the school yard and watching and participating in the races. I was the fastest girl!

The school itself was open in the summertime, and the mothers came to have their babies looked after while they slept in fishnet cradle swings.

My friends back then were: Mary and Pauline Alcasa, Alice Hasson (Ikie Hasson's sister), and Becko Albahar. We'd play checkers at the summer school. It was like a day-camp. They had one counselor to about 50 kids. Those were my summers!

Once in awhile my older sister's friends, like Flash Elias's sister, Stella, would take me to Washington Baths. Stella would come up to my house at 222 New Lots Avenue to take me to this park. She was about 25-30 years old. Another girl named Lena would go with us. She was my age. Washington Baths was a popular seaside athletic field. They had a sun parlor on the roof, punching bags for men, a big swimming pool, and salt water for us to swim in. This was located in Coney Island, right near the rides and Steeplechase Park.

The girls (Lena and Stella) would take me there for the afternoon. They were very good-natured. My mother and Flash's mother, Estrella, were very good friends and we (their daughters) were all like sisters.

At the Washington Baths I saw all of these women bathing naked near the sun parlor. I was embarrassed because I wasn't naked, but they all were.

We'd also go to Steeplechase Park (Dad used to sneak in there). Each ride had 32 numbers there, but you'd find plenty of castaway tickets.

After Washington Baths and Steeplechase Park, we'd go to the beach or boardwalk. Iridescent ink would be put on our wrists. To save money, we'd eat sandwiches. They also had penny arcades, but we couldn't afford that. We'd talk and have fun. There would be about four to six of us. To get to Coney Island, we would take the subway.

Sometimes, I'd seen Eli Rousso at the boardwalk or beach selling ice cream pops. He was about 13. He looked like



"*chandrajone*," like a ragamuffin, but he was still adorable.

At the beach, Stella would hold my hand in the waves. I used to have the most paunchiest bathing suits, made out of wool.

You'd get very wet and the wool bathing suit got uncomfortable, and then she'd take me

under the boardwalk to change -- there was a little bit of privacy back there. She'd hold a big bath towel around me and I would put on a dry bathing suit.

While I was out at Washington Baths, Esther was always working on a sewing machine, so I hardly ever saw her. She used to bring home shorts and bathing suits for me.



My family at Van Cortland Park, 1927! Here I am, age 4 or 5, with all of our relatives. That's Dad (Chaim) on the left, Jakie (age 7) beside him, then Sally next to him, me in the foreground and my Mom (Mazalto) behind me, and Esther on the right.

Yusef Eli - 1932 - Using unpaid kids to build fountain pens

This is my mother's brother. Aunt Cora was a sweetheart with a tenor voice. She was a champion baker.

He brought home a loaf of fountain pens, and he wanted people to assemble them for free. This was a sin to Aunt Victoria's house on Snedicker Avenue.

He made a game of it to use us as unpaid child labor. He'd say: "Who is going to win? Who is going to assemble the most fountain pens?"

Mom: I came home late from Snedicker to 679 Alabama Avenue, in the dark, maybe 5 blocks.

He used to kick relatives because they did not listen to him to sit and work for him.

Age 12 -- 1934:

Going to the Van Cortland Park with My Parents:

Uncle Joseph's Crazy Dance

When we'd go to the park, my mother would bring tons of stuff. She would prepare for these outings on Saturday, after *shul*. The next day, Sunday, we would go to the park.

She'd make a big pot of *veeszhonies* on Saturday. Then she'd reheat the food on Sunday in the morning. We also brought pots of spaghetti and rice, and lots of fruit. For the fruit, my Dad would buy lots of melons. We had salads filled with lettuce cucumbers and tomatoes.

My father would put this banquet next to the stream, near some big rocks. He would cover it with an oil cloth tablecloth and wedge it into the rocks.

To get to the park, we'd have to go on two trains. We'd go to the New Lots Avenue train and take the BMT Canarsie Line to Atlantic Avenue. All five of us had to carry a bundle.

All of us would wear shorts, except my mother who'd wear a dress with a big corset. Her hair would always be in a bun. No one wore makeup, but there were many earrings, necklaces and bracelets. All of these belongings were heavy.

Then there would be other delicacies. When we'd get to the Atlantic Avenue the train would be standing still with its windows open, waiting for the passengers to get on. Papa would carry me and put me through the window to get a seat for my mother.



When the doors finally opened, there would be a huge crowd and a big crush in which you could get trampled. Mama had to get a seat, which is why I would reserve one for her. My father would always be worried about where Jakie and I were because he couldn't see us due to the crowds.

He was very insecure, frightened, "*Stay cerca de mi, dolly.*" ("Stay close to me, dolly") He was always so proud of me when I got a seat for mama.

On those old trains they had little sections of cubicles where a family could sit together. These were the wicker seated trains with ceiling fans.

When we arrived at the park, we'd let our parents set up the food. Then we told our parents we were going up the mountain in the park. My mom would say, "Be very careful!"

The mountain was so steep that you had to hold onto trees just to get up. At the top was a plateau, and there were always gypsies celebrating there. They had such loud music! Jakie and I were so shocked by them that we couldn't say a word to each other. They were dancing and playing music. On the plateau was a big caravan of wagons and horses.

They had tambourines, and a lot of jewelry. The women were all heavy, and many smoked -- which was outrageous! I had never seen a woman smoke. We hid behind some bushes, watching them. We didn't want to stay there for very long because we were frightened. He said, "You're going to tell Mama, or should I?"

Me: "I'll tell Mama."

Jakie: "I'll tell papa."

When we'd approach our parents, they would be so excited.

Me: "*Mama, ya savies?*" ("Do you know?")

My mother would clasp her hands and say "*Lo que dulce? Lo que dulce?*" ("What sweet?") My dad would hike up his pants and tug on his belt, which was his way of showing happiness. On his face would be an adoring, excited smile, as he looked down at me. He'd go "eee" "eee". My mother would hide her mouth and giggle with joy.

My father was very genteel and proper. Everything had to be just so. When he found out we'd climbed up the mountain and saw the gypsies he said, "*Adies, adies.*" ("Oh god, oh god.")

Jakie and I used to like to roll down the hills. We would cross our arms and we'd roll, roll, roll. We'd race to see who would go down fastest. I didn't like to stay near anyone because their shoes would hit my face.

We'd be out of sight of our parents at that time. They granted us more liberties than I would grant my children.

My sisters Sally and Esther would be busy with their friends. There would be about ten Sephardic Jewish families there.

It seemed like the whole town was there because everyone knew everyone else. There would always be at least one family cooking so there would always be something good to smell.

Each family had something to keep their food warm in. They brought regular dishes,



My sister Esther in perhaps 1924, age 14.

which my Mom would wash in the stream. We would bring our food and stuff in satchels made out of black cardboard. We'd have races and play jokes with the other people there.

My Uncle Josef, for entertainment later in the day, would step onto a table, or a high rock, and start singing in Spanish while clapping his hands, "*Que sikita la camisa.*" By the end of the song, everyone would be singing and clapping their hands. We were all a little drunk from homemade wine even though it was during Prohibition.

Then the crowd, about 30 adults, would begin chanting "*Que sikita los pantalones.*" ("Take off your pants") He was anxious to comply, but all of the women started to scream. He went ahead and did it anyway. When he started to take off his pants, there was another pair of pants underneath. He had forgotton to take off his shoes, so he got stuck!

The men helped take off the shoes. Now he's in stocking feet. Again they dared him, "*Quisikita los pantaloos, OTRA VEZ!*" (Again)

Again the women screamed, but he was very happy to comply. He was about 50 then, dark hair. He was sweaty, wearing an undershirt, and everyone was screaming -- and he did it again.

He said, "I'm gonna take it off!" The women yelled "No no." The men were just as shocked as the women when he had a third pair of pants on! To this day, I'll never forget that, it was a hot, hot day in July.

How he wore three pair of pants in that hot weather, I'll never know. That's what kind of guy. He'd do anything for a laugh. He was the exact opposite of my Dad, who was so proper.

My Dad would say about Josef, "How could he do that?" He was upset and angry with Josef. My father was extremely organized, clean and responsible. My mother was more of a joker than he was. She was entirely different. She was the one who made life happy, with a lot of friends and company.





Here I am with Brother Jack, around 1936.

608 Williams Avenue

Age 15:

"Shipwreck Kelly bends a fence in spite"

There was a man named Shipwreck Kelly, a Sephardic who was also boxer. He had a smashed nose and iron teeth and he always wore a big white hat – he was very flamboyant.

I was in high school at the time. I had little cliques of friends mostly from the East Side. He was in the older group, Joe Cassorla's age (early twenties).

We would visit them sometimes on the East Side, around Allen Street and he would constantly look at me. He came around to my house many times. My dad thought he was very ugly.

He bought a present for my mother to get on her good side so that he could date me. He came to my porch, without notice, at 608 Williams. I didn't want to go out with him. It wasn't nice that I should be so popular, and Esther not.

So I said to Shipwreck, "No, I don't feel much like it." I was 15 and he 22. He was so upset that he grabbed this cast iron ornate fence. He took two parts of the fence and bent them all the way back. He slammed the gate, and he walked off. I never saw him again.

608 Williams

Age 15: Murray wants to be my boyfriend

Murray Zadakariah, a friend of Joe Cassorla's, hung around Pop Lader's candy Store along with Jack Baruch. People who were my daddy's age hung out at Jig's. With a group of girls, we'd walk on the main drag, New Lots Avenue.

One day, Murray came over while my friends and I were walking and he said, "I'd like to take you out, Betty."

He asked the girls to move on, saying, "I just want to talk with Betty."

I said, "No, forget it!" I was kind, not snooty. I wasn't interested in him. I wanted to go out with a good-looking guy. My dad thought he was too old for me; he was six years older. My mother thought that he was nice, but not very intelligent.



Later on, my family was in our house and my dad tells me, "Betty, there's a Spanish boy downstairs. He wants to see you."

There was Murray. He said, "Even though you said no, I just want you to know that I bought a brand new hat, just special for me to wear for you."

He had a big oval, cylindrical hatbox in hand. He was so eager, but I said no again.

I told my Mom about this fella, and my mother approved. He had a job, and he was nice looking. He had blue eyes and blonde hair; he looked like Mel Gibson.

My father, Chaim, treasured this photo. *He carried it with him in his wallet every day that he worked (which is how it got*

crushed). He would show it to his friends. He was so proud of me!

Age 16: Another suitor: Hymie Cohen

Hymie also hung around by Pop Lader's store, though he was not a friend of Joe's. He asked me out, and he was very handsome. I said, "Yes!"

Hymie took me to the Paramount Theater. Usually there was one hour of live entertainment, a movie, and some shorts. He asked me to go up to the balcony, which was where people smoked and a location for lovers.

The Paramount Theater was in Manhattan, off Broadway, near the Astor Hotel, at mid-town. We went by subway. I had been there before to hear the big bands, but never before on a date.

He was trying to kiss me, and I got so uncomfortable that I had to ward him off. He didn't like that I was so unresponsive. We ended up not talking that much. He eventually said, "Come, let's have an ice cream or sandwich."

We went to a popular ice cream parlor in New Lots, Carol's. When you go in Carol's, it was similar to the shop Maxim's in the movie *Gigi*. All my friends were there, and they said, "Oh, look at Betty and Hymie. Are they a twosome?"

At the end of the evening we gave each other a kiss, to say good-bye. I didn't want to go out with him any more because I didn't like boys who were pushy -- I just wasn't that type.

Swim team at Thomas Jefferson

In high school, I was very active in the school programs. I worked and wrote for the Liberty Bell -- we did our own printing, ads, and gossip.

I also participated in swimming. I had a lot of speed as a swimmer, but I didn't have the right form. The teacher said, "Betty, I want you on my team, but you have the wrong form. But because you have slipped, I'm not going to correct it." I had the worst stroke -- my legs were hanging down.

We had school swim meets where we competed against other local schools. In races our team always won. There were 6 rows, 3 from our school and 3 from the other. We just swam up and back one time. When I got to the end, I turned around and pushed with my feet against the wall. Then they'd blow the whistle.

They would then announce with a microphone, "Betty Camhi, representing Thomas Jefferson High School." The pool was at basement level. I raced at ages 16 and 17. They called me "Betty Lightning."

Ages 15 - 17,

Best friends Alice Hasson and Mary Alcosser,

Pauline Alcosser, Becko Albehar, Ray Levy,

and Frances Berglass

Alice and Mary were my best friends. We used to walk around New York, go to movies, and go to Sutter Avenue. There were stores where we'd look at nice trinkets, ribbons and bows. They also had nice purses and dresses.

this was in New Lots, but maybe 15 blocks away from where we lived. We also went to Pitikin Avenue. All the fine stores were there.

All of these girls were sweet and friendly. When Lou started to go with me, I happened to like him. Then the girls were saying, Mary especially, "Lou isn't taking you away from us."

I asked them, "Why do you talk like that?"

As it happened, he did take me away from them.

Moving to 661 Williams Avenue

Age 17

661 Williams Avenue, continued

Age 16: Working for Natty Joe's

My father worked at Lloyd's Sportswear on 35th Street in New York. This business is still there -- one of the few that is. George Arliss played in the film, *Lloyd's of London*. Freddie Hazen liked the name "Lloyd's" and used the name to become a multi-millionaire. His four sons run the business. This is a different family from the eccentric Jack Hazen.

My father contributed a roman numeral pendulum clock to the factory, so that it would chime the hours and half-hours. Everyone liked that clock.

My father had an empty machine sitting next to him at work. One day he asked, "Becky, would you like to come sit at the machine next to me? Since you know how to work at the machine, maybe you'll like it." So I went to work for Lloyd Sportswear, on 35th Street.

Freddie Hazen liked the way I worked -- so meticulously. Says my husband: "Betty weaves very fast and clean and is exacting in her work. The quality at Lloyd's was nowhere near the caliber of what she was used to producing. This was a liability for Betty. The boss got nothing to lose by hiring her."

Freddie said, "This type of work is no good for you -- you're too clean." Freddie paid very cheap prices, but my work was of the quality needed for sample-making. So I went back to my old factory, Natty Joe's.

Age 17: Falling Between the Tracks

The World's Fair was in New York in 1938. We had relatives visiting from Rochester for the occasion. On hand was the Calderon family, which consisted Aunt Sinora, Uncle Gabriel, and their children: Sarah, Lebna, Harry, Hymie, and Sammy.

They all stayed with our family. We lived at 608 Williams Avenue, in New Lots, Brooklyn. We put mattresses on the floor in order to make room for their family. I continued to sleep in the kitchen on two orange crates and a big red colcha.

While going to see the World's Fair, a big crowd wanted to go fast out of the train to get onto the platform. We were already in the train. We were getting out at Flushing Meadows. The station platform was nice and level and straight. However, the train tracks were on a curve. I did not see the big, big space.

I was with my cousins, but they weren't next to me. All of a sudden, I was beneath the platform. My cousins couldn't see me. I looked up and saw two large women fainting and a lot of people screaming. Some big men were trying to grab me to pull me to safety. These were complete strangers.

The people who were trying to grab me were on the train. Somebody pulled the emergency cord to stop the train to keep the doors open and prevent the train from crushing me. Two men grabbed me. The platform was about up top my nose.

The men were grabbing me under my arms, and someone was pulling my hair. My legs were hitting the platform, so all my ligaments were torn on the platform. My legs swelled up within an hour.

I wanted to keep going, because I wanted to see the World's Fair. We went to the First Aid station. They called an ambulance, which was a beautiful, orchid-purple ambulance. The ambulance came with a big screaming siren, but I refused to go into it alone.

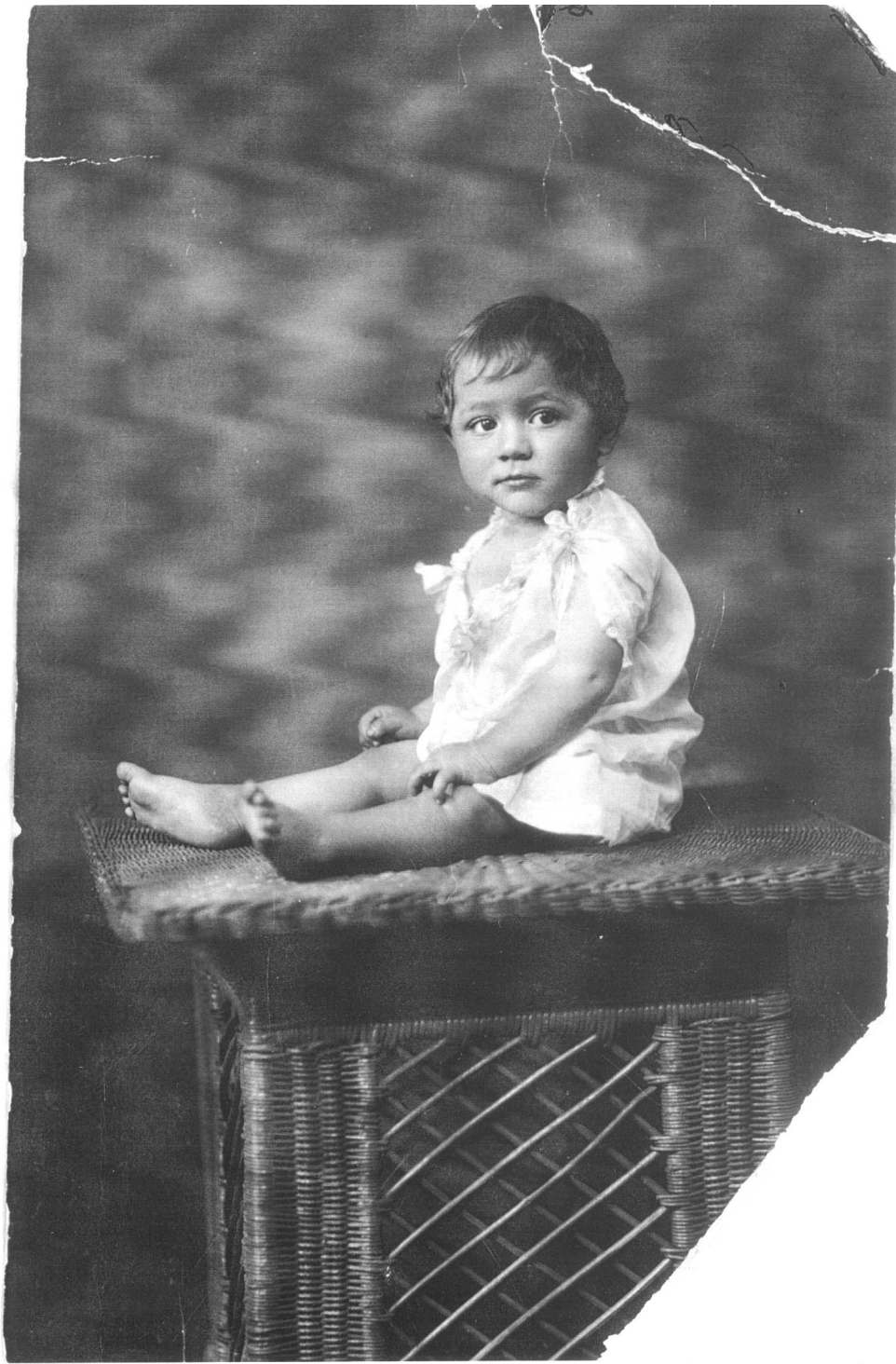
My cousin Lena went in with me and drove with me to the hospital. That's when she told me I had all-torn ligaments, They advised me to go home. I was afraid of the expense of using the ambulance so it is possible that I paid it.

The ambulance brought me back to the World's Fair to be with my family. The first aid people gave me a wheel chair and my cousin wheeled me around. I remember seeing Johnny Weismuller and Eleanor Holmes, in an Aquacade. The producer of that show, Billie Rose, was married to Fanny Brice.

I very much wanted to see the show, and we had good seats. I got to sit up front because of the wheel chair. However, I was in a lot of pain, my legs were swelling up like elephant legs. I couldn't stay there anymore -- I had to go home. I rode the subway home.

My parents looked at my legs and asked what happened to me. My mother was very upset and asked what happened. Mazelto said, "*La muerte, la muerte. La hjija mia!*" She was screaming.





My baby sister Sarika, in 1927 at age 1, just before she passed away.

She was worried because I was her baby. Her real baby, Sarika, had died at age one in about 1929. I barely remember Sarika because I too was young at that time. I also had a brother, Daviku, but he passed away. My mother lost six children; two set of twins (one died at childbirth, the other was stillborn), Sarika and Daviku. I was not even born yet, but my sisters were alive.

My father's mother, Esther Camhi, buried the twins. She didn't call a funeral parlor. She probably got in touch with a rabbi. He told her what to do. We think she went somewhere, the Williamsburg Bridge was nearby there. I think the twins were buried somewhere on the east side of Manhattan.

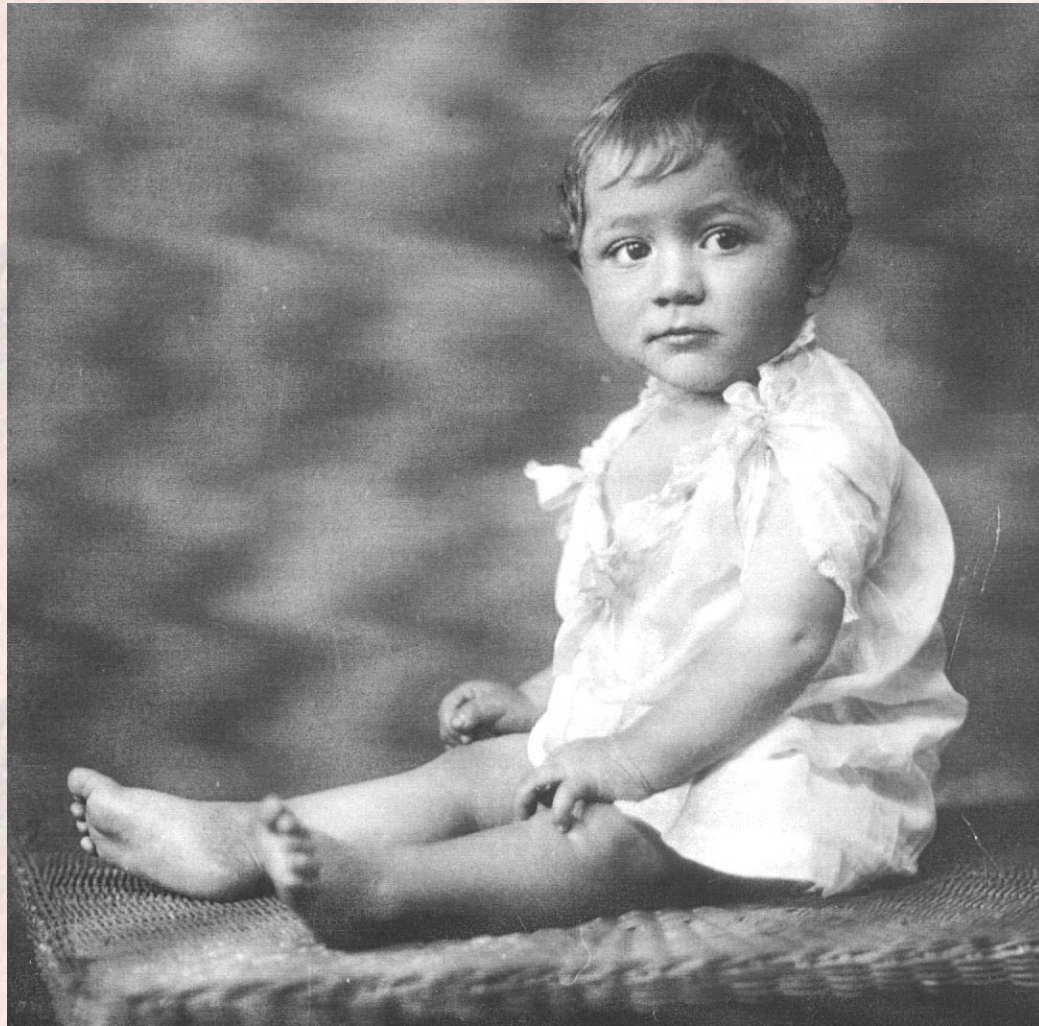
As far as the government is concerned, no one was born and no one died. This was still an Ellis Island-type community. The rabbi told them what to do. After the twins came my brother Daviku, maybe in 1917. He had blonde hair, and he lived until age two. He was a beautiful child... Sally and Esther always said that. They would say, "*Hermosicu, hermosicu!*"

Soon, my brother Jack was born. Shortly after that, Davuiku died. If they have a succession of deaths, they have a tradition. For example, my mother Sophie became the honorary mother of Abie Passo. This is a way of warding off the evil spirits. It worked because after that she gave birth to six more children.

The custom with us was that someone "bought" my brother. It's sort of akin to a Pinyabend, where children are "bought" as an honor. Who bought Uncle Jakie? We don't know. Probably one of my uncles. They might have had a special party which a rabbi would come to.

This buying was done to remove the evil spirits, and it worked! My brother lived. They called Jakie, "*El Dorsed.*" This means the desired one, a child very much wanted to be born and to live safely.

In fact, my brother Jakie was given extra-special treatment by the family for the rest of his life. Partly because he was the only male, surrounded by females, but also because he was the desired one. All we heard was "Jakie this" and "Jakie that."



Sarika would have been someone I could talk to all my life. I was about 5 years old when she died.

I was never jealous because he was my best friend all my life. My mother and father were pretty strict with me and Jakie would be there to console me.

Jakie and Louie and the other boys had a club room, and I wanted to go there -- but I was not allowed. Mazalto would say, "Good girls don't go down club rooms."

I was born three years after Jakie was born. After me came my little sister, Sara, or Sarika. I was about three when she was born, in 1925, and she died a year later of pneumonia in 1926.

She was in my parent's deed. She was a little, little bundle, in a big double bed. She looked like an angel. This was on Alabama Avenue. My sister Sally told me, "You've got to take her to the doctor. You've got to take her to the doctor." But my parents didn't believe in doctors; they went to the drugstore. My sister Sally begged them to take her to the doctor. Sally was about 22 at the time, but living at home.

Sally used to walk around with Sarika in a carriage, saying, "She's my baby, she's my baby." Then when Sarika died, Sally would hit my mother an awful lot. She hit Mama so much! "It's all your fault!" "It's all your fault!" She died of pneumonia.

I don't know who discovered her dead. They chased us completely out of the apartment and into the hallway. We heard screaming, which would have been from my mother. The other women who lived near us and my mother all wore bambulas on their heads and black or navy.

Me and Jakie were trying to sneak in to see what was going on. My mother saw me and said, "*Venga aqui*." ("come here") We were afraid to come in because of all the screaming and Sarika's empty carriage. My brother Jakie and I were holding onto each other. We went closer and closer. She pointed to the empty carriage and said, "*Mira. No hay la chica mas, la chica Sarika*." (Look, there is no longer a child, the girl Sarika) She was wailing as she said this.

We never saw the body; no family wants its children to be around death. This was the last of the children of the Camhi family. My mother had had enough.

Ages 12 - 14:

1934 - 1936:

608 Williams Avenue

At 608 Williams, we had steam heat. By this time, Sally was out of the house and moved with Uncle Dave to Van Sicklen Street. My sister Esther became the rent-payer for the whole apartment.

Over there, I found out my father worked two jobs. He'd work 9 am to 5 pm for Freddie Hazan at Lloyd's Sportswear, 224 West 35th Street, in the same building as Syl-Dart (then there was no Syl-Dart). Then, he'd go home and eat. After dinner, he'd work in the basement. I'd work with him. When I was done there, I wasn't allowed to play with my friends. He could not get one well-paying job and had to work at more than one place.

My mother got diabetes around this time. My father had to bring her to Kings County Hospital. He had to go by trolley to Kings County Hospital and wait in the clinic there while they gave her injections. Eventually, he learned how to give her injections. He'd give her an injection, make coffee, and give her juice. He loved my mother so much, that everyone said, "*El es enamorado*." This means, he is a lover.

He was very gentle, neat and clean. He kept the shoeshine kit under the cabriole legs of the bathtubs. He'd shine his shoes every single day.

We were paying much higher rent now. Average rent was twelve dollars a month on the lower east side. Then to move to a better cold flat, the rents went up to about twenty dollars a month. For steam heat, it cost maybe thirty dollars. But, Esther was paying it.

My sister didn't want to pay the whole rent because she wanted to buy clothes for herself. Because she paid less, he needed to make more money. Therefore, he had me come down to the basement and help him.

He worked with gloves that had the fingers cut half off. He did this so that he could feel the material. My mother would always make *kavejiku* for my father. He was very much at peace with the *kave*.

My father's job at Lloyd's Sports was secure. The owner, Freddie Hazan paid less for labor but guaranteed the job year-round labor. They produced ballerina swing skirts.

I loved school, but my father wouldn't let me play after school. He had me come down to the basement to learn how to sew. Mr. Mevorah, not Aunt Bella's dad, but this was Sasson Mevorah, had a factory in his house.

The furnace was down there, but it was cold. We never had enough steam. My father wore a scarf around his neck, and he worked with gloves with fingers removed. He wore a hat or a *yarmulke* to keep warm. My Mom would call me and say, "*Tri kave par papa, para callentar un poco.*" That means bring dad coffee because it's so cold, this will warm him up.

I'd give him the *kave*, in a *gisveh*, a brass European pot that would pour strong Turkish coffee (with a lot of sugar in it) as it's made. Mom's friends used to interpret coffee grounds and predict the future. Mom and dad would say, "Oh, Becky Becky, my dolly, I see a string and handsome man in your life. You're gonna see. *Mundos buenos! Maravillas!*"

The elders wanted to be respected for being knowledgeable, so they'd fantasize about this. They were attributed with the power of foreseeing the future.

There was a tray called a *tablah*. My mom would place grape or cherry syrup, *likum* (a gelled square powder pastry), and two glasses of water with paper napkins and spoons onto the tray. I would go over to the old ladies, and they'd smile at me and say, "*Ahh, Rivka, Rivka! Esta muy hermosa, muy hermosa.*"

They'd take the syrup into their mouths, then place the teaspoon into the glass of water, drink some of it, have *likum* and then bless me. They'd sing, "*Rivka, Rivka, la y hermusica Rivka. Buenica Rivka.*"

At this time, my sister, Esther now had her own private bedroom.

About Manah, my father's mother

One of the old ladies was Manah, my father's mother. She was also called Esther Camhi. My sister was named after her. All of the old ladies after they reached a certain age wore their hair in a snood of some sort.

She always wore the snood, called a *Bambulla*, a man's handkerchief, a wine-colored button-down sweater, black Oxford shoes, and stockings.

She also wore beautiful gold earrings. My father adored her. She was a very tiny and old woman.

She was maybe born in the 1870s. It was commonplace that the mother lived with the son.

One day, my father's brother (Jakoo) took



It's not a high-quality photo, but this is the only one we have of sweet Manah.

Manah so that my parents could relax for a day. I visited and found her scrubbing the bathroom floor and washing clothes in the tub.

I said, "What are you doing?" She responded, "It is nothing my darling."

So when I went home and told my mother, imagine, Manah on her knees washing clothes in the tub. My mother said, "Sometimes she feels it's better to give her something to do, so she doesn't get bored."

Manah was very frail. One day, coming out of the steps at the Malta Street Sephardic Temple, now a church, she fell down the brick steps on the front of the building. A young child pushed her accidentally. He tripped her, and she fell. She had to go to the hospital and was diagnosed with a broken hip.

She went to Beth-El hospital because there was no family doctor. My father would nervously hike his pants and say, "*Idies, idies.*" He was so fearful for her. Then her health deteriorated, and she passed away about a year later. This was sometime in the 1930's. Everyone back then had black gravestones which were laid flat, not upright. She also had a second stone on her gravesite-- an upright and a flat one.

This brought a very big void in our lives. We lived at 221 New Lots Avenue yet. (This section should be moved) At New Lots, 221, Dad would hang around. We'd be stricken with Esther's natural beauty. She had a perfect little nose, a trim figure. She wore pretty dresses... Factory workers earned more than office workers back then.

My sister Esther persuaded my parents that I should graduate high school. Since she paid the rent, she had more say.

I won a contest at speed typing and stenography, and my father wanted to put me on the sewing machine.

Instead of working for seven dollars a week as an operator, I could have been a typist for a group of lawyers even though they were paid less than factory workers.



My sister Esther in 1926.

Our place on Alabama Avenue had had a coal stove, which my mother used to paint with silver paint every Passover. She was so proud of it. For Passover, my mother and Manah would also buy an aluminum structure that sat over the entire gas stove top. It had perforations, and you would cook through it. This kept the Passover pots from touching anything not Pesadech. We called this "*Nuevu tiniques por la stova.*" This means "new tin for the stove." After using it, we'd throw it away.



Aunt Esther was so beautiful and a lot of women were matching her up with their sons. They'd bring platus, baklavah, dishpishteel. Esther was 12 to 14 years older than me. If I was 14, she was 26 or so.

She didn't marry early -- she worked on a sewing machine on bathing suits and shorts. She worked for Gold Tee's Sportswear, a manufacturer in Manhattan, perhaps around 34th Street. She used to make bathing suits and shorts. She always gave me gifts.

Beautiful Esther with my mother, Mazalto, circa 1928.

608 Williams

221 New Lots

This is when Dave Angel came into the family. I was about 10, living at 220 New Lots. We never knew of such wealth.

He took care of my sister's *trousseau*, which consisted of all linens, pots, silverware, clothes, jewelry, gifts -- all the time. He adored her.

My sister Sally was a fighter in life. She knew what she wanted. Dave and Sally had a wonderful marriage together. Dave made his fortune in velvet dresses. He was called, "The King of Velvets."

We took family pictures upstairs on the roof -- on a tar-paper roof. It was easy to get out to the roof, through a big iron door. Although there was tar and pebbles on the roof, we still took the photo up there -- maybe for privacy. They brought me a nice little lace dress. I had my hair bobbed in the barbershop (bobbing means bangs across the forehead, and then cut straight down along the sides)

Graduation, Age 13: 1935

608 Williams

We had to sew our own graduation dresses. My father came with me to the fabric store in Brooklyn, and we bought some special organdy fabric. My sister Esther had a lovely chiffon cape with ruffles on it. I asked my father if I could copy it, in white organdy.

I was the belle of the graduation. I was given a prize in my sewing class for creating such a lovely outfit. All of the dress had to be created by hand -- no machines, that was the school's rules.

My mother brought me to a beauty parlor where I had two waves pasted on my forehead. I also made a white cape. My mother bought me white shoes. I was dressed all in white.

Mom brought me to Paradise Studio to take a formal picture, which is now hanging on the den wall. At the dance, there was a boy who was very crazy about me. I wasn't crazy about him. He was rich, a Sephardic fellow,

one of the Kaplan Elias's sons. My mother heard that and she was very happy because there was a lot of wealth there.

I used to have a lot of fellas coming to my porch at 608. My mother would say, "It's not nice that you should have so many fellows, and they should have nobody."

While at 608, elderly Spanish women used to find escorts, meaning dates, for Esther. Esther went out with them, but she was still particular. Many years later, she met Nelson Webb and they fell in love during the war.

The boys knew I couldn't see (go out with) them, so they'd try to bribe my mother with gifts. My mother would get pocketbooks and kerchiefs. But, when I turned 14, I was finally allowed to go to the movies, parks, or to parties at people's houses.

Daddy had his social club, which I was not allowed to attend. My mother said, "Nice girls don't go to that club." Dad said that different clubs had different reputations.

Age 15: Thomas Jefferson High School

When I went to high school. I immediately wanted to join the clubs: the Liberty Bell Club (Newspaper) and the cheerleader's club.

Any girl in the cheerleader's squad became extremely popular. I had a white sweater, a short, pleated skirt, and big J on the sweater. We went to all of the football games in which the Thomas Jefferson team played against the other schools.

For example, Tilden High came to our school -- so we didn't need any busses. We were about five girls, and hundreds of people cheered. One of our chants was: "Give me a T, give me an H, etc.... Yay, Thomas, Yay, Thomas....Then: Yay Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Jefferson, YAYYYYYY!"

We were more vociferous than the Tilden cheerleader squad. My father was so proud of me. He didn't stop picking up his pants, which he did when he was excited or nervous. He'd say: "Ay, Becky mia, ay Becky mia!" ("my Becky")

He never came to any of the practices -- he worked too hard. He used to like the way I looked in my cheerleader outfit. He'd never seen anything like it. My other two sisters went to school on the Upper East Side, where they had nothing like this.

Getting to know Lou

Louis Cassorla remembers: "I knew Mom in the Malta Street Hebrew School in 1932. I was twelve and she was ten. I noticed she was friendly with Sara Hazen, and I went to school with Sara. Sara was full of freckles, but she was too young for me. I didn't take any great personal note."

Lou knew my brother from Hebrew School, though he and Jack never played together. Jack's friends were more like Eli Rouso, Joe Eilias, and Sammy Mayo -- more of a synagogue crowd, more religiously orientated.

Lou: "My group was more non-religious. Jack was a fast reader of Hebrew -- he ran away with it. A little later, when Moishe Copio started to work, in the second year of school, he would meet Hymie

Baruch on a train. They were both working already, and they were talking about a special club that was disbanding and moving to a new location. We were about 16 years old.

Hymie asked Moishe, "'we're forming this club, would you like to join in.'" The club consisted of me, Callie, Moishe, Joe Benson, Louie Calderon and others.

All worked except Daddy and Itzy Horowitz. Itzy was supposed to graduate with me, but he flunked English.

So I got friendly with Jack. We were both members of the club. I knew where he lived, on Williams Street. I lived on Snedicker and going to the club (a six-block walk) was almost the same path as the one Jack took.

Jack was a sewing machine operator, but he quit in 7th term, which was 12th grade. He wanted to be with the older boys and go to work. Jack took a commercial course in typing which very few people took."

Betty: Jakie used to go horseback riding, and they'd come back to my house as 661 Williams. They'd go out early in the morning. Lou would come into the bedroom, and pull my blanket off -- I was hiding my face.

Jakie and I slept in the same room until I was about sixteen and he was nineteen. We had a railroad flat, and that was a kind of living room. Bedding had to be put in a closet, and you had to search for room for it. The couch that we had to sleep on always smelled of lemon oil furniture polish. It was a dark blue leather couch.

So I would be giggling. Dad would be forward enough to pull the blanket off my head. He'd say, "What do we have over here? Who do we have over here?"

Lou: "I remember that Mom was very cute, and shy. She was only a year and a half behind me in school."

Betty continues: I thought Lou was very handsome, with his riding outfit and all. He had boots and jodpurs. He had curly hair. I too had my jodpurs from when I used to go horseback riding at Sunrise Highway Riding Academy.

After school, I joined Sunrise Highway Riding Academy. It used to cost 75 cents per ride. A girl called Beatty Berkin encouraged me to get on the horse. It used to be two steps to get on it; there were to be three reins. One rein was loose, and the other was one whole piece. In a few minutes, I was riding pretty fast, and the horse ran away. This was on a path near Jamaica Bay.

There were a lot of WPA workers over there. The workers were yelling, "Hold on! Hold on!" Then Beatty Berkin, a very experienced rider, raced right alongside my horse and blocked my horse. Her horse stopped mine. By this time, I was clutching the horse's hair.

I wanted to get off, but they (Beatty and the WPA workers) wouldn't let me and said, "Stay on, until you get back to the school."

So I'd see Lou regularly when they went horseback riding, and I'd see him around on the street. We'd be promenading around at Highland Park. It was near a reservoir.

We got closer and closer. Dad invited me to a New Year's Eve party with Moishe Copio, his wife and Hymie and Edna. This was to bring in the new year of 1940. That was the first time we started to go with each other.

As long as I was with him, I had a wonderful time.

Lou: "I enjoyed her company. I remember thinking this is a little rose among the thorns."

Mom Age 18

Dad Age 20

1940

In this year, we'd have a date, and then no date. Neither of us wanted to get tied down. We didn't want to get labeled as having a steady girl or boy. If a Sephardic man dated a Sephardic girl for more than a few times, everybody expected you to get married.



Lou: "I was dating other girls back then besides Betty. She was very pretty, with a little trim figure, with beautiful red hair."

Mom: "I never had flaming red hair, it was more like a carrot top."

I graduated high school at 17 and a half. At that time, I had won a stenography contest, and I loved commercial law. My teacher asked me what I was going to do after graduation. I said, "I'll probably be sitting on a sewing machine."

He said, "I have to talk to your father." I said, "Don't bother, because my father would object."

Our financial status was not so good in our family. Sure enough, Mr. Cohen, my commercial law teacher, came walking down the block. I said, "What are you doing here?"

He said, "Betty, I'm determined to talk with your father." This was a Sunday afternoon. He went upstairs to see my father. I went upstairs to introduce them. My father was very cordial.

My dad said, "I know my daughter excels in typing and stenography. I don't know much about that. But I do know the needle trade, and Betty must work on the sewing machine, because I very much depend on her earnings."

Until then, only my sister Esther and Jack donated earnings. Sally had no economic obligations to the family back then.

1941, Age 19 - Meeting the Cassorla Family

Lou: "I had a good friend, Abie Passo from Holyoke, who asked me, "How serious are you with Betty? If you're not serious, I want to go out with her."

I had gone out to a party at the Cassorla's house in 732 Alabama Avenue in Brooklyn. This party was to celebrate Lou's entrance into the army. Lou and I had been going out here and there, but had not become as attached as we did later when he was in the Army.

I met his brother Joe for the first time at this party. Joe held me around my waist and looked at me and said, "How about we have a date?"



He didn't know that I was his brother's regular girlfriend. So I said, "I don't think so. I came here purposely to see your brother off."

I could have had him, too, but I'm glad I didn't; even though he became very wealthy.

It was a nice little party. Edna and Hymie Baruch were there.

They had been going together for about 3 years by then. They got married November, 1941.

Betty age 18 at Indian Lake, NY

1940: Abe Camhi visits me

Abe Camhi (no relation) visited me at my Mom's house. He was in the navy and wore a pea coat and sailor's hat. I was shocked to see him. I knew him from the neighborhood.

He asked me out, too, but I was waiting for Lou to come home. The following is a conversation we had

Abe: "I don't understand it. You're not engaged to him!" He was miffed.

Me: "No, I want to wait for Lou."

1942: Visiting Dad with Sophie Cassorla at Ft. Dix

Grandma Cassorla called me up, and I was terrified. She said, "Louie asked that I call you and bring you with us to visit him at Ft. Dix, New Jersey.

Grandma Cassorla had asked Lou, "Is true? Are you serious about Betty? Don't joke around!"

He had replied, "Yes, it's true. I want you to bring Betty to visit me."

When she called, she first spoke to my mother, and said, "I'd like Betty to come with me to Ft. Dix." My mother was pleased, because this was a very respectable family. I was very nervous. They were Monastirlis, and we were Katorlis. Each family had a different shul and was part of a different group.

My mom said, "Look, Mrs. Cassorla is coming to get you, and Louie wants you to be with him before he goes overseas."

Sophie Cassorla and I took a train, an IRT to see him off. Her husband was working.

She was nervous and depended on me to get us there by the train. She didn't want her daughters to come or any other Spanish people to see us.

But on the way to the IRT, on Hegeman Avenue, a quiet street, where it meets Pennsylvania Avenue, who do we see?

It was Dora Russo, and Grandma Cassorla nearly fainted.

She said, "Betty, don't say a word. Let me do all the talking!" I said nothing.



Betty with girlfriends.

Mrs. Russo asked, "*Sophie, donde estas yendu?*" ("Sophie, where are you going so early in the morning?") Mrs. Cassorla answered, "We are going to go shopping in New York." And we hurried, hurried, hurried away.

Lou and I weren't engaged yet so the gossip would be, "There's going to be a wedding between Louie and Betty!" We didn't want anyone to talk about us, and that was not limited to Dora, but anybody.

Grandpa Cassorla (Lou's father) paid no attention to gossip or any family doings. Like Lou, he was not interested in social plans, birthdays, parties -- these were the women's department.

So Mrs. Cassorla and I went to Pennsylvania Station with a lot of army troops. On the train, I was frightened and nervous. I left Mrs. Cassorla alone with her son, and then she walked away and let me and Lou be by ourselves to talk. She was very understanding.

Dad was very happy to see me, because he loved me very much. We met outdoors in a sandy area with wooden barracks, it wasn't very nice. There were many soldiers and parents. We talked on a bench, had a soft drink or an ice cream, and then I had to leave because then the visiting hours were over.

1943: Seeing Lou at Nattie Joe's

I was working at Nattie Joe's, on 36th Street, and one day, I came downstairs and saw Dad waiting for me by the elevator!

Lou: "I was delivering troops. They needed a cadre. The troops were to be stationed at Fort Oglethorpe in Georgia and ten men were to go to Fort Devon, Massachusetts. I got this particular assignment, but was arranging to be back at the base a few days later. I was at Oglethorpe on the way to Devon. So I stopped in New York."

Betty: "He was good enough to eat."

Dad: "By this time, we had an understanding."

1940 - 44: Sewing and working

In these years, while dad was in the Army, I worked continuously. Mollie Cassorla, by comparison, had off the entire summer! My father worked at two different factories, one in the day and one at night. He did this so that he could pay for my mother's diabetes bills.

Esther lived in the house at that time. My brother Jack had left. I gave my entire pay to my dad. I gave him maybe sixteen dollars a week at first, then maybe fifty dollars later. My dad would give me an allowance, but only after protests from my mother and Esther. They would argue, "The girl *needs* some things."



There was a mannequin I saw in a window on 34th Street, a small store across from Macy's. There was a black dress with an X-strap design showing just a bit of cleavage. I paid payments so that I could get that dress. It was maybe 25 dollars. An eight dollar dress was a big deal back then, so you can imagine a 25 dollar dress!

Chaim and Mazalto, Betty's parents, circa 1952

The dress had blue crystal buttons and every 8", there was a little trim. I went to the photographer who took a picture of me in the dress. He colored it in for me. I looked nice- I had a great little figure. I also bought a pin from Macy's with two swords and a chain.

1940, My friends - Camp Lehman

I went to Camp Lehman in 1942. Avrahm Camhi, my uncle, persuaded my Dad to send me to this camp, even as an 18-year old! When I got there, I found that it was like a resort.

It was \$8 a week. I had such a good time. There were eight girls whom I quickly became very close to. We wanted and got a cabin by the pool. The other girls were in the big house.

One day, when I went out to the pool, I had a snake quickly curl up my leg and bite me. I was bleeding a little bit. The girls were yelling, "You gotta go to first aid!". I finally went there and the woman cleaned me up.

When the maintenance man needed to come to our cabin, they would say "Man coming, man coming," in order to warn us.

We would all say, "Sure, he first saw us getting into our pajamas, and *then* he shouted."

I got lost at camp in the forest with Sophie Mevorah and Ettie Eli. All we had was an apple!

Three girls and one apple.

We fought over who had taken too big a bite.

A search party came out to look for us - we were so scared because it was hot and getting near dark!



Betty at Indian Lake (taking aim at Lou's heart?)

"Louie is taking you away from me," said Mary Alcosser

I bought Louie a piece of jewelry. I went with Lou Cohen to get a wrist bracelet for my Lou. He went with me, and I got Dad an ID bracelet.

I'd sometimes go to the movies with my girlfriends. Also, I'd go to the USO Club on Sheffield Avenue and the YMHA. They had dances for sailors and the army boys. We'd give the men coffee and sodas. I'd dance with them a little.

One sailor wanted to hold onto me, and didn't want me to leave. When Louie came in from a furlough from Westover field, he said, "Forget about him. I'm here now!"

Lou: "I think he was being obsessive."

Even Abe Camhi, one of Dad's good friends, who was in the Navy, said, "I'm here now. Lou is not here. Come dance with me!" I said, "I want to stay with Lou!"

Aunt Sally as a young woman

I asked my cousins, Annie Eskalyo and Sophie Nachmias, about my sisters Sally and Esther, because they were much older than me and I didn't know much about their backgrounds as young children. Now and then, I had asked Esther and Sally about the old days, but they didn't tell me much.

Both of them said that my sister Sally was a rambunctious fighter. She was pretty and knew what she wanted. My mother was energetic and outgoing -- that's where Sally's spirit comes from. Mazalto was not an arguer, except when she defended me against Miss Kriegen.

Uncle Dave saw my sister Sally in the factory one time. He liked her temper. He looked at my sister Sally and said, "Look at how young the girls are. I can't believe they put them in the factory to earn a living."

Sally ripped into Dave Angel back then, saying "Don't *you* talk about me and my parents!," not knowing this was her future husband.

More about factory work...

My commercial law teacher, Mr. Cohen, felt very badly about me because I had to go to work on the sewing machine. I had won the typing contest at Tilden High School. Esther was so proud when I won this award. She subscribed to steno magazine so that I could practice. She was always getting me gifts.

She sort of adopted her as my child because when I was 18, she was about 32.

She wanted me to graduate from high school, so she yelled at my father when I went off to work.

At that time, factory workers earned perhaps \$20 a week, compared with \$10 for an office worker.

For example, Edna worked as a secretary for three lawyers and received \$10 an hour.



Here is my mother, Mazalto, as a nursing assistant in the 1940's.

Esther, considered the most beautiful!

Esther was considered in my eyes, and among the Sephardics in my neighborhood to be the prettiest girls in New Lots. She was a sweetheart. She supported the whole family.

Lou: I remember her little nose and trim figure.

November, 1942: Louie Returns

I got a phone call from Mollie (Louie's sister) saying, "Come on over, we want to tell you something." Probably it was the middle of the week. I asked my mother, "Should I go?"

Mazalto: "*Vate.*" (Go with my blessings.)

The Cassorlas knew that Lou and I were going together, but they did not know how intensely we cared for one another.

I went over there, to 732 Alabama Avenue, which Avrahm had bought shortly before World War II. Mollie was there, living with Lou's mother. Jack Baruch was away. Bessy was there and so were Grandpa and Grandma Cassorla.

Mollie said, "What would you like most in the world to happen?" I was shivering because I was so nervous, with the in-laws there in the living room and all.

I said, "I'd like the war to be over, and for my brother and Louie to come home."

Then Mollie said, "He's home. Louie is in Fort Devon."

Dad had already been in England. He had been there only for 6 months and was ill.

Grandma and Grandpa Cassorla and myself went up to visit him. We went up to Mt. Holyoke. Mr. Passo was there, he had opened a factory -- one of the few men of Avrahm's age who had a car.

He was the most handsome Sephardic man around, and his wife was small with freckles.



*Mazalto again as a nursing assistant.
Everybody did their part to help out during
the War.*

1942: Meeting Dad on a return trip from his Army base in Massachusetts

I made an appointment to visit Dad at Fort Devon, MA. I agreed to travel with Avrahm and Sophie Cassorla. It must have been by train, but I don't remember much of this. Grandpa was very generous.

Lou: "Pop once made \$10,000 in one day by selling a crystal chandelier."

We stayed with Meier and Clara Passo, in Holyoke MA, who have since passed on. These were Lou's parents' friends. Grandpa Cassorla lent Mr. Passo money to go out of town -- Meier was almost destitute and got an

opportunity to set up a factory for a major manufacturer.

Meier was so handsome -- the handsomest man I ever saw. He was such a sweetheart --very old-fashioned, European, tall, 6 feet easily. He got along famously with Grandpa Cassorla, and they always had a good time together.

We loved the whole family and had a fabulous time when we stayed with them. They introduced us to Coca Cola bottles. We were used to have 2 cent sodas.

Before going to Massachusetts, I was at the candy store at the corner of Williams and New Lots. I saw my friends and Bessy there. My friends were telling Bessy, "You know Betty is going to Holyoke to see your brother."

I met Bessy, who waved a finger at me and said, "*You're* not going to meet my brother! *I* am!"

I said I didn't know what she was talking about. Then she said, "My parents said that there's no room in the car for you." She added that I'd have to stay home so she could go see Louie!

Of course, she stood home - not me. Sophie had said to Bessy, "No, you're not coming -- Betty's coming."

Mr. Pessa had a car, and he took us to the hospital where daddy was. Thank god he looked great. He was due to come back to New Jersey, so he applied to become a cadet in the Air Corps. That was in Carbondale, IL.

I went down to Carbondale with my friend Charlotte -- she was heavy set and very nice. Dad's friend called Burkowitz was Charlotte's boyfriend. I told Charlotte I couldn't go down by myself to see Louie. Charlotte's Mom talked to my Mom and Dad to persuade them to allow Charlotte and me to visit Burkowitz and Lou.



Lou and Betty circa 1942. *Was this shot taken by that maintenance man? (!)*

Dad and I took an engagement picture then, in a studio in Carbondale, Illinois. I wore my blue dress.

One day, Lou was in charge of a group of soldiers marching in a field. Dad said, "EYESRIGHT!" All the GI's turned to look at us and saluted! We were embarrassed but so pleased.

This trip cemented our relationship. We had been writing to each other almost every two days. I might still have those letters!

1943, Carbondale, Illinois:

Caught kissing by the maintenance man!

When I was there we sat talking on the street, but still on the base. Cadets were not allowed off the base. We were sitting there talking and Dad kissed me.

The maintenance man, an old crab maybe in his 60's said, "I caught you, I caught you. I'm going to report you to the captain." He did, and the captain called Lou down. He said, "I understand, Lou, but try to be more discreet."

Dad: "Where can I go? I'm already behind the building."

Captain: "Forget about it, just try not to get caught."

When dad wanted to see me, he pretended to have dental problems, which would allow him to get a three-hour pass to get off base!

1943: Sick in Carbondale

I got food poisoning from that trip when we were out at a luncheonette I had to be hospitalized. I forget what they did to me. Dad rubbed the back of my hand gently while I slept. He asked, "Betty, how do you feel?"

By the next day, I was out of the hospital and feeling much better.



Mama - Esther - Papa Camhi - Rockaway Beach

Mazalto, Chaim and Esther Camhi at Rockaway Beach, around 1948.

Leo Moskowitz, 1957

I first met Leo when we moved in from New Lots in 1957. Leo had a kosher butcher shop in Merrick on Merrick Road, near the Chinese Laundry, where Daddy almost got killed.

I was looking for a kosher butcher so we asked all the neighbors. They suggested Leo and I ended up becoming his best customer, paying cash each time. I paid \$60 a week in meat bills-- maybe a two-week supply. \$60 then would be worth about \$180 now.

I'd buy chickens and cut them into eighths. I would also buy tenderloin steaks, rib steaks, but rarely chopped meat (for stuffed peppers only). I never bought brisket, which is ashkenazi-style. However, I would buy London broil. I'd get square-cut roasts. I wouldn't buy too many deli meats.

Leo one day came over and smelled my potato pancakes. He said, "I MUST have Betty's pancakes." He ate dinner with us, ignoring his helpers working for him back at the shop!

Betty's Latkes

This is an ashkenazi food that we came to like.

Ingredients:

- Matzo meal
- Potatoes, grated in strips
- Onions - (drain the water after cooking)
- Eggs
- Pepper and salt

Fry and eat right away!

Fire at Leo's, 1960

Leo went out of business when his first store burned down. Many other stores burned down, too. I would call Leo at his home, looking for kosher turkey. He was very impressed with my dedication to him and his service.

Leo went into business this time with a man named Sandy Gordon, who had an existing business in Freeport. What was nice about Sandy was his sincerity. He was a blandish red-head. We saw him at Jones Beach a lot with his wife and his two daughters. They tried to have a ready-made take out business. It failed and they lost lot of money.

Then, a Yiddish couple wanted to open a kosher butcher shop near Waldbaums. The three of them went into business together, but fights among the owners and a wife were constant. Sandy died in 1985. No one told me about it. I kept going to the butcher and always asked about Sandy, because we loved and adored him.

I asked, "Why didn't you let me know about Sandy's demise?" I wrote a nice letter to his wife and their two daughters. I told them how I loved Sandy, and how much we loved the way he treated us.

I got a response from his wife that said, "How wonderful to know that my husband made such a powerful impression on people."

Leo later went to Florida and retired.

TO BE CONTINUED...

Note:

The story lines of Betty and Louis Cassorla continue as one towards the end of this book and web site.

