



The Autobiography of

Elsie Fried

(nee Maier) 1918-1944

As told to Albert Fried-Cassorla... Last updated 10-18-21. Previously on 6-15-01/

Note to readers... Elsie and I began this on November 26, 1990 and kept at it for over 11 years. It's been my great pleasure to get to know her better! -- Albert

Elsie Fried's *Program of Care* article - You may read this article [HERE](#). In it, Elsie Fried presents two opposing theories of juvenile psychological development. She says that the Piaget model posits a process of continuous detachment from others. In contrast, she offers the model outlined by Carole Gilligan.

This article was published in the *New York State Bar Association Journal* in July of 1986. I must say that I knew, Elsie Fried, a marvelously intelligent and compassionate woman, was also my mother-in-law. I was privileged to know her. A special thank-you goes to Dr. Jean Kirk, who discovered this article in her belongings and who sent us the copy you will see here. --Albert Fried-Cassorla. October 18, 2021

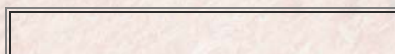
My parents' lives:

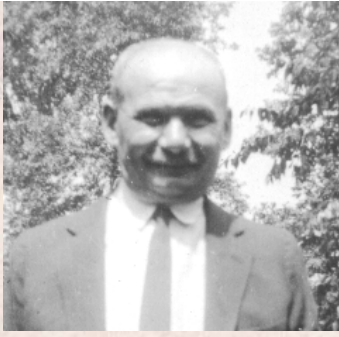
Rose Ostrow, 1890 - 1973

Nathan Maier, 1890 - 1982

My great-grandfather, Jacob "Zayda" Ostrow, arrived with his wife, Amelia (Malka) and their three sons, Bernard, 24, Jacob, 21, and David 15. They all came from Kiev, Russia. In order to escape anti-semitism there, they walked across the continent of Europe, passing national boundaries, until they reached the Atlantic coast and France.

There they managed to get on a steamer and arrive in New York City through Castle Gardens in the 1880's.





On the other side of my family... this is Nathan Maier's father.

We used to call my Jacob "Zayda," Yiddish for Grandpa. He lived from 1846 - d. ?. One of my earliest memories of Grandpa is riding on his foot, while he was seated, and he would say, "Oop-hoop-high! Ooop-hoop-high!" Zayda had a long beard, and he wore a fedora practically all the time.



Barnard Ostrow, Elsie's maternal grandfather (Rose's Dad).

My maternal grandfather, Bernard, lived from 1863 - 1959. He was a very good looking man. His first wife, Ida, died between 1891 and 1894 (no one knows exactly when). She had five children, leading to 28 grandchildren!! His second wife, Olga (Goldie), had seven children, leading to 14 grandchildren.





The tombstone of David Ostrow and his wife Rachel. David was the youngest of the three Ostrow boys who emigrated from Kiev, Russia. He was the brother of my grandfather Bernard.

My grandfather Bernard was in the feather business. As Stan says, they used to laugh a lot -- his business tickled them! He imported exotic feathers for ladies' hats. Then importation of feathers was forbidden by law, on account of the potential for bringing in disease.



Bernard Ostrow, (left), with friend, circa 1923.

At that point, Bernard entered the hat business, which remained his livelihood for the rest of his life.

My mother Rose Ostrow was born in Philadelphia on North Fifth Street. Rose was the daughter of Bernard's first wife, Ida. Because she was brought up by the second wife, who favored her own children over those of the first wife, she had a pretty rough childhood.



My brother Herbert, circa 1919.

I remember her (Rose) saying to me that for their main meal, the children of the first wife generally had tea and bread while the others had better food.

Bernard was probably working hard and didn't see what was going on.

I understand from my mother that the second wife, Goldie, was very much interested in material things and money -- more certainly than she was interested in Ida's children. She was a traditional step-mother. As Stan puts it, all of Ida's children went to Klein's for their clothes, and Goldie's went to Bergdoff Goodman. "Eees a vell-known fact!"



Aunt Anna Maier, Rose Maier's sister and the de facto matriarch

Rose told me that her sister Anna was like a little mother to the rest of them: her, her sister Ida, and her two brothers, Will and Joseph. My observation was that my Aunt Anna was the matriarch, in the absence of a true, caring matriarch. Rose mentioned attending dances as a teenager. She attended business school, to become a secretary and became a secretary at Brentano's Bookstore in Philadelphia.

At one point while living there, she was voted the Most Beautiful Woman in Philadelphia in some contest -- and she was the most beautiful woman in Philadelphia! (Take my word for it.)

At this point, we'll begin with my father's life, Nathan Maier, also born in 1890. Daddy was born in New York City. As a young man, he was in the jewelry business. That accounts for the fact that he had to move pretty often -- being assigned to various cities in the U.S. My oldest brother, Herb, for example, was born in Pittsburgh. Lee, my second oldest brother, was born in New York City, and Carol was born in Brooklyn. Marcia was born in Mt. Vernon, New York.

Going back to Nat's childhood, his mother, Rachel, was confined to a mental institution almost throughout the childhood of my father. I remember her -- she was very slight, but with long black and gray hair, down to her waist. And she was extremely frugal.

The story was during that in later life she traveled blocks in order to save a few pennies on vegetables and meats. This was not absolutely necessary, because Grandpa Maier was a butcher.



Brother Lee (right) with kids, circa 1920.

Grandpa Maier was a very rigid, strict man. He also suffered from shingles -- a case he did not get over quickly. I have a distinct impression of him being in need a great deal of time, suffering from shingles. Perhaps his illness required the kind of silence and consideration which children are not capable of.

I remember him scolding us a great deal. I don't think any of the grandchildren enjoyed visiting him at his Washington Heights, Manhattan apartment.

He came from Manheim, Germany, but I don't know in what year or why. (Probably they couldn't stand him in Manheim either! -- AFC).

My maiden aunt, Aunt Lil, was a dominating character as well. When I think of her now, it's always with sadness, because of her limitations in having to care for her mother and father. She was a lonely woman, but she was very efficient. She earned one of the largest salaries of her time as a merchandise manager for Gimbel's, Rosenbaum's in Pittsburgh, and other firms.

My mother hated Lil profoundly-- cause unknown to me, except a general dislike for her interference in her marriage to my father.

My Life: Born April 12, 1918,

Wheeling, West Virginia

I was born in Wheeling, West Virginia in the year 1918. My father at this point was in the jewelry business. My understanding is that he traveled a great deal as a salesperson for another company.

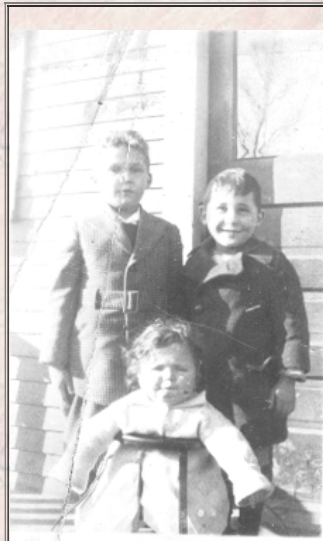
He probably found it most convenient to live in that area, to be near his sales territory.





My father, Nathan Maier, in the early days.

I have some pictures of me in Wheeling with my two brothers, Lee and Herbert. But basically, I have no memories of the place.



The Maier kids, circa 1919! Here are Herbert (left), Lee (right) and me below, in the center.

During that period, my mother was a housewife, taking care of the three children.

We lived in Wheeling for only 2 or 3 years, after which we moved to Flatbush, Brooklyn.



Albert says: Dontcha love that pudgy punim?



Costumed kids on the porch!

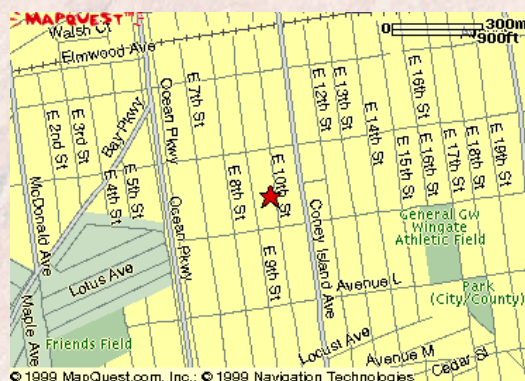
Flatbush, Brooklyn, 1921 - 1927, Ages 3 - 9

We lived at 1064 East 10th Street. I visited that house about two or three years ago, and it looked the same as I remembered it.

It is a one-family house with a porch out front and a stoop. It occupies a small piece of property and is similar to others on that street, all of them being fairly close together. It was a typical middle-class house with a front lawn, in a mixed neighborhood. Besides Jewish people, other groups lived there -- Gentile, but I don't know what nationality.



Rose and Nathan Maier, circa 1910. Rose was voted the prettiest woman in Philadelphia.



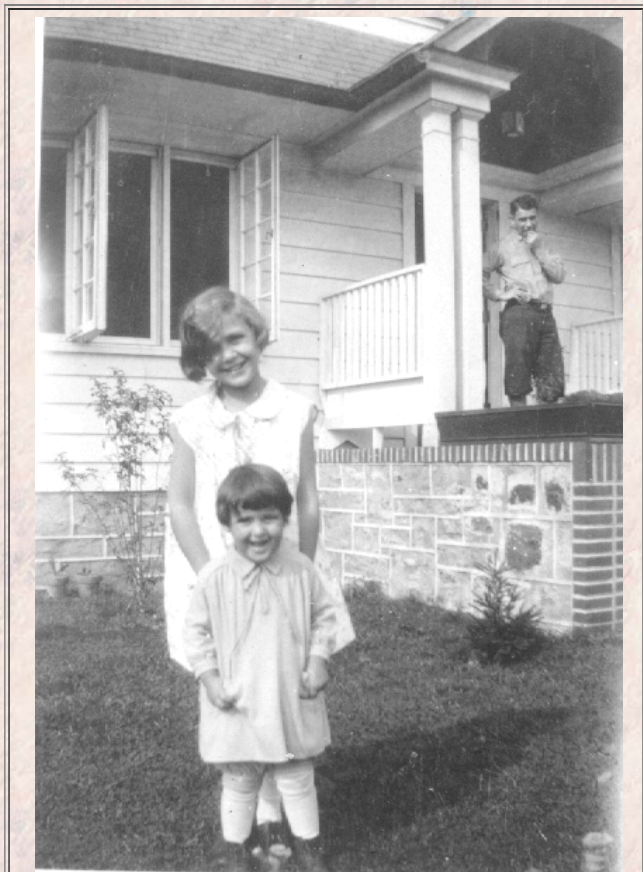
Our home was here at 1064 East 10th Street in Brooklyn.

Next to us lived a family of, I think, four or five boys. They were notorious in the neighborhood for the loud quarreling they did. I have a vivid recollection of one of them chasing the other one around the dining room table in their home, totally furious at each other! How or why I was in their

home, I don't remember. Their name was Nalvin.

In spite of all the quarreling, though, I was fascinated by this family. First of all, by the number of males, all older than me. And second by their continual activity.

My friends and I used to enjoy playing stoopball in our front of our house. I attended elementary school there, though I don't recall the name of the school. It may have been around this time that my mother converted to Christianity -- which meant that the children were not actually started in Christian Sunday school yet.



Here I am with younger sister Carol around 1927.

My sister Carol was born in this period.

Mt. Vernon: 1928 - 1938, Ages 10 - 20

We moved to Mount Vernon, in Westchester, NY, to 460 North Fulton Avenue, to the Fleetwood section, which is near Bronxville. Across the street from us was completely undeveloped land. It had fields and fields of wild grass and flowers!

I have no idea why we moved there. Probably, it had to do with my Dad's job.

Rose and Nathan, circa 1912.

The Cross County Parkway was about 4 houses from our home, running over Fulton Avenue. One of my earliest recollections is hitting a tennis ball underneath the walls of the bridge abutment. I palled around with kids from school in the neighborhood who were about my age. My brothers were too old for me, and my sisters too young.

I have a distinct memory, when we first moved to Mt. Vernon, after the moving van had left, that my parents sent me to buy a single loaf of bread at a nearby grocery.

Not knowing the neighborhood, I started out with destination unknown. It was practically rural around there. I found the store all right, but I couldn't find my way back home, and started to cry! I was about 10 years of age then. This being my first day in the area, I didn't know my address there either. Stan: "She ended up in a foster home, then shipped out to Shanghai!"

I must have been up on Gramaton Avenue (an Indian name), where a lot of shops were. I was walking and crying, and clutching my bread. A policeman finally took me around by foot, until we found the place where we lived. To this day, I don't understand how my parents could send off a child of that age to an unknown destination.

I soon made friends with the family next door, a family by the name of Handel. I was very good friends with Leah, who was my age. She was a kind of blonde, stoutish, physically soft-looking girl, who was fun to be with.

I have some pictures of myself at that time I had a very boyish haircut and was very slender. We had a full-time maid, and a nice back and front yard, a stoop and a car. It was one of the first cars on the street!

My mother used to drive all of her friends around on their various errands. She was a splendid driver, in contradistinction to my father! I remember distinctly that Dad used to play golf on Yom Kippur.

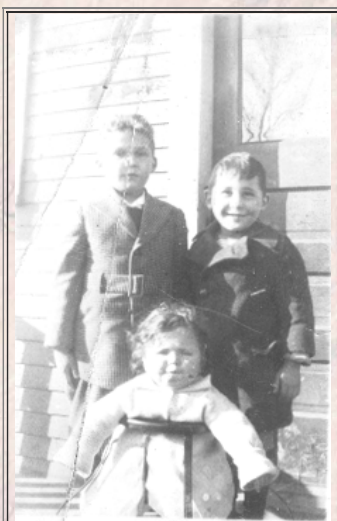
There was lots of quarreling between Mom and Dad because they were incompatible.

About My Father, 1930's

I had the greatest admiration for my Dad. During the Depression, he had a partnership with two other men running millinery departments at various Pennsylvania and New Jersey Department Stores and specialty stores. In about 1930 or '31, it broke up because of the depression, and the breakup was unfriendly.

As a result of the breakup, Dad -- with 5 children and a wife to support, and no immediate means for doing so -- managed to support us all. When the partnership broke up, the various stores were allocated among the partners. There was some quarreling about this.

Each one managed to get at least one store in a big city. Dad's was in Wilkes-Barre, whereas another partner's was in Harrisburg. One partner was Grandpa Ostrow, his mother's father, who had introduced him to millinery business initially.



Two bruddas and a chubster!
*That's Herbert, top left; Lee, right,
and me, apparently holding my
breath. Circa 1919, with me, age 1.*

How did he make his business succeed? (Stan's answer, jokingly: "He stole from his creditors!")

Stan later adds: "I know this, he didn't pay his bills until he had to. Everyone in the industry used to wait until 90 days. And they'd take a 2% discount for early payment anyway! That's what they had to do to survive in the Depression."

We lost the house in Mt. Vernon. It was sold at auction. We sold the car. We had to move to an inexpensive apartment in Manhattan. This cut in our consumer outlay allowed us to operate minimally, so that the stores remaining to Dad paid the reduced outlay.

Dad was very good at delaying payments to wholesalers for the purchased hats, which were bought for the stores. He used the proverbial "the check is in the mail" technique. He could not expand his routes during the depression because there was no market for it.

Many of the towns on Dad's route were Polish coal mining towns. The women there needed nice hats to wear to church. This was the backbone of his business. He could tell by which tickets were returned, which styles were popular. Each hat had a ticket. Hat #343, which was a Breton, having a turned-up rim (an Eloise hat!). That hat was enormously popular, and he used to order it time after time.

The hats were bought in NY in the millinery district, from the wholesaler, sent to his shipping office on an upper floor at 15 West 38th Street (next to Lord and Taylor), and from there distributed to various units on commercial hat trees, and shipped by parcel post to places in Pennsylvania.

Nathan and his assistants boxed them personally. All of the kids helped at some time or another. We stuffed the hats in cardboard boxes using white tissue paper. We stuffed the hat interior and placed more tissue around the outside of it, to avoid damage in transit. Straw hats were especially vulnerable. Hats were a big thing in those days! No one went on Fifth Avenue without a hat at that time. Dad used to say I had a hat-face -- meaning that all the hats looked good on me.

At Lit Brothers today, in Philadelphia, you can still see a sign on the outside of the building that says "Hats Trimmed Free." This refers to a service provided by my Dad. His company was called Mair Millinery Company. Even though my family name was Maier, the printer corrupted the spelling, and it remained Mair. His company paid the employees working in the various department stores.

Ms. Kaufman, the book-cooker (keeper!)

The office had a small partitioned section with a desk in it, and the rest was given over to hat trees, boxes, piles of tissues and work tables on which the packing could be done. There were no decorations, dirty windows. We faced the back of the block, so it wasn't noisy. Dad had an accountant, Ms. Kaufman, who (Stan: "Used to cook the books for him!") used the enclosed portion of Dad's office.

Ms. Kaufman was a vigorous, slender fiery lady, with red hair with a high-pitched voice and a determined desire to save money for my father any way she could. She was a real friend of the family in that respect.

I used to go out sometimes with my brothers when they were down there. Herbert and Lee and I would go to a little restaurant, where we usually had some hot dish like spaghetti. By the way, my father used to call me Spaghetti -- because it was my favorite food any time of day. I sometimes even had it in the morning. Even now I do, at age 72. My dad would yell, "Get up! It's time for school, Spaghetti!"

Dad was usually out buying merchandise, or on the phone deferring creditors -- he didn't spend much time packing merchandise. Business was a real struggle for him, because it was a small business with lots of competition from larger companies, and a small profit margin. Being a woman's item of dress, hats changed styles very much -- sticking him with old merchandise very often.

If it rained on "Palm Saturday," which is the week before Easter Sunday. The store was closed on Palm Sunday (our way of referring to the sale day before Palm Sunday). When Dad came home from his trip to the stores on a rainy Palm Saturday, most of us would find sanctuary under the beds. This was potentially the biggest day of the year in terms of gross sales and income. On a bad Palm Saturday, we would be very morose and anxious, so we'd stay out of his way.

We used to say: "Look, if they want a hat, they'll come another day!"

But Dad used to say: "Water under the bridge will never return."

Personally, Dad was a rather gruff character, but he had the proverbial heart of gold. Never outwardly affectionate, and quite puritanical, we always had to be fully clothed in his presence, and off-color language was never tolerated.



Rose Ostrow Maier, the most beautiful woman in Philadelphia in the 1910's.

About my Mother: Rose Maier, nee Rose Ostrow, 1930's

My mother during all of this time had been keeping house in Mount Vernon. We always had a maid, and 7 people at the table. She set a lavish table of meat, potatoes and vegetables -- plain cooking but diversified.

There was spaghetti, take-out Chinese food, Jewish cooking such as pot roast and chicken, always lots of milk and spaghetti. During the depression, my mother always had a maid. She needed one!

She spent her days as a housewife, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the kids. Mother was never a very good housekeeper, and as I grow older, I learn to respect her more and more for this -- acknowledging that there are more important things in life, more important things to do. Of course, she would never put it like this -- she just knew it instinctively.





Sailor boys! Lee (left) and Herbert, my brothers, circa 1923.

She was a very gentle influence. She was liable to bring stray people home to sleep (Stan adds jokingly: "Particularly good-looking men.") and was the taxi for the block, because we had the first car on the block, driving everyone everywhere. She was a very good driver. We had an old Franklin with an angled front windshield. It had nice soft seats.

Mom would drive us to our various piano lessons. One of us took violin lessons. My friends lived in the neighborhood, so I could walk there.

Rose's interest in Christian Science

One of the distinctive qualities of our house was that we never had a doctor. My mother was a Christian Scientist, and managed to get us through all of the childhood illnesses without consulting a physician.

This was hard on me, because I was a victim of periodic bouts of what was then called "Quincy's sore throats." In later life, when I consulted the doctor, he told me I had a couple of the worst tonsils he had ever seen. I had them out at age 34 in the doctor's office -- it was rather traumatic, on account of their size and susceptibility to infection.

During the time that I was confined to my bed for these bouts of infection, I read Alcott's *Little Women* until the book fell apart! This must have been at least 25 times. Like all growing children, I was attracted to the romance between Laurie and Jo, and wept gallons over Beth's death.

I also enjoyed during these periods, Elsie Dinsmore by ???, and wept quarts over this. Her father confined her to her room because she refused to play the piano for his company on a Sunday! This confinement of the character went on for days, and I was fascinated -- identifying with the character's suffering.

When sick with a fever, a Christian Science Practitioner would be called. She was a trained person empowered by the church to treat people, just as a physician is empowered by a medical board.

These theories are all out of Ralph Waldo Emerson, by the way, and when I went to college I lost my faith -- learning that she had lifted whole sentences!

I lost a lot of respect for Christian Science around then.

The Practitioner would treat me through thought processes. I respect the theory.

"Sunday on the Parkway with Dad"

Every Sunday, Dad would take us on the Bronx River Parkway, because it had small hills, and on the way down we would have this lifted feeling -- sort of like flying.

It was purely a fun ride, not a picnic. We had cookouts, too.

Mt Vernon Life: Ages 11 though 18

I also remember making friends with Adele and Lucille Schwartz. I was also palsy with a number of friends, including Aida Langella, Louise and Ruth Buhl (Bonanno), Adele and Lucille Schwartz, Bunny Campbell, and we'd read poetry together in the fields.

The Poetry Society: Odes in the Woods

The woods were across the street from our house, which at that time was an abandoned golf course that had gone to seed. There was no traffic, not even a horse and carriage.

We'd read Edith St. Vincent Millay, and Amy Lowell and others. Bunny's mom was Superindendant of Schools, and so she was very well educated. The Bonnano (Buehl) family had a divorced woman, as the family head -- she ran a cosmetics business called Lucille Buhl Cosmetics, Lucille was also my Sunday School teacher (Christian Science).

But little Lucille once said that I asked her mom, the elder Lucille (my Sunday school teacher) the most difficult questions in Sunday school, challenging some of the beliefs. Part of this came from my having discovered that Mary Baker Eddy (the founder of Christian Science) had lifted much from Emerson.

I played the piano for the Sunday school, accompanying the Sunday school singing of the hymns. I had had piano lessons for about three years, from about ages 7 through 9. I used to play duets with Bunny Campbell, all at the house of or piano teacher, Ms. Coffin.

My first piano teacher's name was Mrs. Ilephant, and her house is where I took the lessons, right adjoining the school.

Miss Coffin got a bad case of rheumatism during my childhood, and she was unable to play the piano anymore. That had been her whole life.

She was a lovely person, very thin, with straggly hair, small. She was a patient teacher, and was very pleased with her students, who responded well to her teacher. She also used to give performances in New York in the smaller auditoriums. Perhaps she's still alive.

Our breakfast nook

I remember the breakfast nook in the Mt. Vernon House, and Joe Frank, and the music room. The nook adjoined our kitchen, and had two benches, with a table, and you had to slide in.

It was THE place for snacking, confidences among kids -- a very, very private place.

That privacy was delicious. I had little crushes, and I used to talk about boys incessantly.

Elementary School: Lincoln School:

Ages 9 - 11, 1927 - 30

When we first moved there, I went to school at Lincoln. I have no recollection of my first elementary school, in Flatbush, Brooklyn.

One of my first friends there was a girl named Eleanor Nordstrom, who was Scandinavian. She had two older brothers, and one day they asked me to take my pants down and show them what I had underneath. I was about 11, and they were in their teens. I was in her house. I got frightened, and I ran home! I was probably crying.

But it wasn't so bad -- they probably just wanted to have a look! They were otherwise good kids.

Woodrow Wilson Junior High School

Ages 13 - 15

I have few special memories of this school, except that I used to go ice skating there, right on the Hutchinson River. They had a roped-off section there, and a bunk house where you could go in and get warm.

One of my friends there was Bunny Campbell, whose mother was principal of the school. Also Miriam Brous, Lenore, and my continuing best friend, Louise Bonano.

Her mother, who was German, had been married to an Italian man, who left her and her two children behind -- Louise and Ruth.

I didn't know anything about the divorce, just that there was no father. It could have been a death as far as I was concerned. It was mostly a gentele community up in Mt. Vernon at that time.

Bunny and I got very friendly, and we used to go into the woods and read poetry.

A.B. Davis High School, Mt. Vernon

Ages 16 - 18, 1938 - 40

We lived in Fleetwood, a part of Mt. Vernon. In school there, I had a wonderful English teacher, Mrs. Brower. We had to memorize a short poem every Friday and recite it in class. Every Friday, I was absent from that class only.

Mrs. Brower didn't know what the problem was, so she sent me to the Dean. The Dean said, "What's the problem, Elsie? You do well in other subjects." I explained that what was going on was that we were all asked to recite in class, and I was afraid to stand up and recite. She asked, "Did you memorize your poem?"



This is a glamor shot of me taken in 1936 or so.

Arthur Herman tries to undress Miriam Brous!

I remember one boy whose dad was a bootlegger, and he was very advanced sexually. He was also distinguished by the fact that he kept a white silk handkerchief up his shirt sleeve. We thought that was elegant -- or at least different.

He tried to undress Miriam Brous on a date. She was a friend of mine. She told this to me with a tone of horror. None of us liked this act, but it was very titillating!

I remember once there was a boy named Lawrence Davis. He was the valedictorian of A.B. Davis High School. He was very smart and funny. I always wondered what happened to him. I was enchanted by the power elite at high school, which I was part of. Carolyn Lindjem, Adele Richie, Barbara Fisk were that elite -- consisting of the popular girls who went to every school-sponsored dance.

I was active also in the dramatic club. We did a show called Billy, a comedy. I was Billy, by God! It was exciting, but I still remember being very frightened when I went on stage.

At the dances, we'd do the Westchester, the Lindy hop, all to live bands. I got asked out from time to time. I'd wear high heels and my feet used to kill me! I remember walking home after a dance in my stocking feet, when it was cold out.

The way we took in these dances was not on a date basis. It would be groups of boys and girls going together and intermingling.

One of Herbert's friends was Joe Frank. Stanley adds: He was one of the few that I liked. Stan adds: one of Elsie's friends was gay, Irving Weinstein, who later got married and had kids and was a buyer in the garment district.

Joe Frank later became a cultural attache in Paris. Joe used to come to our house. We had a sun porch full of musical records. Joe and Herbert used to play classical music all the time. They'd sit quietly and listen, and talk about literature. Joe later went abroad as a cultural attache -- he was thrown out by the McCarthyite witch hunt. He was a professor at the University of Colorado. He was a scholar of Greek and Latin literature. He also spent his summers in a fishing village in Mexico.

Stan says: Did you remember Joe having any attachments to any women?

Elsie: He used to go out on double-dates with Herbert and Herb's girlfriend and his.

My father was a very prudish man, and my mother never discussed sex with me, so all of my knowledge came from a bunch of poetic girls! There wasn't a toughie among us, so there was no place to get this information.

I was on the tennis team in high school. I played singles and enjoyed it a lot.

The kids were Herbert, Lee, Elsie, Carol and Marcia (Myrtle was her given name, and she changed it legally).

Herbert goes to college

I also remember Herbert going to college and coming home with a new world for me. And I remember my being a mother to Carol and Marcia.

Learning about his college and the things he was studying opened up a new world. For that, I have been eternally grateful to Herbert.

He went to the Washington Square campus of NYU. He was taking a pre-law degree, and as such he was in touch with all the teachings of the liberal arts courses and enthusiastic about them.

I remember discussing books with him. He commuted by the Grand Central railroad, then taking a subway downtown.

Since then, I've always been interested in books, and so on. Herb was also very fond of music and used to practice the piano incessantly, though he was not especially talented -- but indefatigable!



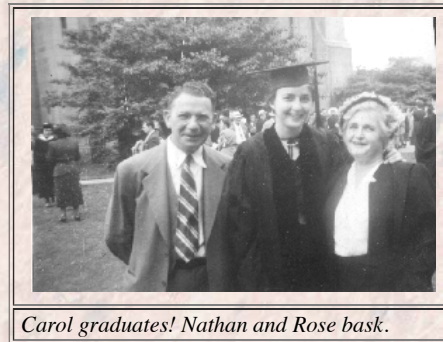
My youngest sister Marcia was always a graceful dancer.

He only loved classical music. I especially remember his going over again and again, the Variations on a Theme of Paganini by Brahms. Every time I hear it, I think of him. I also remember fights between Lee and Herb. Lee was more outgoing and much more practical. Lee was more of a

businessperson, quite gentle, very sweet.

Whereas Herbert was very self-centered and interested in only certain things, such as cultural people and his own special friends, Lee seemed more expansive in his interests and outgoing.

At dinner time, I remember having to clean my plate (eat all on it), and the rapturous taste of baked potatoes with butter, crisp skins, flaky insides, and melting butter. Mmmm!



Carol graduates! Nathan and Rose bask.

More about Dad, Nathan Maier

My father was a gruff but kindhearted man. It was difficult for him to express his feelings, I think. I don't think he was sensitive to the feelings of others either, although he tried hard to be pleasant and accommodating.

Dad read a great deal, mainly good books. He enjoyed reading about prominent men.

Dinner was a special time. Mom would discuss what went on that day... she had a full plate to work with. She managed to become friendly with most of the neighbors. Dad never discussed his business when I was younger, but he always listened carefully to the conversations that were going on.

He was a very moral man. For example, it hurt him to have to indulge in certain business practices, such as taking discounts where they were not authorized. If he paid on time, he took a discount -- but Dad always took it whether on time or not because of a cash flow problem.

We could tell that earning a living was a struggle for Dad. He was not comfortable with discussions of feelings and intimacy. He had a beastly background.

My father loved simple foods, like potatoes in any form. When he'd come back from his travels, he enjoyed his potatoes.

My emotional life with my friends

Me and Miriam Brous and Leora Lentz and Lenore Thompson and Bunny Campbell discussed boys. Our contact with boys was mostly at the school dances. We discussed what they did there.... who danced with whom, whom nobody danced with, which boys were good dancers...

We also went on occasion to Glen Island Casino, out in Westchester. The big bands played there, like the Tommy Dorsey Band, plus the casino band. We went there with our dates.

We had a lot of silliness, giggling a lot of speculation! No hard facts. They were not admitted into the discussion.

High school dances were not a great source of happiness for me. I remember my feet hurt from dancing in heels. I had to take my shoes off on the way home. I remember walking part of the way, though not far. I walked under the bridge, which was part of my house.

I was reasonably popular. I remember some of the boys I danced with: Lawrence Davis, valedictorian; and Robert Smolean, whose father was an optometrist with a big store in downtown Mt. Vernon.

I was very pretty! I remember getting a lot of compliments.

I was also confident about my academic abilities. I got good grades and enjoyed school. I did well in everything, except math.

Relationships with all siblings

Lee:

Lee was and still is somebody I feel never as close as I was to Herb -- but a very lovely, sweet-natured man. He was neglected not only by me, but by my father.

Lee was about seven years older than me. Lee used to fight with Herbert, who was two years older than Lee. They had some violent fights. They used to pick up andirons, although they actually never got around to injuring each other. Lee was the stronger of the two. I don't remember what the fist fights were over.

I remember listening in on some of the parties Herb gave, on the back lawn. They were very revealing for a young lady. There was a lot of petting going on.

Stan adds: They wore short dresses, but not too long.

I was watching from the window on the second floor. There were blankets on the grass.

Stanley: Alas, alas! (Which takes off from a line by Gertrude Stein, "Pigeons on the grass, alas, alas! Blankets on the grass, alas, alas.")

I used to overhear some very interesting conversations. They would discuss the women's breast, their relative merits. This was Herbert and his friends.

Stan: Even when Herbert had Parkinson's disease, he was still after the women. He used to go out to the beach looking for them.

Carol and Marcia

It was a mistake by my mother to give me responsibility for the girls -- it robs you of your childhood. It was a great temptation, though, for a woman with five children.

There was a lot of quarreling between them over clothes, stealing from one another.

Carol and Marcia were not around while I was watching Herbert's parties. Carol and Marcia shared a room together. I wouldn't share any of this dirt with them -- but I would with Miriam.

Herbert was the favorite of my mother. On the other hand, my Dad had more in common with Lee.

Herbert was the favorite over everyone. We had to keep utter silence while he practiced. Carol resented that terribly.

My Mom would say: "Be quiet now, Herbert's practicing."

Herbert had no talent for music, but he studied assiduously. He had no talent for it.

More on Herbert & NYU

Mother was a very busy lady. She had five children, and she had been at one time the secretary at Brentano's -- which was unusual at that time. This was long before Mt. Vernon, before she had any children. She was voted the most beautiful woman in Philadelphia.

In those early days, she called me "a little Mother," which I was to my two little siblings. I don't think it was to helpful to be that. She did a lot of homemaking, We had a maid, a full-time one, which was very expensive.

Still, you can imagine with five kids, She was a very giving person. She used to drive all of the neighbors all around. She was a very good driver. She used to back that old Franklin out of the garage, and it was a 90 degree angle! Good weather or bad, she'd drive somebody. Once a neighbor had to visit her child, who was institutionalized for being seriously ill. Whenever I ask someone about that institution, in Ardsley, no one recognizes it.

Summers at Camp Morgan or Sloan

I enjoyed those very much, especially horseback riding. I went with Bunny there. I still see Bunny occasionally, although lately I haven't seen her.

Ida Langela

Ida came from a very poor family that threw her out of their house and made her live with other families. She became a household helper, what we would today call an au pair. Au pairs didn't get money, only room and board.

Ida had a lot of spirit -- she was rebellious, and this was a way to get her out of the house. They were a poor Italian family. Ida became part of the group of mainly middle class children.

None of us had any contacts with blacks, except for maybe one or two who were on the football teams. We were mainly interested in poetry.

Herbert on cats vs. dogs

My brother Herbert once made a remark that was revelatory of his concept of things: "I don't care for dogs very much, because they become very servile to their owners. Cats are very independent, no matter who owns them. That's why I like them better."

Washington Heights: 1935, Age 17

Dad lost the house in the Depression, 1935. His business went bankrupt. My sister Carol never got along with my father. As soon as she graduated high school, she went to college, to get out of the house. She graduated from the University of Chicago.

We had a dog named Chummy, a chow dog. He got out of our apartment and got lost which was upsetting to us. We sold our car.

We were not frightened about these changes. I was too stupid to realize what was going on, how deep my father was going through hell. He didn't know where the family's next meal was coming from. There was no question of my Mom working. She had skills, but she also had 5 children!

She worked as a secretary for Brentano's. I graduated while in Mt. Vernon and moved around the same time. I went on to NYU.

NYU: A Pure Delight! 1935 - 1939

Ages 17 - 20

[Note from Albert: Be sure to see Elsie's fine letter to Sidney Hook's son, reminiscing about this same period. It's in the joint Elsie and Stan section.]

I loved NYU, because of the stimulation. It was a continuation of what I had expected from Herb's descriptions.

I had Sidney Hook there and took every course that he gave. When I took his courses, Hook was a Trotskyite. He was anti-Stalinist, but not yet a militant anti-communist. That didn't enter too much into his teaching, which was the Socratic position. He took the devil's position.

We used to go downstairs after his course. We were all revved up and talking and so excited. Hook would take us down at the cafeteria, where we would literally and figuratively sit at this feet. This was in the Main Building of NYU at Washington Square.

We would talk about Marxism (at that time he was a Trotskyite), Nietzsche, and others. He taught at the Hoover Institute, "of which there is no whicher." An extreme case. The people we were friendly with then were Lee Rogow, Arnold Horwit, Rod and Herb something, Mickey Rogow (later a model; she was a model in the garment center. This made her particularly prestigious.)

Hook's style was to make positive statements, which sounded to the students as somewhat challenging, or too general. We would challenge him, and he'd defend is position, and we'd go back and forth. Since he was a brilliant man, a gadfly of the period, therefore he was particularly critical of the politics of the day -- mainly of Calvin Coolidge, the predecessor of Hoover.

He sat on a chair, but we'd sit on the floor, because we were too lazy to get a chair. There were 10 or 12 of us. Most of these people did very well in life. There dramatists whose plays appeared on Broadway, like Rogow, who had a play called, Make Mine Manhattan, a musical.

Arnold Horwit is a writer, who also contributed to Make Mine Manhattan. He also wrote Billy Rose's syndicated column for him. Rose was an impresario in making shows and follies. Stanley says he sees his name on some TV shows now and then. Jerome Robbins was a classmate of ours. I knew him, and he was part of the Hook group. I'd see him at a party now and then.

Norman Mailer also joined us at parties now and then. Although he went to parties, he was always around at NYU parties. I remember him as intelligent, part of the discussion, and a good charade player!

Graduating NYU: 1939

We had a graduation ceremony, and my parents came. It was held in Washington Square. They still do it there - I've been invited as an alumna. Graduating was a major event, because I lost friends. We all scattered. I lost contact then with people. I maintained contact with theatrical people, like Micky Rogow (woman) and Arnold Horwitt ("Make Mine Manhattan").

I don't have pictures of these people, by the way.

My dad probably burned them all, strong-minded German! I'm just teasing!

1939: Moving from Mt. Vernon to Manhattan

We moved to Washington Heights in 1939, at age 21. This was probably traumatic to my parents. My Dad lost all of his money, and his partnership was dissolved. One of his 2 other partner, was being selfish about it. He had no dependents. My Dad had 5 children to support and his wife. The partner demanded half of the existing stores or concessions.

One of the partners wanted all of the good stores. I'm not sure how they worked it out. But in any case, times were hard. We lost the car and our home.

My mother used to hock her ring every time it was tuition time. Of course the tuition was \$300 a year. She or my Dad got the bills. Mom was the driving force behind us going to college. My Dad protected us from the tsooris of the depression, just by paying bills and getting a roof over our heads.

None of the children had left the house then. Chummy left the apartment and we never saw him again. Life in the apartment was not much different from life in Mt. Vernon. We had a lot of space. We were very close to Columbia Presbyterian Hospital at 168th Street., a little south of the Cloisters.

1941: Kew Gardens

We moved again the Kew Gardens. This was when I was first getting to know him. Stan used to come to Kew Gardens when we went out on dates. We had a semi-detached house. It had a nice porch in the front. It was right near the LIRR railroad. This was near where Kitty Genovese was killed, much later around 1965.

My brother Herb married Doris while we were there. Herb was married three times. Doris was his first wife. They divorced, and she remarried.

The Garment District: 1939, age 21

It was the Depression, and wherever you could get a job, you took it. I made \$13 a week in the garment district, after graduating with a B.A. We called it an A.B. back then - same thing. My father's friend, Mr. Louie Kalish, owned three manufacturing firms. Each one made a different type of dress. For example, I worked for RK Junior Frocks -- these were junior sizes, for young women. They had a higher waist.

There I worked in many ways. I'd put on a dress, if the models were out to lunch. There were 6 or 7 models. The 3 houses, which were contiguous were: RK Junior Frocks, a more expensive junior size, and evening gowns. You'd go next door. These were on 7th Avenue and 37th Street. I did know the address, and I passed it awhile ago. They're not there now. They went out of business after Mr. Kalish gave it up and put it in his two sons. No talent!

The biggest difference for me was the tough atmosphere of the garment district and the serene atmosphere of the university. I used to cry regularly! At Mt. Vernon when I'd go home at night, I'd be so disappointed and sad.

Salesmen would be very concerned that dresses be available to their clients. Pattern-making was done in the back. They'd say, "Elsie, go back there and go try on dress No. 9." The pattern-maker would say to me: "I'm making a pattern on this dummy now, and don't forget it!"

Then I'd go back to the salesman and tell him the story. He'd be angry and tell me to go back there and tell that pattern-maker that Lord & Taylor was there and I need it! So I'd be in between and abused!

So I'd cry, right there, where the models stayed. Nothing like that would ever happen in a university. My family was polite to each other. This was so unusual and rude and pressured! If I'd been tough, I would've told one of them to drop dead -- but I wasn't used to it.

For example, I was still going through a lot. During one of these fights, before Mr. Kalish gave up the business, he told me not to worry about it too much -- he'd married second best, and it just took time. He was my father's age, perhaps in his fifties. He was small, thin, and rather angular.

I was young! I recovered! I only worked in one place in the garment district. The district was very crowded, and everybody moved very quickly and was concerned with their own conversations. I used to go to the same place for lunch -- a place at the basement part of the same place I worked. God food, priced right. I went out with the lady in charge of the models and the models themselves. It wasn't a glamour model, it was a manufacturers' model and it was hard work - not a possibility for me.

A: Did you have any idea what you wanted to be or do?

Elsie: No, I didn't have an idea. My father insisted that I take enough courses to become a teacher and qualify for a certificate. But NYU gave us terrible educational courses, nothing to help you to teach. I took them anyway. My father was paying the bills.

He had five children to support and he didn't know where his next meal was coming from. He was an older man, and he didn't have anybody to help. My father and my mother's father, Bernard Ostrow, fought hard over the spoils -- divisions of the stores throughout Pennsylvania.

Albert: We always think of the sign over Strawbridge and Clothier, "Hats Trimmed Free" as belonging to Nathan -- that maybe he had a concession there.

When we go visit Peggy and we take Rt. 80, every other little mining town that we pass has memories for me as one of the places where Dad had a store or a concession. For example, Hazelton, Wilkes-Barre, Scranton, Harrisburg, Pottsville. Blum Brothers had stores in Hazelton and Wilkes-Barre and he had the concessions there. When I went there 10 years ago, Blum Brothers store was still there in Wilkes-Barre. It was in the anthracite coal belt.

I remember that my brother Herbert said we had a choice between going to a department store or a little store. My dad said, "Remember your father! Remember the little stores! Give the little guy a chance!"

Another time, I was with Herb, and he said, after a political discussion, I said, "That's the Catholic church for you." He said, "Don't you put down the Catholic church -- they were your dad's bread and butter, with Sunday hats and Easter bonnets!"

Supervisor of Shipping Office in Manhattan, 11 Broadway, below Wall Street - 1941 - 42

I left the garment district because I got this job. I don't recall how I got it. I just took it for granted that if I heard of a better job, I'd go and take it, or at least interview. All were through friends. I never looked at want ads.

The role of this office was to build war vessels. I worked on landing craft I worked on records of deliveries and payments. Keels were made, and then a payment was made. We had to have certification by the person on the builder's site that this was done. We'd have a number on a projected ship, and we'd record what was paid.

I recall a huge, slanted table. One guy there was a bastard -- a Catholic man. He was very right-wing, a fascistic Irishman.

I never went out to a site. Boats were being built in Connecticut, Philadelphia, Camden, and they were coming out like bees! I had never seen anything but a dress being put together! But all I got was second-hand reports of their construction.

Meeting Stan

While at this office, I had completely broken with Rod. I was dating a guy who does dancing, Adler or something like that. There was this girl, Florence, who had a boyfriend who was overseas at the time. She was more or less engaged to him. She was a dark-skinned, nice-looking Jewish girl.

Neither of us had a date for that night, a Saturday. We each said to each other, "We're going to nail the next guy who comes down this aisle!" This was a main busy aisle, and a side-street aisle that led into the head of the department.

Stan was walking down our aisle, and we said, "Well how would you like a date? Get a friend and get two of us!"

Stan was there because he worked there as an engineer. He was a much higher rank than me -- we were clerks. He reacted favorably. We played it funny, we weren't insisting. I thought he was handsome guy! He always used to walk around with rolled up shirt-sleeves, no tie. Shirt open. I liked that informal look. I liked both looks.

So Stan agreed, and said he had a friend, who was stationed on an island in the lower bay. (Hoffman Island). New York Harbor was like a armed camp. Larry Neary was there, being trained by the government for the merchant marine. The merchant marine lost more proportionately than any other people in the war, says Stan.

We gave him a phone number to call. So I got a phone call. He said, "I'm very sorry but Larry was fogged in and couldn't get to the mainland. But I'll be happy to take you out."

Later we found out he thought he was taking to Florence!

Stan: I don't recall when I realized whom I was talking to!

Our first date: The Carnegie Hall - New Yorker incident, January, 1941

We sat in a box, and after one of the pieces had been played by the orchestra, everyone looked at a box that was right in front of and below us. And we couldn't see the box that was right in front of us, so we looked over the railing and nearly fell right over.

In 1942, Deems Taylor was a composer - conductor. We were at Carnegie Hall. At the end of the composer's music, we stood up, looked at Mom and clapped. He was in the box below us.

We leaned over to see where he was, and we almost fell over. It was written up in The New Yorker, that we almost fell over in our enthusiasm!



Elsie and Stan Fried at an upstate New York resort called Plum Point, circa 1941.

Stanley and Elsie in 1941

Stan: I had box seat tickets to Carnegie Hall to see Deems Taylor, a composer-conductor, and how I had such expensive tickets considering the salary I was making is beyond me! I remember we had a fight that night. She said she wanted to go see her friend who lived across the street from Carnegie Hall, maybe Paul

Draper, a gloriously talented harmonica player.

I said to Elsie: "You shouldn't be dropping names with me, and putting on airs!"

Elsie denied it.

Elsie and Stan break up for 6 months

I don't think we saw each other for 6 months after that. I probably thought she was attractive but I was enmeshed in myself, not in other people. I was maybe 20. At the time I was more concerned with my job, friends, taking courses in Naval Architecture.

Actually, I was more involved in cost-estimating changes in jobs on ships.

Elsie: Soon after, in the New Yorker, someone wrote about the two people who nearly fell over the box! True story!

Elsie: I continued working at "Supe Ship." We kept records of progress payments made by the government to the builders of ships during. These were companies like Federal Shipbuilding and Drydock, which built destroyers (gone), and some firms in New England. Also Gobbs and Cox, a major builder of destroyers, escorts, and liberty ships. We covered up in NY State to Southern England.

Stan: I was a contract administrator there. I also made sure that the ship work was done on time. We got involved in a lot of statistical management methods.

Elsie: I worked at Supe Ship from 1941 through 1943. In 1943, Stan and I were married.

Albert: How did you get back together?

Stan: She threw me down on the ground!

Elsie: I was a bleach-blonde, and attractive.

Stan: She was a bleach-blonde and desperate! Just lucky!

Elsie: We kept running into each other since we worked closely together. So we got over the fight.

Stan: Nature took its course. I was still working there, and we were married on a lunch hour. (See Stan's biography for a description of our wedding certificate ceremony at City Hall.)

I had some close friendships at Supe Ship. Florence was a good friend. At nights, we all enjoyed listening to the radio in our home. We listened to shows at different time. My brother used to play the piano like crazy. He used to sing, but he was the most untalented guy you ever met in your life! But he introduced me to a new world of ideas and culture.

Marcia was 9 and a half years younger than me, so she was about 11 at that time, and Carol was about 13. Lee was 3 years older than me, so he was about 24. Lee was off to war by then. Herbert was in the war, but he had an assignment stateside. He was drafted.

We had nice family dinners. Sometimes we talked about things that were happening in each others' lives.

1943: Forest Hills

We moved into an apartment house in Forest Hills. When Stan came back, he came back to Forest Hills, and stayed there till we got our own apartment in Greenwich Village. We only stayed there for a few months.

In late 1943, we got that apartment. Stan went into the service. We turned over the apartment to Aida and Bob, friends of ours. Bob just died recently. I moved back in with my parents.

During 1944 and 1945, I was married, but Stan was in the army.

1945: Our Apartment in Scarsdale

[This is the end of the 1918-45 section. Please return to the main biography menu to continue with Stan and Elsie, 1945 onwards.](#)