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Milton Sasch is my Maternal Uncle.

FOREWORD

It was some forty years after landing on Ellis Island as an immigrant from Gelvon, a **far-away** shtetl (small town) in Lithuania, that Michael Zaas was awarded a gold medal by the United States Government. In this land of opportunity, it is not unusual for a foreigner to attain special recognition for service to his adopted country; but that such an **event** happened to Michael, whose loyalty to the U.S. Government was once questioned, was extraordinary; thus, the story must be told.

To my dearest niece and nephew
Evelyn and Charles for the life-long
friendship and loads of love
and understanding and ~~an~~ encouragement
to carry on

Milton

July 11, 1976

THE BOY FROM THE SHTETL MAKES GOOD

Chapter 1.

Michael was sixteen years old when he, together with his parents and two older brothers migrated from Gelvon, Lithuania to the United States. The year was 1921, They came to join the other six children who had migrated to America prior to the First World War and settled with relatives in Chicago. Upon arrival in Chicago, the newcomers were warmly welcomed by the entire "mishpoche" (family). After years of waiting and much anxiety, the family was at last reunited.

All the relatives showed up for the welcoming party on the first night of their arrival in the home of the eldest daughter. Sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, all came to meet the "greene" for the first time. They were joined by cousins, grandchildren, nephews and nieces, and an uncle who pioneered in)C<IJIDg to the United States before the turn of the century, It took Michael several days, with the help of his older brothers;- , to figure out who was who in the family. After the party, the newcomers were : .t.aken to their newly furnished rented apartment near Douglas Park on the west side of Chicago.

On the first Saturday morning after his arrival in Chicago, Michael had an unexpected visitor - his .American born cousin, Henry Melnich, He came to invite him to go to synagogue.

Henry, who was about four years younger than Michael, only recently had celebrated his Bar Mitzvah. Michael recalled that at the welcoming party several nights before, Henry's father had remarked about his son's superb reading of the Torah on his Bar Mitzvah and about how he had been looking forward to the arrival of his cousin from Gelvon, so that they could do things together, including attending synagogue services.

To his great surprise, Henry learned that Michael was not interested in going to the synagogue. Henry was puzzled and couldn't quite understand why his cousin from the "shtetl" was not interested in joining him in prayer services. Michael told him to go to "schul" this time by himself, and that he would be glad to spend time with him later in the day.

That afternoon, Henry returned and invited Michael to join him for a walk in the park nearby. They located a bench and sat down and watched the children boat-rowing on the lagoon. Slowly they began to warm up to each other as cousin to cousin. Michael was very pleased with Henry's mastery of the Yiddish language and felt comfortable that he could express himself in "mame-loshen" (mother tongue). Michael also sensed that through his newly-found cousin, he could hasten his understanding of the new world around him.

As far back in his early childhood as he could remember, Henry was fascinated with his father's funny and mysterious stories about the life and ways of the shtetl of Gelvon.

He remembered that he would always say "Papa, tell me more, more". Here was his first opportunity to probe further with Michael. "Tell me about Gelvon - what is it like?" he asked.

Michael, after some reflection, began: "Gelvon has about a hundred Jewish families and about ten gentile families. The Jews are primarily engaged in eking out a livelihood and going to the synagogue, The education of the children takes precedence over everything else. In the synagogue, the Jew.c prays thrice daily to God. In the home he raises the family in the spirit of God, Once a week the people of the shtetl transact business at the town's market place. On that day, the peas:eJ:l!lts of the neighboring villages come to the shtetl to sell their farm products and, in return, buy products or services from the Jews. For example, we, in our l:ittle place, would sell a lot of cigarettes, herring, bakery goods, and other general merchandise."

"It sounds like you had a big business", interrupted Henry.

"No, nothing like that. It was on a very small scale. We could hardly make enough to llve on. Ila make ends meet, we also had a dyeing service. My pare.nts were known for their special craftsmanship in dyeing much of the wool brought to the market for sale."

"Tell ll!e some more about Gelvon."

"The main street leading to the market square was in the center of the shtetl. A number of small st eets intersected the main street. All the streets were unpaved, and,

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at times, they were so muddy that we children could hardly cross them. The entire width of one side of the market-square was occupied by the "Kloester" - Greek orthodox church. Surrounding the other three sides of the market-place were the one-story houses of the wealthier Jews. These houses generally had dry-goods stores and other types of stores in front. The living quarters were in the back. The poorer shops, such as butcher-shop, cobblers, tailors, and other artisans were located on the side streets."

"We had only one synagogue, located on a road leading from the market square to the palace of the Polish Count. He owned the entire town and surrounding meadows. The Rabbi lived opposite the synagogue."

We lived on the main street quite a distance from the center square. Our little store facing the street was connected to our living quarters, which contained a kitchen with a dirt floor. The rest of the house had wood floors. There was one large room which served for eating and contained sleeping benches for the children, and a small bedroom for our parents. In the rear of the house, we had a barn for the horse and cow, and a place for the chickens. Adjacent to the barn, in a separate room, were the two big copper kettles in which my parents did the dyeing of fabrics. The house and barn were made of logs and their roofs were straw".

"What was "cheder" (school) like in Gelvon?"

"The cheder I attended was an ill-ventilated living-room in the home of the "melamed" (the teacher). Every Jewish child attended elementary cheder and many attended advanced classes in Jewish studies. My parents told me I was about four when I started. I joined ten or fifteen other children of assorted ages. We were all huddled together at a long, wobbly, gouged-out table. At the head, sat our teacher, Peretz, a grey old man with a long beard." As Michael described this scene of not too many years ago, he burst into laughter.

"What's so funny?" asked Henry.

"I just visualized the many times our "melamed", in the midst of tutoring us, would doze off. As soon as we children were sure he was sound asleep, we would tip-toe out into the street to play. Upon awakening, he would round us all up and shoo us back to cheder to resume the lessons."

"That sure is funny; but actually, what did the melamed teach you?"

"First of all, the melamed taught us the Jewish alphabet and the translation of Hebrew words into Yiddish. To stimulate our interest in learning, he would often stand behind us and surprise us by dropping a coin upon our book, as God's reward for learning. For several years, he had me memorizing Hebrew prayers from tattered prayer books, and I was required to explain the full meaning of each word. By the time I was seven, I was well versed in the study of the

"chumesh" (the Pentateuch), and when I was ten years old, my parents took me to the wisest melamed in Gelvon, a man of **the Talmud, with whom I studied the main code of Jewish** , , , 'wisdom, which included the "tanakh" (the bible) and the gemore*. It was this "melamed" who introduced me to higher mathematics, such as algebra."

Henry, who was a baseball enthusiast, asked Michael what sports he played in the shtetl.

"For us children, structured sports did not play a part in our lives - we were taken up with schul and cheder most of the day. Our sports were jumping, skipping, running in the meadows and chasing squirrels."

"You are not against religion now, are you, Michael?"
"no, not really - but things have changed. You see, in the shtetl, religion was a way of life. Prior to my Bar Mitzvah, I went to schul three times a day and of course, I wore tfilin.* We lived from Sabbath to Sabbath. It ushered in the joy of life. We children especially loved the Sabbath meals and the family singing of prayers that followed. In the shtetl, we seemed to be apart from the rest of the world. But this all changed with me when we left Gelvon."

* Gemore - Part of the Talmud which consists of the interpretation and discussion of the law.

* Tfilin - Small leather cases containing quotations from the Pentateuch worn by religious Jews on the forehead and left arm during morning prayers.

Henry was still puzzled about Michael's less than full devotion to the schul and daily prayers. ,Michael went on to explain, "After the war and prior to our coming here, we spent six months in Kovno, the capitol of Lithuania, where we awaited the arrival of the necessary visas to enter America. My brother, Raymond and I often attended lectures on timely political, religious and cultural topics affecting the Jewish people in the world. This exposure to new ideas brought a new outlook on life for me. My interests turned to non-religious matters, and my fervor for praying began to diminish".

"What are your new interests?" asked Henry with great curiosity.

"I wish to concern myself with many aspects of life which never touched me before. But first, I want to study many secular subjects such as algebra, chemistry and botany. In time, I may qualify to go to college and become an engineer", Michael continued.

"Did your parents ever consider going to Palestine, as many others did?"

"No, they were not Zionists, although others in the shtetl were. When the war broke out, the people of the shtetl were divided. Some Zionists were eager to go to Palestine; others wanted to join the socialists or communists in Russia; while still others, especially the elderly Jews preferred to remain, trusting to God to show them the way."

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"Did the war come to Gelvon?"

"Oh, yes. The Russian, German, Polish, and Lithuanian armies were in our town at one time or another during the war. Early in the war, we experienced the effects of actual fighting in and near Gelvon, and suffered from increased persecution."

"What happened?"

"If you really would like to know, I will tell you of some incidents that we experienced. When the Polish army marched through the town to the Russian front line, several soldiers ran into our little store demanding that we give them cigarettes. When my mother said we had none, they threatened to cut my father's beard and ordered Raymond to get on his knees. They whipped him several times, insisting that he show them where the cigarettes were. He pleaded "Pan, (sir) we have none." Failing to find the cigarettes after searching behind the counter, the soldiers gave up, and rushed out to catch up with their marching comrades.

"At another time, my brother, Ralph was the victim. He was accused by the Polish police of having smuggled in several hundred pounds of salt. Salt was a very scarce item at that time. They took him to the police station, threw him to the floor, and each took turns in slugging him with chunks of fire-wood. Neighbors, who saw my brother being pulled into the station and heard his screams, rushed to tell my mother. My mother took to the street and on to the police station, with me by her side. As we approached the station,

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we could hear Ralph's terrorizing screams and my mother cried aloud, 'Gevald, gevald (help, help) they are killing my son!' The police began shoving her away and chased me, but I kept coming back to the side of my mother. At this frightening scene, the neighbors dispersed, ran back to their homes, and hid behind their locked doors and shuttered windows. Getting no relief from the police, my mother ran to the house where the goy Boyluck, the horse-thief, lived. He was fond of our family, and his stster, Marya, often helped my mother in the house. ^{(;!, ...'} "Pan/\Boyluck", mother begged, "I will pay you twenty-five rubles - help me get my son back - they are butchering him!" The horse-thief did his good deed, and an hour later, Ralph was back home. Whata sight he was! His eyes were swollen closed, he was black and blue all over, and suffered great pain. He did recover and survive, and as you've seen him,, here, he is now strong and healthy",

Henry was so intent and was such a good listener, that Michael was tempted to tell him of the time when his own father's cousin Zusie was accused by the Russian Cossacks of being a German spy. This cousin, Zusie was forced to dig his own grave and was buried alive while his family watched. Michael refrained from telling him of this dreadful incident. He remained silent and contemplative for a while, and then decided to tell Henry the following story instead: "One sunny day, I found myself at the town's market square. Instead of seeing horse-drawn carts, peasants and traders meandering between displays and exhibits of livestock products,

the place was jammed with people in their holiday dress watching a happy group of Lithuanians, Jews, Poles, Russians and Germans, arm in arm dancing in a circle to the tune of "Chad Gadya" led by our Cantor, Zalmon. At the same time, my mother was serving wine and matzoh, and my father was passing out cigarettes to the applauding audience."

"When did that happen?", Henry asked surprisingly.

"Would you like me to tell you the truth? This was just a dream." They both broke into a hearty laugh, and soon after, left for home, humming "Chad Gadya, Chad Gadya!"

Chapter 2.

For years, it was Michael's dream that when he got to America the doors to education would not only be open to him, but also that his "rich" brothers in America would subsidize his schooling. To his great surprise and disappointment, he soon learned that practically all the savings of his three brothers went to meet the cost of bringing over the family and he would have to finance his own educational pursuits. He was so told by his brother, Sam, who said: "Brother, we worked and saved, and barely had enough to bring you all over here and cover the cost of the apartment furniture. If you want to go to school, you will have to work your way, as many immigrants before you have done. We will not expect a penny from you for the upkeep of the apartment or for the cost of the grub. Just go right to it! Go to work and use all your earnings for your schooling. As a matter of fact," he joyfully announced, "I already have a job waiting for you as a grocery clerk with my former boss on Polk Street." Michael didn't say anything, he just listened.

Michael resolved to take his brother Sam's advice to work his way through school. After only two weeks in the country, he enrolled in an evening preparatory elementary school to learn to read, speak, and write English. To earn some tuition money, he accepted the job arranged for him by

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his brother Sam. He became a delicatessen and grocery clerk, at a salary of 8 per week for a twelve hour day, seven days a week. His boss, who was a recent Russian Jewish immigrant, permitted him to take whatever time off he required to attend night school and also told him to feel free to do his homework when not busy waiting on customers.

Two years later, he was accepted in a preparatory high school for the purpose of mastering the necessary high school courses required for high school graduation. Michael drove himself hard to attain his goal. Under special arrangement, he successfully passed the University college entrance examinations in 1925. Soon after, he was admitted to the college of his choice, Armour Institute of Technology in Chicago. Early in 1927 he became an American citizen.

Michael had saved enough money to sustain himself for the first two years of college, and by the time he became a senior, even with his summer-time jobs, he was short of funds for tuition. When his family learned of his financial straits, they rallied to make sure that the youngest of the family make good. His mother gave him almost all her savings from her children's weekly allowance, saying, "Here, my son, education remains in your head - you can't lose it, nor can anyone take it away from you." His sister, Jeannette, provided him with free lodging, and his brother, Sam arranged to have him work in his grocery store on Saturdays at an attractive wage.

Michael graduated with a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering in June 1930. The following day he was on a train to Washington to accept a government appointment as a Junior Valuation Engineer with the Interstate Commerce Commission.

En route to his new job, he took inventory of the years of hard work and study which culminated in the fulfillment of his boyhood dream to become an engineer. This, he thought, was the most eventful period of his life. He found it hard to believe that as a Jewish boy from the shtetl, he was being appointed to work for the U.S. Government.. He felt his coat pocket, to make sure that his certificate of citizenship was intact and turned to his wallet to go over again the Civil Service examination grade and his college grades, which qualified him for the pending appointment.

Early the next morning after his arrival in Washington, he found his way to the Interstate Commerce Commission office, stood with awe and great humility before a personnel officer, and repeated after him: "I, Michael Zaas, solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic".

Michael felt that he was on the threshold of something great. He became retrospective. In looking back at his college years, his hard work, his many frustrations and deprivations, and finally the good fortune that brought him to this day, he recalled that he had experienced a few sad

lessons on the **way**. There were times when he felt stifled because of restrictions of free expression. He remembered the incident in his senior year when he was severely chastised by the Dean of Students for his article in the Armour Weekly in which he questioned the existence of God. On another occasion, Michael had his first encounter with anti-semitism. It happened a month or so before graduation when representatives of a Chicago firm were interviewing seniors for possible jobs. While Michael and two of his classmates were on their way to be interviewed, he was called aside by the Dean of Engineering, who icily and emphatically advised him: "Save yourself the time, Michael, you might as well turn back. They do not hire Jews."

Michael was crushed, made no comment, and continued on his **way**. At the interview, he had feverishly completed the application form and for his answer to the question "What is your nationality?", he wrote in bold letters JEWISH and walked out.

Getting the job in Washington was a happy turning point for Michael. He was imbued with a drive for further study and self development in the social and cultural aspects of life. He sensed the beginning of a new dawn. He wanted to do his share in bringing about a **more** just society, to combat anti-Semitism, and, at the same time, work for the fulfillment of his dream, which was to **win** the heart of Billie Amtman, the girl he had been seriously courting in Chicago.

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In contrast to fast-paced Chicago, Michael discovered that Washington was a polite Southern city dominated by easy-going masses of Government employees. A new world opened up to him, offering various cultural and educational opportunities. He feverishly began to catch up on all fronts. He enrolled in evening courses in Philosophy and Ethics at George Washington University. He began studying Spinoza's "Improvement of Understanding" and Karl Marx's "Capitalism". He became a frequent visitor of museums. For relaxation, he read Shelley, Keats and Browning. The romantic and poetic **works** inspired him to write lengthy love-letters to his girl friend back home. These letters served him well, for Billie soon followed him to Washington, where they were happily married early in 1931,

Within a year after their marriage, they became very much preoccupied with their own little world, pursuing self-education and visiting the historic sights in and near **Washington**. They became active in civic activities and also joined the **Jewish** Community Center drama group.

By mid-1932, the economy was in an accelerating depression and a ferment of discontent **was everywhere**. J?resident Hoover tried to soothe the people with such statements as "prosperity is just around the corner" and: "there will soon be a chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage". But no recovery was in sight. Michael and Billie were not insensitive to the worsening economic situation.

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They joined to help elect F.D.R. who promised the country a New Deal. Billie joined a drama group in which she took a major role in Clifford Odets' play •Waiting for Lefty•, based on a New York taxi strike.

Several months after Franklin Roosevelt became President, his Ad.ministration.decided to abolish the Bureau of Valuation of the Interstate Commerce Commission and Michael found himself out of a job. Fortunately, he was detailed by the Commission to a temporary Job w1th AAA* of the Department of Agriculture,

At the AAA, he became an examiner reviewing Govern-ment contracts negotiated with farmers in the outh for plow- ing under cotton and the killing of pigs for the purpose of maintaining prices. Henry Wallace, who waB.c then Secretary of Agriculture, had the Government freeze the pork and distribute it to families on relief. Michael saw no future in this job and after about three months, he accepted. a job with the Forest Service inMilwaukee, isconsin, as a topographic draftsman. There, too, he soon realized that being a drafts- man was far from his life's ambition. Re therefore took steps to reestablish his professional rating in Government service. Re succeeded in receiving an offer as hydraulic engineer with the U.S. Geological Survey in Madison, Wisconsin•.

* **AAA** - Agricultural Adjustment Administration

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An important prerequisite for this new job was the ability to drive a car to visit streamflow gauging stations throughout the State of Wisconsin. - Michael faced a problem. He never had driven a car. His friends in Milwaukee came to his rescue. The Sunday before he was to appear on his Job in Madison, he spent all day being taught by them to drive a car. The next day, he was able to give an affirmative - answer to the question posed to him by his new boss, "You do drive, don't you?"

It was in Madison in 1934 that Michael and Billie began to participate actively in the life of the community. Billie also attended sociology and other courses at the University. In a short time, they cultivated friendly relationships with several of the young instructors who introduced them to the activities of the League for Peace and Democracy. In the Jewish community, they associated with a number of young couples, some friendly to the Soviet Union. Michael organized a club and named it "New Life". The purpose of the club, besides being social, was to support the aspirations of the Jewish people living in Birobidzhan, the autonomous Jewish territory which had been established by the Russians in the "twenties".

In the summer of 1936, Billie and Michael surprised the family in Chicago by announcing that they were planning a trip to Europe to visit Michael's birthplace in Lithuania, as well as France and the Soviet Union. Although the trip cost them less than a thousand dollars; it practically wiped

out all their savings, and they had little left, more than change in their pockets.

Upon their return home, they reported their fear and concern of the rise of Fascism in Europe. They related how people on the trains, apparently suspicious of each other, spoke in whispers of new oppressions, fears and boycotts. Michael and Billie reported their horror, on passing through stations in Germany, of seeing large billboards reading "Kauft nicht bei Juden!" (Don't buy from Jews!). At a train station in Berlin, they saw newspaper boys licking their heels, giving their Nazi salute and spouting out "Hell Hitler! - Want to buy a paper?" There were rumors everywhere of the imminence of a Civil War in Spain.

The rumors soon proved to be right. Civil war did break out in Spain, and Hitler's armies marched unopposed into the Rhineland. Fascism was on the march. Michael and Billie, as well as millions of other Americans, feared that fascism might also become rampant in America. Unemployment remained at about ten million, and the end of the depression was not in sight. Many Americans believed that the New Deal was doomed and thought fascism might prove to be the best solution to the problems facing the country.

It was clear to Michael and Billie, and to most Jews everywhere, that Fascism and anti-Semitism go hand in hand. One of the formidable critics of FDR's handling of the depression was the Reverend Charles E. Coughlin, the radio priest

of Royal Oak, near Detroit. By regular radio broadcasts and in his newspaper, he blamed the ills of the country on the Jews, saying that the Jews controlled the banks and referring to the **New** Deal as the Jew Deal. He spread rumors that Roosevelt was the descendant of a Jew named Rosenveltd.

Father Coughlin's tirades against Roosevelt and the "Jewish bankers", which he delivered Sunday mornings to a radio audience numbering in the millions, instilled great fear in the hearts and minds, not only of the Jewish population, but of millions of other Americans. More and more, people, were noting with disgust the havoc and destruction Fascism was bringing to the world, and anti-fascist movements began to appear in various parts of the country.

Michael and Billie attended some meetings of the League for Peace and Democracy and became aware of the increasing number of recruits, including students and faculty members. The newcomers were more militant. They changed the name of the League for Peace and Democracy to the League Against War and Fascism. Later the new League was publicly accused of being pro-communist. While Michael was fully in support of the new League's real goals, he thought it best to disassociate himself from their activities.

Social and political activities became less important to Michael and Billie, as they welcomed the most joyous event in their lives - the birth of their son, Ly-le Tevya in September of 1937. Their full attention was then devoted to the rearing of a happy, health child.

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The fact that, by 1937, seven years after the beginning of his career **with** the Government, he was still only a Junior Engineer, weighed heavily upon Michael, and he decided to explore **ways** to enhance his professional standing and financial situation. In the summer of 1941, Michael decided to take graduate courses in Hydraulics at Colorado State College in Fort Collins, Colorado. The family spent a wonderful summer there. It was their first introduction to the **West**. Michael had always hoped to be able to work for the Bureau of Reclamation in Denver, Colorado. As a result of an interview with Bureau officials in Denver, Michael received an offer of a job as assistant Hydraulic Engineer in the Salem, Oregon office of the Bureau of Reclamation. He gladly accepted. In February, 1942, Michael drove from Madison, Wisconsin to Salem, Oregon, in his old Chevrolet, driving on **snowy**, icy roads, through mountains and terrains he never knew existed. To the joy of everyone, he made it without a mishap. Billie and Lyle followed a week later to join him in his newly rented apartment in Salem,

) Michael found the job in Salem very rewarding and challenging. He was engaged in the preparation of water supply and economic studies for the development of water supply and economic studies for the development of irrigation projects in the Willamette Basin of Oregon, one of the richest agricultural valleys in the world. It was the beginning of a new wonderful life for the family. In 1942, their second son, Dennis Nathan was born. About three years later, Michael was

promoted to Associate Engineer and transferred to the Regional Office of the Bureau of Reclamation at Boise, Idaho.

Upon arrival in Boise, they bought a home in a nice area. He liked his associates at the office and the family was pleased with their new surroundings. The children enrolled in school, and Billie and Michael became active members of the PTA. Billie also became active in the League of Women Voters, and Michael became a charter member of the Boise Little Theatre. They found Boise, located in sunny sagebrush country, a pleasant and invigorating place to live. In this environment, they enjoyed a new state of equanimity. This serenity however, was suddenly interrupted by a letter from Washington questioning Michael's loyalty to the Government based on his record in Madison.

Chapter J.

One day in August of 1948, much to his surprise, Michael received a registered and confidential **memorandum** from the Loyalty Board of the Department of the Interior in Washington. The memo requested that he respond in writing within fourteen days to the following questions:

(1) Do you have any information concerning or explanation of a report that in 1938 you were an active member or held office in the Madison, Wisconsin Branch of the International Workers' Order?

(2) Do you have any information concerning or explanation of a report that in 1938 you made a donation of one dollar to the Wisconsin State Conference on Social Legislation?

(CJ) Do you have any information concerning or explanation of a report that in 1938 you were a member in the Madison Branch of the American League for Peace and Democracy, and that you attended as a state delegate the National Convention of the American League for Peace and Democracy held during the period January 5-9, 1939 in Washington, DC?"

Michael and his wife, Billie, were stunned and shaken by the surprising memo. Suddenly, their dreams for a secure future for themselves and for the education of their two boys appeared to be in jeopardy. Michael was immediately preoccupied with the problem of how to appropriately respond to this inquiry. He knew that each query in the memorandum had some element of truth, but he felt if the real facts were explained, his loyalty to the U.S. Government would be unassailable. Although he had heard of others who were asked to resign for alleged disloyalty to the Government, he nevertheless believed it could not happen to him.

Michael reflected on the **grave** implications of all of this.

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He thought of his present Job and of his future. He and his **wife** recalled their friends and acquaintances in places where they had lived before. They speculated as to who among them might have been the informer of his alleged "disloyal activities".

"I am willing to bet that it is our 1936 trip to Europe and the Soviet Union that is in the back of this investigation", said Billie.

"At first I Jumped at the same conclusion", responded Michael, "but I cannot find a single word in the **memo** referring to our visit to Russia".

"It is precisely because-of this omission that I am suspicious about it", replied Billie. "It is inconceivable to **me** that they would be inquiring about a dollar we may have contributed to some social agency, and yet not raise one word about the seven days we spent in Moscow and Leningrad. Don't you think: the FBI knows all about our travels abroad?"

"You are so right I. The y must...know because I fully responded to the question of foreign travel on every personnel form I filled out in the past ten years. They probably left it out so that they could confront me with it at a follow-up interrogation".

As they both settled down to reminisce about that period in their lives, Billie recalled, "We lived in Madison then, and do you remember the fuss some of our friends made when we spoke of the more important role of the women in relating that many were doctors in Russia and that **we saw** a number of women conductors on street cars?"

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"I sure do. Because we lauded that as a good sign, they accused us of being pro-communist."

"It is true that we went to some meetings of the League for Peace and Democracy, but actually, Michael, you never did sign up as a member, did you?"

"No, I told them that as a government employee I could not prudently become a member of the League. True, I was ashamed of my refusal to Join, since I felt it was my right and duty to speak-freely on vital issues of the day."

"Then how will you explain your reason for attending the conference in Washington?"

"First of all, I **was** there as a non-member delegate or participant. Further, *i* thought that if the Secretary of Interior, Harold Ickes, **who was** my boss, was featured as the **main** speaker at the conference, I could rightfully be in his audience."

After reminiscing for a while longer, Bill! and Michael decided not to do anything about the memorandum until they had a chance to discuss it with their cousin and close friend, Henry Melnick, who was due to visit them the following day as he was en-route from Washington to San Francisco.

The next morning Michael was back at the office working on irrigation and power generation problems for federal reclamation projects in the Pacific Northwest. He found it difficult to concentrate on his work, and as he reclined in his chair, oblivious of his associates around him, he pondered over some questions which were on his mind. He wondered whether there was another one among the hundreds of employees in this Regional Bureau Office who

might have received a similar inquiry-. He wondered why- his problems and concerns in life were so different from those of his colleagues. He began to **size** up his co-workers. one by- one:

There was his friend Carl Goenslen from Wyoming; a pious Catholic who **minded** his own business and at every- opportunity- said that he never knew that a Jew could be as nice as Michael.

Then there^{were}/Harold Hafterson, . his supervisor from Idaho, whose favorite topic of discussion was skiing , square dancing , and rodeos; and his friend Donald Brigham, . the Mormon from Utah, who believed that Jesus Christ once visited the. United States. Brigham drank only milk, and never would say- 'hell' or 'damn•, but when things really got rough, he would say "I don't give a continental".

Still another **was** the elderly- Baptist, Wahtenpaugh from Oregon, who frequently chided Michael for permitting his boys to partake of a little wine on festive Jewish holiday-a. Finally he thought of Christopherson from Montana:, who said. that. Michael was the first Jewish engineer he had ever met. He thought that **most** Jewish professional men were either doctors, lawyers or labor leaders.

"All a bunch of nice fellows, Michael thought, Hbut none of them are as disturbed as I am about our civil rights or liberties being threatened. Is it because in their lives they never experienced or witnessed, or even encountered anyone else who. had felt the whip of a Cossack, or the torture of -a Halerchik* or a Nazi.

Michael continued to reflect, •Here I **aa**, a boy from the shtetl, remembering the Diaspora and the recent holocaust, now confronted with a loyalty test. How can I explain to **my**-office

* A Polish General who incited pogroms.

associates my present disturbing predicament or my passion for equality and justice?" This train of thought was suddenly interrupted by a telephone call from the office of the Director. "Mr. Zaas, the Director would like to see you. Can you come up, please?"

"I will be there right **away**", Michael managed a stammering "Thank you".

Michael entered the Director's outer office and tried to be his usual casual self, smiling, and exchanging pleasantries with the receptionist. He was doing his best to hide his inner turmoil. He feared that the Director may know it all and that he was about to face a request for his resignation.

"You can go in now", said the secretary after a while.

Michael entered. "How are you **Mike**?" the Director greeted him warmly.

"Great" Michael replied nervously. He is trying to soften the blow, he thought to himself.

"Say Mike" the Director began convincingly, "I talked to Don Street, our chief economist, and he highly recommended you to conduct the proposed agricultural and water supply survey in the Lewiston, Idaho abandoned orchards area".

Michael was relieved that the Director was not about to fire him, and presumably **was unaware** of the Washington office inquiry concerning his loyalty. He remained silent.

"Yes, and one more thing, **Mike**" continued the Director, "I hope this assignment will not interfere with your role in

"Arsenic and Old Lace" now playing at the Boise Little Theatre.

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We saw it the night before last, I didn't know you were a thespian. Go on with your performances, there is no particular rush. Why don't you and Don get together on this",

"Thank you - I will", Michael replied, Re said "good bye" and left in a flush of relief,

Upon returning home, Michael happily related to Billie that he was sure that no one in the office, not even the Director, was aware of his troubles. Re was positive that he alone in the whole office was facing this kind of problem. Michael went on to say, "I guess it must be because I, unlike the others of **my** associates, continue to identify myself with the immemorial cultural and ethical values of the Jewish past; a tradition of independent thinking, a constant search for truth and justice, and a passion for learning. These ideals in our tradition, I am sure, emanated from..the teachings of our early Hebrew prophets" . . .,

"Could it be" said Billie "that perhaps you, as a **Jew**, and man others like you who experienced persecution abroad, have a greater appreciation for the freedom. they enjoy here and therefore react fearfully to any infringement on freedom of thought or expression."

Chapter 4,

When Michael came home from work announcing with joy that the Director was apparently unaware of his loyalty inquiry, he found the house spio and span, the two boys all dressed up, and the dinner table set - all in readiness for their expected guest, **was** their cousin, Henry, who/duo to arrive from Chicago. It had been years since they had had contact with him, , and they-wonderered about the purpose of his mission to Palo Alto, his destination,

Michael and Billie were happy to-welcome Henry. He was not only their cousin. but also a close friend.and confidant. He was an attorney for one of the Federal .agenc.ies in Washington, 00, and doing well. How fortunate, they thought, that he was coming; .he could not have picked a more oportune time.

Soon after his arrival, he shocked Michael and Billie with the news that he was no longer with the Goverment, Hiso:tfice, without prior notice, requested his resignation because of ques-tions of his loyalty to the Goverment. The primary reason for his dismissal was that he had been associating with people who were under investigation for disloyalty.

Michael could hardly contain himself, and, with heavy heart, told Henry- that only yesterday he, too, received an in-quiry from Washington questioning his loyalty. •I have ten days to reply. Lucky you are here - we sure.can.use your advice,"

Henry was quick and ready to give Michael his advice. With a grin, he began by saying, "I could have told you this

would happen to you. After all, aren't you a friend of mine? Guilt by association! Look, buddy, I have just been fired and am on my way to Palo Alto - as far away from Washington as the train will take me. I plan to start a new life. I will get a job, do anything, just so I can earn enough to sustain myself, have my wine, women and song, and let those damn fascists screw themselves. I am through: As far as you are concerned, believe me, your jig is up too. No matter how you may try to explain that you are loyal, it won't help you. Your idea of loyalty and theirs, the s.o.b.'s, is a mile apart. So, my friend, face it. They are determined to get rid of those **whom** they consider are the do-gooders in the Government, particularly fellows like you who were prematurely anti-Fascist.

Michael and Billie listened in amazement and alarm as he continued. How will you explain that, as early as 1936, even before the Spanish civil war, you were already associating with some of the members of the American League for Peace and Democracy? Did you hear of the pillceman down south who arrested a guy because he was reading the "Liberty" magazine - he thought he was a Communist.

Billie burst into laughter. "Yes, and you Billie, didn't you once march and demonstrate in Milwaukee against the visit of a Nazi German Ambassador who was officially received by the Mayor? The FBI knows all about it. On the basis of what is going on in Washington, there is no question in my mind, Michael, that you are on the **way** out".

Henry's words deeply disturbed Michael. Re understood why Henry thought he had a right to resent a society which deprived **him** of the opportunity to earn his livelihood, because he questioned the views of the Establishment, or because he did not choose the "right" friends. Re knew that Henry had to work his way through law school and still managed to become president of the senior class and graduate **with** honors. . . After graduation, he refused to become an ambulance chaser, as many did during the depression. When the opportunity came to take a job with the Government, he welcomed it. Re thought he finally could serve the public interest and have security for the future. Now suddenly, his plans and hopes came to naught.

Michael hardly could believe that he was to face the same disappointment in life. He listened with alarm to the advice that he face up to the inevitable of either an outright dismissal or a request for his resignation. In his heart, Michael felt that he must not assume that his case was hopeless - he had a strong feeling that he could prove his loyalty to the Government. Throughout his mature years his activities, such as serving as block-warden during the Second World War, his service as cub-master and later as scoutmaster, and, together with Billie, their civic activities were proof of his allegiance to the Government.

The animated discussions continued until it was time to accompany Henry, California bound, to the railroad station. Upon returning from the station, they again considered how best to respond to the memorandum of investigation. Henry's remarks had left them depressed and in a quandary. Later in the evening, when

their two boys were asleep, they went over the events that could have led to this crisis in their lives. They wondered particularly as to who among their former associates were so affected by their own prejudices that they had to report them to the FBI. They carried on with their soul-searching until long past midnight.

Michael couldn't fall asleep, but tossed and turned. A host of memorable events and episodes flashed through his mind which may have had some bearing on the question of his loyalty. He thought of the Friday night Hillel group discussions at the home of Rabbi Kadushin in Madison. He remembered that the Rabbi was always on the side of the Jewish radical students from **New** York attending the University. Some of the students later quit school and joined the Lincoln Brigade in Spain; but the Rabbi would be the last person to consider his students un-American for that reason.

Suddenly it occurred to Michael that the informer might have been a man by the name of Mark Green. **Mr.** Green was an active American Legionnaire himself a Jew, and owner of a photo shop near the Campus. He thought he lost a lot of business as a result of the bad publicity of the **New** York student radicals. He was therefore violently against the "nice Jewish boys" getting involved in the protest against the showing of Fascist movies. "What is it to them? What will the Goyim think?", he would say. Michael thought he probably should never have argued with him. He was hopeless!

When Michael finally fell asleep, he dreamed of the days when he was a Talmudic student in Gelvon. He dreamed: Was it in the Gemore or was it my father who told me "MJ' son,

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whatever you do in this world, remember that God, blessed be His **Name**, said 'Ben Odem Lamokem, Ben Odem Lachvery•, meaning: I will forgive you for any sins you do against Me, but not for the sins against your fellow man•. "And did not prophet Jeremiah, during the exile of the Jews to Babylonia, .urge them to seek the welfare of the city in which they dwelt because their welfare depended upon that city!" And so the dreams went on.

When he **awoke** in the morning, the first thing Michael said to Billie was "You will never believe it. I **saw** the prophet, Jeremiah. I am convinced he came to remind me that it is one's duty to participate in the improvement of the social order to which he belongs. I should have no regrets. I also dreamed about my father and saw Haman, the anti-semite, and Mordecai (Queen Esther's uncle). They came to tell me something. Three against one - my father, Jeremiah, and Mordecai - the good, against Haman - the bad. The message is clear. I cannot fail them. If Elmer Sandell, the **New** York student was ready to flight.,.,_in Spain for his belief in Justice, equality and democracy, **we** too must stand firm in the conviction of the fairness of our behavior and face the consequences. This is our heritage, and we shall not **waiver**. I will stand erect and testify, if necessary, as d, id Mordecai before **King** Ahasuerus. .

"Tonight we will write a reply to the unbelievable b7 stupid inquiry".

Tog'i?ether, Michael and Billie earnestly pondered **what** to say. After several drafts, they came up with the following response to the three questions asked b7 the Loyalty Board:

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This is in reply to your interrogation of August 10, 1948:

1. My active interest in the International Workers' Order was only because of its insurance feature. The premiums were unusually low and attractive to people with meagre incomes such as I then earned. Shortly after joining it, I found other policies better suited to my needs and I dropped the I.W.O. insurance and membership.

2. **As** to the donation of one dollar in 1938 to the Wisconsin State Conference on Legislation - I have no recollection of making such a contribution. I have often made contributions to religious, civic, and social organizations, and I may also have contributed to the above mentioned organization.

3. As to my participation in the League for Peace and Democracy, I was definitely not a State delegate to the National Conference held in Washington. I also have no knowledge of the activities of the State League. I doubt whether I ever became a member of the Madison branch, although I did attend some of its meetings and recall that I agreed to attend the National Conference.

In 1939, as now in 1948, I held an American's high regard for peace and democracy. It appeared to me at that time that the League for Peace and Democracy might be a proper medium for promoting both these ends.

I wish to add that in my eighteen years of service with the Government, I never wavered from giving the job the best that was in me and in the best interests of my country. I stand ready to defend my loyalty to my country which I cherish, and am ready to protect it at all times.

Very truly yours,

Michael Zaas

About a month later, Michael received the long awaited reply from the Loyalty Board, stating:

The Interior Department Loyalty Board, after considering your case, which included your reply of August 24, has determined that no reasonable ground exists for believing that you are disloyal to the Government of the United States.

Signed,
Secretary, Interior Department
Loyalty Board

Chapter 5.

Michael was relieved that the Loyalty Board concluded that there **were** no reasonable grounds for believing that he was disloyal to the Government. He nevertheless was deeply hurt that they not only based their investigation on flimsy accusations, but that they hadn't added a note of regret for the mental anguish they may have caused him.

He put this unfortunate episode behind him, returned to normalcy, happy in the thought that he did not 'cave in' as many others had done who had left Government service without confronting the investigation.

Michael devoted himself to the tasks of his job and Billie turned her full attention to raising two happy children. They also resumed their civic and social activities.. About a year later, in 1949, Michael was promoted and transferred to the Bonneville Power Administration in Portland, Oregon. The attraction to move to Portland, besides the increase in pay, was that Portland would offer better educational opportunities for the children and greater cultural opportunities for the parents.

In Portland, they bought a spacious old two-story house in the Irvington District. This oversized house, which Billie referred to as the 'old hotel', served them well for various meetings and social gatherings. The move brought significant changes in their lives. Within a couple of years, they took on a new life style - a life full of social and cultural activities including active roles for their children in and out of school.

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The family joined the Portland; Jewish Community Center and took advantage of the on-going cultural, educational, and athletic programs. To keep up with the boys, Michael took up volleyball, which he continued to play for the next twenty years. Upon election to the 'Center • Board, he organized a Jewish Music Council and Billie followed by heading a Jewish Music Festival, a first in Portland, open to the entire community. The children found new challenges in their studies and class assignments. Lyle resumed his piano lessons and played at a few student recitals, and later Dennis, as a promising young pianist, entered the Jewish Music Festival. Lyle attended Sunday school at the Reform Synagogue, and when Bar Mitzvah time came, we celebrated the occasion with a party at home where he delivered an impressive talk on what Bar Mitzvah meant to him. Five years later, Dennis had a similar celebration.

Michael found his new job very challenging and rewarding. He was now recognized as a specialist in the field of hydrology and he represented his agency in matters relating to development of water resources in the Pacific Northwest. At last, the family enjoyed a period of accomplishment and fulfillment.

In 1956, as the children grew into their mid and late teens, Billie accepted a clerical job with the Corps of Engineers. After about two months on the job, this period of enrichment and happy activity was suddenly marred by a revolting development - this time, the questioning of Billie's loyalty to the U.S. Government. Whereas Michael's investigation was by correspondence, Billie experienced direct confrontation with FBI investigators. This is how she relates her experience --

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"Without any forewarning, I was suddenly called out of my office, directed to a conference room, where I was confronted with three burly FBI men, each apparently with his designated assignment. One with a stack of papers, asked the questions; the second, with a notebook, recorded the answers; and the third **watched** closely for psychological reactions to the myriad of questions, **names**, dates and places that covered a span of 20 to 25 years. The third offered me a cigarette, apparently to ease the strain, but I curtly refused it.

"At the end of two hours of interrogation, mostly trivia, such as 'Did I know such and such a person, and where was I on a particular date'. I was told that I would be recalled the following day to reconsider my answers. I returned the following day and with firmness I told them I had no changes to make. I further expressed my revulsion at being interrogated, and I enumerated some of my civic and organizational activities, all of which I declared to be those of a loyally concerned citizen".

Some time later, Billie received a document declaring her to be a loyal citizen. She was given a complete clearance.

It appeared to Billie and Michael that her investigation **was** initiated by the FBI in order to further put into question Michael's loyalty. It was no surprise to them that the probing of his loyalty appeared again about a year later.

In 1957, he was designated as an American delegate to present a paper on water supply forecasting at the International Union of Geophysics and Geodesy meeting which **was** held in Toronto, Canada. Upon return from Canada, they **were** surprised to learn that the FBI was still visiting their friends in Portland, checking his loyalty.

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The same year, Michael developed a streamflow forecasting scheme for use by his Administration in maximizing the generation of power from the Columbia River Federal Power System. Its adoption resulted in substantial increases in annual revenues from the federal power projects. Two years later while still employed by Bonneville Power Administration, on special request of the United Nations Special Fund, Michael did a water resources survey on the Awash River Basin in Ethiopia.

Chapter 6,

Upon returning from Ethiopia, Michael had second thoughts about continuing his service **with** the federal government. He thought of retiring, freeing him to seek and explore new challenges for himself and his family-, new educational opportunities for the boys, travel abroad, and renewal of their zest for community- participation, free from concern about government suspicion of their motives. Consequently-, Michael decided to retire that year, upon reaching the age of 55, after having served thirty years with the Government.

Michael and Billie moved to Berkeley-, California, to be near their sons who then were attending universities in California. Michael was soon engaged as a consultant in San Francisco, and Billie took a job with the Department of Health, Education & Welfare.

Unexpectedly, about five months after moving to Berkeley-, Michael received an invitation from the Department of the Interior, the same agency that questioned his loyalty in 1948. He was to come to Washington to receive a distinguished service award. With great anticipation and excitement, Michael and Billie arrived in Washington and on January- 16, 1961, in the Interior Auditorium, Michael received his citation. It was presented to him by the then Assistant Secretary- Aandahl, who summarized the citation as follows:

"IN RECOGNITION OF YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS DURING YOUR THIRTY YEARS OF FEDERAL SERVICE, WHICH EXEMPLIFY YOU AS AN OUTSTANDING PUBLIC SERVANT, IT IS MY PLEASURE TO PRESENT TO YOU THE HIGHEST HONOR OF THE DEPARTMENT, ITS DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD, MY CONGRATULATIONS",

THE ULTIMATE AIM OF GOVERNMENT IS NOT TO
RULE OR SUSTAIN BY FEAR, NOT TO EXACT
OBEDIENCE, BUT CONTRARIWISE, TO FREE EVERY
ONE FROM FEAR THAT HE MAY . LIVE IN ALL POSSIBLE
SECURITY ; IN OTHER WORDS, TO STRENGTHEN HIS
NATURAL RIGHT TO EXIST AND WORK WITHOUT INJURY
TO HIMSELF OR OTHERS .

BARUCH SPINOZA .