Self and Social Fashioning

A Personal Account

by

Richard Ned Lebow

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To **RUJO**

Ruth Newman Lebow, 1906-1992

Joseph Lebow, 1902-1998

To whom I owe so much

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Introduction

We all write autobiographies, although most of us do so only in our heads. We think about our past frequently and from time to time tell stories about it to others. They can amuse and impress other people and make us look interesting and one of the in-crowd. They buttress our self-esteem and our social prospects when they garner interest and receive positive receptions. Telling stories also helps us sustain the illusion of continuity, that is the belief that we are something more than momentary selves and possess an identity that extends back in time. For some people the past is anathema and they have pushed all or part of it aside to make new selves. For such people the absence of continuity is all important, but in practice what they have done is to conjure up two unity selves, one before the break and the other since.

I write this account of my life for me as well as the reader. At age 84 I use it as a vehicle to reflect on many selves, some realized, some suppressed, some only imagined or never fully achieved, but still real to me. I attempt to situate myself in an era, a member of what Americans have erroneously labelled the "silent generation." It applies to those of us born between 1928 and 1945, too young to have fought in World War II, and for the most part too old to have rebelled, as Boomers did, in the 1960s. Silent we were not, as leading voices of protest, including Bob Dylan, Abbie Hoffman, Joan Baez, and Martin Luther King, Jr. are all members of my generation. The Silent generation lived through the Depression, World War II, the Cold War, the postwar boom, rock 'n roll, the beatnik and hippie eras, civil rights and Vietnam War protests, and the sexual and information

revolutions. Some of us are still going strong although unlikely to have tattoos, vape, listen to K-pop, or be on our phones all day.

I make no pretense about chronicling my generation; like all generations it is far too diverse to be represented by the life of any individual. Rather, I intend to situate myself within an era and employ the concept of a generation to offer some insight into me as much as I use myself to help explain an epoch. Like everyone else I am a typical and atypical product of my generation. I was most representative of it in my youth, when I assimilated the values, outlooks, practices, beliefs and expectations of those around me. I gradually distanced myself to some degree from most of them but they remained important because my sense of self took shape in sympathy or antagonism to them.

I differ in important ways from many other members of my generation in my international life, academic career, and perhaps the number and degree of my contradictions. I am Jewish, born in Europe, but also an American. I had a wonderful family life, but as an adoptee. I strongly identify as a New Yorker, but live most of the year in Italy. I was a Brooklyn Dodger fan who now roots for the Red Sox and Arsenal. I am highly educated and multi-lingual but take the most pleasure in the simple rewards of life available to most people. Although in my mid-eighties, I remain robust, able to press heavy weights, play a passable game of tennis, and run in the mountains.

Why should my life and generation interest you? It has been an interesting one, and not just because of my narrow escape from the Nazis in 1942. I was a baby and a passive agent. My survival story is really about all the people in France who risked their lives to protect Jewish children and those in America who arranged for their passage and entry into the country. Describing my adoption and childhood can be read as an adoption narrative, and a positive one in every respect. It also highlights the anxieties of adoptive parents, especially

in an era when social workers came snooping and there was a five year trial period. My teenage and early adult years were entirely normal. I was a psychological mess, and a physiological one once the hormones of puberty started flowing. My ability to get through these years may be of interest to those in the throes of this most difficult stage of life.

My adult years lie at the core of my narrative. They describe my professional and personal lives and their connections. I describe only briefly my contributions to the several disciplines in which I worked. They are well-known to people in these fields and of less interest to general readers. I discuss at greater length the people I studied, worked, and crossed paths with, as some of them are very well known and I tell interesting, and untold stories about them. Then there is the Indiana Jones part of my life that includes being the first scholar-in-residence in the Central Intelligence Agency, spending time with an assassination squad in Belfast, escaping from imprisonment in West Africa, and being shot at in three wars. I also reflect on my roles as husband, father, grandfather, and professor.

As for my generation, there are important reasons for connecting with it. Early in the twentieth century modernists like James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and T. S. Eliot argued that wisdom was not produced by any generation but collectively by all of them. Each generation has much to learn from its predecessors about life, love, art, and practical matters as well as the languages in which they find expression. So perhaps the depiction of life portrayed here, in many ways representative of the second half of the twentieth century, will be interesting and fruitful in ways I cannot imagine. I also use my memoir to explore the multi-faceted and fragmented nature of the self and what I contend are its positive benefits. In this respect my self

does not differ from your self, and my experience is relevant, even helpful, even if you are decades younger.

Writing my autobiography was an act of self-discovery. At the outset I thought I knew who I was, why I was writing it, and roughly what form it would take. I was wrong. The more I wrote the more confused I became, but also, paradoxically, the more enlightened. In trying to be honest, I came to recognize more fully the negative as well as positive sides of my character. I now understand more fully the connections between my personality and life choices, between both of them and my intellectual development, and the multiple identifications to which all of them gave rise. I discovered tensions of which I was vaguely aware but had never confronted directly. These tensions for the most part remain unresolved, because they give rise to competing self-identifications, or identities, if you like. Having long ago given up the delusion of a consistent self, I am now more reconciled to be a fragmented and multiple self, and, as a result, better able to recognize its psychological and practical benefits. I will say more about these payoffs in due course.

Writing an autobiography demands discipline. Writing for a general audience and compels me to approach the task is a more reflective and systematic way. Writing is like teaching, which I did for fifty-eight years at various universities in North America and Europe. You really have to know your subject to teach it well. I had to think about myself in a more systematic and penetrating way to disorder my superficially ordered life to present it to you in its complexity. This is the opposite of what most autobiographies do. They present engaging narratives about allegedly coherent selves and how they emerged. They acknowledge periods of confusion and conflict about who they are but these ultimately get resolved. In real life, people are always conflicted and fragmented. Their self-identifications and understanding of

themselves are constantly evolving. They are not the same people they once were. For reasons I will elaborate, we have strong incentives to deny this reality. I do my best to overcome this reluctance and get in touch with present and past selves. I have tried to conduct a conversation with these selves, and to the degree I succeeded, came to better understand who I am, who I no longer am and who I did not become.

My autobiography differs from many others in that I had an unknown past as well as an unknown future. The two became connected in ways I could not have imagined and did not resolve until writing the book when the last pieces of the puzzle fell into place. My imagined and real pasts and futures were resources that I exploited throughout my life. Unearthing my past has been as long and complex a project as building my future. I will explore some of their connections between the two in my narrative. To my great surprise, the process is ongoing. Two days after finishing the draft of this autobiography I made a most dramatic discovery just when I thought I had all my identity ducks in a row. I will save this revelation for the penultimate chapter.

If present selves are problematic, past selves are more so. George Bernard Shaw began the account of his life with the rather brazen assertion that "all autobiographies are lies and this one is no different." He knew that people play with the truth to look better in the eyes of readers and more importantly, in their mind's eye. Even honest autobiography is problematic because of the slippery nature of memory. What we think is accurate may not be at all because memory is a labile resource. We remake it, generally unconsciously, to advance our social and psychological goals. Awareness of this phenomenon does not make it less likely to happen. I do not doubt that some of the memories I am about to share with you are of questionable veracity, but alas, I do not know which ones they are.

I would like to think that my most vivid memories are the most reliable but we know that is not the case. Research on so-called "flashbulb" memories – those of truly dramatic events -- indicates that they are even more susceptible to editing. Many people of my generation remember exactly where they were when they heard about Pearl Harbor, FDR's death, VE Day, the Kennedy and King assassinations, the moon landing, and 9/11. But studies by psychologists indicate that these memories solidified two and five years after these events, are likely to have evolved over the decades, and accordingly bear little relationship to what they thought at the time. Changes are a response to cues from their environment and the desire to conform to gain social standing and avoid any whiff of stigmatization. Memory is as much social as it is personal. The personal is important, but slippery. As our self-identifications change or change in character or valence we edit our memories to bring them in line or make them supportive of these changes.

My response to this problem has been to formulate a memory protocol. The most reliable memories are those that were documented at the time in writing, orally, or by camera. I also wrote a short autobiography in eighth grade, at the age of twelve, to which I refer. Next best are memories that can be confirmed by other people. When possible, I elicited their memories of events before telling them mine. In the absence of confirming evidence and tests we are on shaky ground. My wife Carol has corrected me on multiple occasions while writing the book, usually about details. So has my daughter Kate. It is a humbling experience to discover that two intelligent people with good memories have different recollections of the same events. It is reminiscent of the Maurice Chevalier song, "I Remember It Well." He sings: "We met at nine." Hermione Gingold replies: "We met at eight." They continue to alternate: "I was on time / No, you were late / Ah yes, I remember it well."

We construct our life stories based on our memories but our life stories shape our memories. This recursive process is partially under our control in that we do the editing. But our editing is often in response to social cues. Although we are the agents, our choices are not entirely our own. Our autobiographies – whether formal, written documents, or stories we tell to family and friends – are social cues for others. We are the creators of memory and also its victims. It is difficult, if not impossible, to step outside this process. The best we can do is to exercise partial control over memory and the narratives we build on the basis of them. Here too, my autobiography may offer some guidance.

The problem of memory raises the larger question of our relationship to society. Beginning in the late eighteenth century people began to conceive of society as something that bound people together but was independent of them. It was shaped by their behavior but also shaped them. In Britain and America, society was viewed favorably. It was thought to offer role models for people. By copying others, by mixing and matching, and experimenting with the character traits and performances of other people we might fashion ourselves. Society was a vehicle for personal development and liberation.

Continentals had a darker view. They saw society as constraining and inhibiting. Jean-Jacques Rousseau denounced it as a form of imprisonment and urged readers of his books to break their chains. His followers, nineteenth century Romantics, thought we could distance ourselves from society, commune with nature, and discover and develop our inner selves in the process. But there is no uncorrupted inner self waiting to be set free. Beneath our affiliations, roles, and autobiographies, there is nothing lurking beyond appetites. Discarding our social selves removes any controls over them and has the potential to turn us into monsters. Mozart offers Don Giovanni as

an example; he indulges his appetites at the expense of others and ignores the growing risk to himself of doing so.

Where does this leave us? Liberals still believe in self-fashioning while post-modernists despair. Sociologists and social psychologists on the whole emphasize the shaping and constraining power of society. Critics of liberalism argue that the role models offered by society have narrowed rather than diversified, and that advertising and the entertainment industry push us towards roles with the most commercial potential. The Internet, initially thought of as liberating, has become complicit in this process. Influencers are the most egregious example, but the Internet has become commercialized in more subtle ways, with the consequence that young people especially are now more prone to social manipulation and shaping.

My autobiography reflects the power of society, but it also constitutes a rebellion against it. I describe a life that has been to a great degree shaped by society. The personal and professional goals I sought reflect my socialization. My personality tells a different story. I was born with it, but it was strongly influenced by society – in the opposite direction of that intended. Instead of making me a socially complacent member of the bourgeoisie, it inspired me to rebel. I have nevertheless adapted to everyday social norms and internalized many of them. I also engaged in some degree of self-fashioning at the expense of these norms and my socialization. I draw on my experience to ask what kind of self-fashioning is possible in modern society and how is it best achieved? I also ask the extent to which multiple identifications enable or inhibit it, and the ways in which memory and autobiography are resources?

I am a reader as well as the writer of this autobiography. It is almost as much of a discovery for me as I hope it is for you. Putting fingers to the computer keys encouraged me to reconstruct and then confront

earlier selves. In contrast to the conventional wisdom that we have enduring identities there is strong experimental evidence that we are at best phenomenological selves. We exist in the moment but convince ourselves that we extend back to the past and forward to the future. We certainly do so physically, although not at the cellular level. What holds us together -- or so we imagine -- is our memory. But memory is notoriously unreliable as it is largely a social construction. We constantly remake our past – consciously and unconsciously – to support our current psychological, social and other needs and projects. The evidence for the malleability of memory is overwhelming, and so too for our gradual reconstructions of the substance and meaning of our pasts.

Writing an autobiography is not writing about oneself but about one's many selves. The mistaken belief in a single, continuous self encourages us to impose order and continuity that was never present. Retrospective order of this kind does not help explain who we are but prevents us from trying to reconstruct and understand our earlier selves. I have tried hard to reconnect with my former selves, which proved more difficult than I thought. It was difficult to remember who I once was. At best, I could obtain shadowy glimpses by recalling reactions to diverse experiences, thoughts about events and people, and expectations I once had. I knew that I was making some progress when past selves became personas in my mind, weighing in and offering advice or criticism of my narrative. Present and past selves entered into confrontations, often passing highly critical judgments on one another. I suppose this qualifies as a mild form of multiple personality disorder. It was painful to become a battleground of different selves, but productive in the sense of allowing me more access multiple pasts. Like you the reader, I am engaged in a process of discovery.

My memoir is intended to entertain, instruct, and provide evidence for my arguments about multiple, fragmented selves. At the end of each chapter, or sometimes sections of chapters, I describe my primary self-identifications and self-understandings at the time. On occasion, these identifications are reinforcing but often they are in conflict. Over time, they rise and fall in importance and change in substance. Periodic reconstruction and of these past identifications allows me and readers to track my multiple selves over time.

My account of my early years has an unusual twist. I was only vaguely aware of the most important events in my life. I had been saved from deportation to Auschwitz, smuggled out of France and Europe, across the North Atlantic to the US, where I then lived briefly in an orphanage. I was too young to have remembered any of this, although I think I can recall glimpses of the orphanage. I may well have suppressed what I otherwise would have recalled. I did know that I was adopted – more about this in due course – as was a younger brother who arrived in October 1945. I remember dreaming in another language, but it disappeared without a trace. I suspect it was Hungarian or French, but this is only a guess, and one made many decades later when in possession of the details of my European life. I will return to my war-time life in a later chapter as knowledge about it had a significant effect on my understanding of self.

I divide my narrative into sections covering my early childhood in Forest Hills, Queens, my late childhood and teenage years in East Rockaway, my early adulthood at the University of Chicago, Yale, and the City University of New York. I move on to my two marriages and family life, my career and the various moves it entailed, and finally my return to Europe in what can only be considered old age. I insert a section on the discovery of my pre-adoptive life and contact with survivors and descendants of my birth family. This began in the 1980s

and. I thought, culminated in a family reunion in Budapest in 2018. It seems the appropriate place to tell this story because although it involves returning to my childhood, really my infancy, it did not affect my sense of who I was until I learned about it.

Each stage of life gave rise to new self-identifications and also those imposed from the outside. I discovered in the course of writing that these self-identifications were relatively few and reinforcing at the outset, but became more numerous and cross-cutting as I matured. The tensions and conflict among them was greatest in my adulthood and declined as I aged. I still do not feel an integrated person, but I am closer to one than in earlier stages of life, and perhaps more importantly, I not only cope well with the tensions between and among different identifications but enjoy and even revel in them. They make me more interesting to myself, and I think, to others.

Caveats are in order about my late-life identifications. In the last year two of them have been problematic. First is my identification as an American. As a child, teenager, and young adult it was entirely positive. The Vietnam War muddied the waters but also made being American attractive when so many people turned out to protest the War, the courts upheld their rights, and the public repudiated it at the ballot box. Now Donald Trump is president and behaving in ways that threaten decency, democracy and international order. I have distanced myself from my American identification and wait with some foreboding to see what damage he and his administration will inflict on the country and the world. Trump is frightening, but more disturbing still is that some 70 million Americans voted for him. I have not deserted my country, but half of it appears to have deserted me.

In the run-up to the election I read an account of Hitler's first month in power – *Februar 1933* (February 1933) by German journalist Uwe Wittstock. It describes how the artistic community in Germany

reacted to the Nazis and the great uncertainty that affected many about the future. It was a timely read. Trump is not Hitler, but democracy is threatened today just as it was in 1933. Many Germans emigrated during the Hitler years and other went into what they called "inner exile." My wife and I have choices many Germans did not and present-day Americans do not. We have five passports between us, and are legal residents of two other countries. We live most of the year in Italy, some of it in London, and only the three summer months in the US. That said, I still love my county, and am grateful to it for taking me in.

I read the Wittstock book in German and hold a German passport in addition to my American one. I feel European as well as American, an identification that grew stronger in the course of my adult life. It will take some explaining how a Jewish refugee became a German citizen. And also how Germany offered citizenship to somebody with no biological link to the country, and why I was so pleased to accept it. The story says a lot about self-identifications and how they develop.

One of the most difficult challenges in writing this memoir was what to include and what to exclude. I began writing it before it had decided to focus it on multiple identifications and a critique of identity as it is commonly understood. My thought was to write down everything I could remember, especially pertaining to my childhood. As I got into the project the synapses began to fire and I recalled more than I thought I would. My childhood was overrepresented in the first draft. When I came to my adult years I faced different problems. How intimate should I be in discussing personal relations? Readers like juicy details, but most people do not want their personal lives described in print. I decided, quite reasonably, I believe, to exercise discretion and avoid telling anything that might be embarrassing to any of the people I care about – especially partners, ex-partners,

children, and grandchildren. I asked family members to have a read and to tell me about anything they wanted excised or revised.

I have not practiced restraint when relating praising or criticizing those who facilitated or stood in the way of my personal development or flaunted values dear to me like tolerance, diversity, and freedom of inquiry.

I reflect on my life and era by describing key episodes in it. I also include interesting and amusing encounters and experiences. Here too I have cut back retaining only those that are saying something meaningful about my development or are interesting and important in their own right. Wielding the editorial knife was difficult because I like telling good stories and have a reputation as a raconteur. I am still not convinced that I have cut and retained appropriately. The underlying reason for this is that I am attempting to do multiple things with this autobiography. It is a personal illustration of the arguments about identity that I make in *Multiple Selves: Rethinking Identity, Self-Fashioning, and Ethics*, but also a larger account of my personal and professional life. It uses that life, as noted, to say something about a generation, and in doing so records events and things meaningful to my generation. I hope you the reader think I have struck the right balance.

My thanks to Naomi Ariela Lawrence for the book's cover design.

Chapter 2
Family

I was interested in my parents and their families and asked lots of questions about them as I grew up. I regret not writing down what they said at the time and not posing these questions to my mother's sister Billie, brother Jerome, and great aunt Lillie (Lillian). Lillie was undoubtedly the best informed, being a generation older. She was also the most sophisticated member of the family. Her two husbands had been rich, she had traveled widely in Europe, spoke excellent German, and passable French. She had lived through a lot of history, having been born in the 1870s. Alas, she was a snob, had no real interest in children, and clearly looked down her nose at the Russian-Jewish Joseph Lebow and Joseph Cotler and their *mischling* [mixed] offspring. Lillie was not reconciled to my adoption and referred to me behind my back as "the bastard." I think there was something personal here as she never described my also adopted younger brother Rob this way.

My mother Ruth was born a Newman, and her mother Estelle a Seldner. My cousin Steve produced a family tree that traced the Seldners back to Hainstadt in Baden and to Hamburg in northern Germany. Clara Michel (1840-1917), the daughter of Anschel Michel (1805-56) and Judith Feist (1810-49) was born in Hamburg. On 30 July 1860 Clara married Leopold Seldner (1827-92), from Hainstadt. This village is on the Main River in the southern limit of Hesse. I have no idea how long the Seldners lived in Hainstadt or where they were before that. It is general knowledge that Jews first settled the region with the Roman army. The first written evidence of Jewish communities in the area is a document signed by Emperor

Constantine in 321 authorizing Jews to be elected to Roman curia. Coincidentally, when I had my DNA tested by the National Geographic Society they traced my descent back to a group of twelve Jewish women who left Rome in the second century for the Rhineland.

The first Newmans I know about are Abraham and Sarah. In 1806, Napoleon's armies invaded the Rhineland and tore down ghettos, freeing the Jews. Recently married Abraham and Sarah Newman left Worms for America and settled in Needham, MA, today a Boston suburb. They named their first son Nedhum, after the town, and it became a family moniker. Jews do not name anyone after someone living, so Nedhum skipped generations. Abraham's son Leopold had three children, one of them, my mother's father, Nedhum Leopold Newman. He was born in Needham on 28 October 1870 and died in New York City on 1 April 1929. He was called Ned, and his name was passed on to me as a middle name. Nedhum's brother Isaac went on John C. Frémont's second expedition in 1843-44 to Oregon. Like many Americans of his era Frémont believed that one or more of the ten lost tribes might live somewhere in the west and wanted someone on the expedition who knew Hebrew. No lost tribes were discovered, but gold was found in Sutter Creek, California,. Intrigued by the west, the adventurous Isaac helped to organize a Kosher wagon train that set out from St. Louis to San Francisco in 1849. Cousin Steve had letters Isaac sent home from California.

My mother's grandfather on the Newman side fought in the Civil War. He was an officer in New York's 69th infantry regiment, known as "The Fighting Irish." They defended Bloody Angle at Gettysburg, the decisive engagement in this famous battle. The First Alabamians, charged them, were repelled, and failure at Gettysburg convinced Lee to call off his campaign in Pennsylvania and retreat south. General Alexander S. Webb, in command of the 69th, and later president of The

City College of New York, ordered the New Yorkers to fire on the retreating southerners. The troops refused, threw their hats into the air, and cheered the southerners for their remarkable courage in charging their well-defended position at enormous cost.

The Newman-Seldner family were equally at home in English and German. The latter language was kept alive by marriage with more recent German-Jewish immigrants. My mother Ruth, and her younger siblings, Billie and Jerry, grew up hearing German but were the first generation not to learn it. They knew at most a score of German expressions, which they used to pepper their English.

My daughter Kate called Ruth "Poma" to distinguish her from her other grandmother "Oma." Almost everyone in the family soon called her Poma. She had grown up in genteel poverty in the northern end of Harlem -- 230 West 140 Street -- and in Jamaica, Queens. The most dramatic event in her early life was a summer in Cripple Creek, Colorado, a 10,000 feet high gold mining boom town in Teller County. It was the site of the Independence Lode, one of the largest gold strikes in history and source of $500 million worth of bullion. It was also the flash point of conflict between unionized labor and the mining companies. Lillie and her first husband Alphonse Beers had settled there because he had some connection with the mining industry. Lillie was childless and wanted to adopt Ruth. She offered Estelle and Ned a small fortune in the way of a bribe. They were unwilling to part with their daughter but agreed that she could spend the summer of 1912 with them in Colorado.

Poma remembered Cripple Creek as a different world. Men carried guns and rode horses. The town was primitive having been quickly rebuilt after a devastating fire. There were lots of saloons and drunks on the streets. Cripple Creek was in the midst of a vast wilderness. Poma went for a walk out of town one morning and encountered a

bear. She raced back into town terrified and screaming at the top of her lungs. She wrote letters home almost every day and had previously devised a code with her mother, who knew that Lillie would be likely to read the letters before posting them. If Ruth was unhappy and wanted to come home she was instructed to make very large periods at the end of her sentences. She did this after a few weeks and Estelle brought her back to Jamaica. I don't know how she did this as six-year-old "Ruthie" – as my dad always call her -- could hardly have traveled by herself.

Ruth Newman in Cripple Creek, Co., 1912

Poma's father Ned had a jewelry shop and was also a traveling salesman, and apparently not a very good one. His stock was jewelry, but also shoes, and he sold primarily to jewelers in upstate New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. I infer these destinations from the postcards he sent to his wife Estelle. Estelle was born on 31 October 1874 in New York City and died there on 2 February 1933. Ned was born on 28 October 1869, also in New York, and died there on 1 April 1929. He had a massive coronary one afternoon while walking along Fifth Avenue. His son Jerome Leopold (Jerry), born on 6 June 1912, also died prematurely from heart failure, in 1970 at the same age of 58. Ned's two daughters were free of heart problems and lived well into their 'eighties. Poma was born in New York City on 24 December 1906 and died in Bellevue, Washington on 5 February 1993. Mathilda (Billie) was born in Roseville, New Jersey on 31 August 1913 and died in Latham, NY on 24 August 2000.

Estelle, mother of Ruth, Jerome, and Billie, was one of thirteen children, nine of them with Leopold's second wife Clara. His first wife Philomena died in childbirth, and on her deathbed made him promise to bring over her younger sister Clara from Hamburg. There is a photograph of all the surviving adult siblings and their spouses taken in 1938. It hung in our house and on several occasions, I asked Poma to tell me about these people. Among her favorites were her aunt Tillie and uncle Odd.

By the time I made these inquiries in the mid- to late 1940s the only survivor from an earlier generation was my great aunt Lilian Fischer. She lived in an apartment on the Upper East Side, had buried two husbands, and lived well off a life interest inherited from these spouses. I was fascinated by her old suitcases, which she passed along to Jerome. They had stickers from some of Europe's most famous hotels and I fantasized what it would be like to stay in them. Lillie

owned a succession of Packards and bought one of the first to come off the postwar assembly line. She traded it in for a newer model sometime in the early 1950s. It was driven by her chauffeur, Walter, an amiable fellow. Once every few months she would deign to visit us for a few hours in the afternoon. We moved from Queens to East Rockaway in 1949. Billie and her husband, Joe Cotler, and their two children followed in 1951 and lived around the corner.

Jerome

Jerome "Jerry" was my mother's bachelor brother. He managed one of the Wormser hat and glove stores in Manhattan. The Wormsers were family of some kind; I do not know whether it was on the Newman or Seldner side. They had a chain of hat and glove stores in the east and the south. Jerry was drafted into the army in 1942 and kept a scrapbook, which I retain, of his military service. He was in the Quartermaster Corps, where he attained the rank of master sergeant. For much of the War he was stationed in Philadelphia at the Reading Market. Farmers from the region brought their produce in for sale and the army got first dibs. Jerry oversaw the purchase of food to support the large training camp of Fort Dix in New Jersey and for shipment overseas. He would come up to visit us in Queens, sometimes with his friend Dean, both of them in uniform.

Jerome Newman in 1944

Food was rationed and certain goods were simply unavailable. On one visit Jerome arrived with some Florida oranges. This was a fruit I had never seen and found it striking in color and texture. My father got out a step ladder to reach a juicer on the top shelf of one of the kitchen cabinets. Dad cut the oranges in half and rotated each of the halves back and forth over the circular pyramid of the squeezer. Juice, pulp, and seeds came out and collected at the bottom of the tray. He poured some into a glass for me after removing the pits with a spoon.

I thought it looked revolting because of the pulp and refused to drink it. He became angry. I decided drinking it was better than facing his wrath. It was the right decision as it was delicious.

Jerry was one of the most generous people I ever met. He always had presents, and thoughtful ones, for us children, and gloves and hats for our fathers. Not having kids of his own he treated us like surrogate children and was our favorite relative. He wanted to know about our lives and as we grew up was someone you could turn to for good adult advice without concern that any confidence would be shared with parents. Whenever we would go to dinner at his apartment at 107 University Place, on the corner of 11th Street in the heart of Greenwich Village, he would let us noodle on his baby grand piano, rummage through his library, and often chat with one or more of his many, interesting friends. Jerome never made much money at Wormser because he used it as a vehicle for employing out of work actors and opera singers.

Bellevue Hospital catered to the city's poor and especially those with mental illnesses. Jerry went there several nights a week to visit patients who had no relatives or friends. He was wonderful at this task and patients spent hours talking to him. High-end shops would donate their products to him to distribute to patients at Christmas. Dressed in a Santa Claus outfit and a white beard he would make his rounds. Steve and I, and later, Jodi and Rob, would substitute for reindeer and schlep around bags of gifts. The week or two before Christmas, dad, Rob, and I, would spend weekends at Bellevue painting winter and Christmas scenes on windows in the wards. We used tempera paints that could be washed off in January. I became adept at covering three or four adjacent window panels with Santa in his sleigh pulled by a troupe of reindeer. I also made good snowmen. Rob was even more adept, and we both learned a lot about

composition and technique from dad. I would ask patients what they wanted to look at and then tried to the best of my artistic abilities to satisfy their wishes. Jerry occasionally received gifts in return, and among the nicest were two paintings done by a patient, born in Korea, of his memory of spring and summer back home. They hang in my office in our Etna, New Hampshire home.

Jerry loved opera, but only bel canto and the Italian and French romantic repertoire. He had two season tickets and would give them to dad and me for operas that did not enthrall him. They ran the gamut from Mozart to Mussorgsky. In the 1950s there was wonderful Mozart and an *Aida*, starring Leontyne Price. Jerry had found a job for her before she became famous and she made sure we had seats for her performances. Leontyne was an occasional dinner guest and Jerry would hail a cab for her because drivers would not stop for "Negroes." I don't think most were opposed to transporting African-Americans, just fearful of driving in Harlem or not being paid if they did. These beliefs were, of course, manifestations of prejudice. Steve and I would wait in the vestibule with Ms. Price and when Jerry had hailed a cab and opened its back door we would open the front door of the building and Leontyne would rush out and plunge into the back seat. Once inside, the cabbie could do nothing but express relief when he learned that this well-dressed woman was going to the Upper West Side.

Jerry was even more of a theater maven. Here too he kept Lebows and Cotlers supplied with tickets. I went to the first run of most Rogers and Hammerstein musicals, and a range of dramatic productions. I have vivid memories of *Twelve Angry Men*, *Diary of Anne Frank* and lighter fare like *Visitor to a Small Planet.* Not infrequently, we would meet members of the cast at Jerry's apartment. Paul Ford was a good friend. He played Colonel Hall – "straight and tall like de Gaulle" --

in *Sergeant Bilko*, one of the most popular 1950's TV comedy shows. He was the straight man to wacky Phil Silvers, the mischievous, always scheming, and appropriately named Bilko.

Jerry never lived with a partner but had a wide circle of interesting male friends. The one to whom I was closest was Bill Craig. He worked for Sotheby's International Realty and sold high-end properties around the world. Bill's true love was music. He was a tenor and had come to New York from Iowa to study voice and had a quasi-professional career. We used to listen to recordings together and go to the occasional recital. His musical and culinary tastes were more sophisticated than Jerry's. Bill lived uptown on the East Side but most of Jerry's friends lived in the Village, which was a gathering place for the gay crowd. In those days nobody was out of the closet and I never spoke to Jerry about this aspect of his life, just took it in stride. He and his friends had served their country with honor during the War – one of them fought at Iwo Jima – and in my view had earned the right to live as they wanted. That was my considered fourteen-year old take on the subject of homosexuality.

Jerry treated the four Lebow-Cotler kids as quasi-adults. He wrote us frequent letters in his signature green ink. They were addressed to "Master Richard Lebow," which greatly impressed me. He later changed the prefix to "Mr.," much to my satisfaction. One of the more amusing evenings at his apartment was a family gathering in 1958 when after dinner he rolled and then passed around a couple of joints. Joe Cotler, Ruth and Billie were horrified. Dad, Steve, and I lit up and it was the first time I got high. The experience was always the same. I would feel detached from my body, almost as if I were looking down on it from above and behind. I was quite relaxed and slightly disoriented. It was interesting but disappointing in comparison to the highs described by others. My dad felt the same way. Everyone said

that sex was much better when high, but I noticed no difference. It was great without stimulants.

In the late 1950s Jerry became the owner a pre-revolutionary stone house in Bucks Co. Pennsylvania, which is north of Philadelphia and across the Delaware River from New Jersey. To get there he bought a white Chevrolet convertible. Driving out there with him could be hair raising because he went very fast and tail gated. Once you got there, the house was relaxing and said to be haunted by a ghost who repeatedly asked for directions to the abattoir. I never heard voices or footsteps on the stairs at night, but other guests did. Jerry gave me the house for a week for a honeymoon when I married Jane. He kindly stocked the liquor cabinet and the refrigerator with food.

Shuster/Lebow

Dad's family name was Shuster and they hailed from Minsk, now the capital of Belarus. Today it is the political black hole of Europe, but in the nineteenth century was home to a vibrant and creative Jewish community. Famous sons include physicist Yakov Zel'dovich, psychologist Lev Vygotsky, City College philosopher Morris Raphael Cohen, US labor leader David Dubinsky, Jewish historian Simon Dubnow, composer Irving Berlin, actor Kirk Douglas (Issur Danielovitch), artists Leon Bakst, Marc Chagall (from nearby Vitebsk), Chaim Soutine, El-Lisitsky, and Mark Rothko, and Zionists Chaim Weizmanm, Yitzhak Rabin, and Shimon Peres. In business, it spawned Michael Marks, founder of Marks and Spencer, Louis B. Mayer, co-founder of MGM, and Ralph Lauren. Not bad for a small, provincial city.

To the best of my knowledge, the Shuster family had little to no contact with the scientific, cultural, or political elite of Minsk. Joe's father, Abram, was a wine importer and merchant, I suspect, on a

small scale. Abram's father was a rabbi of some note. Abram wisely decided that there was no future in Russia and the family left for America via Odessa. There, in 1902, they bought identity documents on the black market so they could transit the Ottoman Empire and take a ship from Constantinople to New York. The name on documents was "Lyubov," written in Cyrillic. They passed through Ellis Island, where "Lyubov" was transliterated into the Roman alphabet and came out as "Lebow." The family settled in Brooklyn but subsequently moved to the Lower East Side, where they had a tiny apartment in Hester Street. Abram later relocated to Braintree, Massachusetts, just south of Boston, where he bought a small candy and cigar store.

Joe was born on 15 September 1903, although his school records and Social Security insist he came into the world in 1902. His three older sisters – all born in the 1880s -- were divided in their opinion as to whether he had been born in Odessa before they left or in Brooklyn after they arrived. The courthouse in Brooklyn that might have resolved this dispute had burned down and its records were destroyed. Dad's first memory was attending his mother's funeral at the age of three-and-a-half. He recalled that it was a bitterly cold winter day and that they walked to the cemetery on wooden plank sidewalks that were ice covered and slippery. His father died when he was thirteen, leaving him to fend for himself.

Dad's childhood was sufficiently unhappy that he was reluctant to talk about it. Abram was a distant and cold father who spent most of his spare time in shul. He was also poor. When Abram died, dad sat *shiva* for the required seven days and promptly gave up religion afterwards. He also stopped speaking Yiddish, a language in which he began to dream in again in his 'eighties.

Dad did pass along several memories which helped to make his childhood come alive for me. It also made me wonder if I could survive in similar circumstances and, if I did, emerge as relatively sane and successful, and so sweet, kind, and loving. His only amusing story took place in Braintree, where dad completed the first year of high school before having to drop out to support himself. He was responsible for preparing the dinner meal and had taken a break to join a sandlot baseball game. The boys saw a fire engine coming their way and decided to follow it. They ended up in front of Joe's building and he then remembered he had not turned off the stove. He gave the fireman his key in time to prevent them from breaking down the door to his apartment. There was a lot of smoke but no fire and he was mightily relieved.

Dad's first job was for the *New York Times*, at the age of six. He was not a prodigy but petit. During the baseball season, the newspaper displayed baseball scores on its marquee. They had agents at the Polo Grounds and Yankee Stadium who would telegraph the score at the end of each half inning. The paper, and presumably its mostly Manhattan readers at the time, had no interest in the Brooklyn Dodgers. Young boys would go out in the very narrow crawl space to the marquee high above Times Square and post placards with the number of runs scored that half inning. Dad was a Giant's fan in those days and on off days would sometimes go with friends to Coogan's Bluff, where they could look down on the Polo Grounds with a clear view of only part of the outfield.

Hester Street, heart of the lower east side, runs east-west from Essex to Center Street. It features in Abraham Cahan's 1896 novel *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto*. Number 102 was home to sculptor Jacob Epstein. Dad once pointed out his building but I did not note the number. His apartment was crowded with its four residents, allowing