

To my darling children

### Family tree.

When I was with you in Cooperstown, a cousin of mine died. He was very educated, much older than I, therefore he remembered more about my father's family. He said that he will give me a family tree that he worked out but I never got around to reminding him now of course it is too late.

I kept thinking that you American children know so little about your ancestors because we were transplanted from Europe where we lived for hundreds of years, and came in contact there as a little girl with older people that knew my great-grandmother and grandfather, and they would relate to you incidents. I must tell you that I was only about 10 when the war started and we had to leave our town and our friends, because our house burned down the first days of the war. However, the little I remember I would like to tell you, knowing you darling girls, your beautiful minds, I believe that would be of interest to you.

I want to tell you that in Europe we had very little of material things, only plenty of time. There were no movies to go to, there were no libraries where you could get books. In fact, all I had was about 2 years of schooling, and when I came here a little girl of over 15, I had to go to work. I did start night school here and I went one term, but my mother and father used to take out home work and the pay was very low, so in order to make something they used to work far into the night. If I helped at night it was finished earlier. I wanted to spare my parents so did not go to school.

It would be hard for you children to understand how hard it was for newcomers to earn enough to eat and pay rent when you had no trade, did not know, the language, and we did not dream of asking anyone or the government for help. There was no such thing. Then, we had pride and self-respect.

You will probably think how come that your father and Frances know so little of what I like to tell you. So here is the answer. When I married your grandfather after a very short time he became sick with a rheumatic heart, and we had our hands full ... Finally when the doctors forbid him to work, we borrowed, loaned, and scraped a little money together. We even took the little money that your daddy and Frances had from presents and bought the grocery with a friend of ours as a partner. I worked in the store every day in the week from seven or six in the morning until sometimes 12 at night and on Sunday from 6 to 1.

Your daddy used to help very much after school till he went into the army when the war started. In the beginning it was nip and tuck, but later we did very well financially. Of course, my dear mother helped with the house. She was the most wonderful mother to me and my children. In 1941, it got very hard when your grandfather got the stroke and was terribly sick, lost his speech, and the use of his right leg and arm and suffered until he died in 1954. So my dears you can see that I had very little time for my children, and there are so many distractions here like radio, and then television, and movies and school, of course.

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In fact, when he was discharged from the army Monday morning, he had a class in the afternoon. He had a drive for learning. In fact, besides serving four years in the army, he was the youngest lawyer to graduate. I thank G-d for bringing him home safe from the danger he was in during the war, and I have no cause to complain. I am blessed with precious good children and grandchildren. Somehow, it was not destined for us to become wealthy. If we had not sold the store that year? If my brother would have lived, your father would have continued with his education and gone into engineering that we wanted instead of working so terribly hard in the law business. This is really not what I wanted to say, I go off.

What I would like you to know is that where we came from no Jew was wealthy or owned much. Some had a hard time just existing. Others had a little more. Our aristocrats were our scholars, of course, Hebrew scholars, and this is the family we are descendants of/from.

My great grandmother on my mother's side had 5 daughters. That was the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> (?) century. They had a big business at that time, and as the custom was then the parents picked young men for their daughters by the amount of dowry they had.

My grandmother that I am named for was the youngest and she married a young man that your father is named for Joseph Ezra Sassower. He was very learned. They had a big house and all these young people lived with the parents after they were married until they managed to make some kind of living and started their own families. Somehow, a terrible tragedy befell that household. The father and all the daughters died. The sons-in-law with the children they had, remarried. When my grandmother died, she was 26 years old and my mother was 3 weeks old. The great-grandmother was naturally broken-hearted, but she would not let the youngest son-in-law leave, my grandfather, leave, because she loved him so much. He would study day and night. My mother used to tell me that every morning about 3 o'clock, he would go to synagogue in all weather and study there. He was a great scholar.

So she married him off to a young girl, who was a granddaughter, that is, he married a niece, just like ...daughter, Ruth married his mother's brother, he married the wife's sister's daughter, and this was your grandfather's grandmother. I married sort of a half cousin, so we had the same grandfather, but not the same grandmother. If you children can understand this mish-mash, you are terrific.

Now, my father's family came from very great rabbis. If you should ask your rabbi about the Belzer Rabbi, he could tell you of their fame. My father's father was the old Belzer Rabbi's brother's son. Seeing his father died a young man, he grew up at his uncle's house. The Rabbi's own children were jealous because he would favor my grandfather and he used to take him wherever he went. My father was the youngest of 6 brothers and 3 sisters. When my father's mother died, she had 104 children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. All my father's brothers and sisters had lots of children. Only my father had 2.

Now we are only a few left. Gertie, Esther, and Jack are a sister's children. Nellie, Helen, are a brother's children. Joe, a sister's son. Sabrina, Lola, Max, a brother's. Dave and Al, a brother's. That is all. Hitler, cursed be his memory, took care of most of them.

I must tell you how my mother and father met. I already told you that my mother's father was a great scholar and he used to go to the synagogue to study in the middle of the night so no one would disturb him.

Well, my father's father, Moshe, that lived in another city. They went, as the custom was, to the Rabbi before a holiday. In the winter, they had to stop over to warm up and to feed the horses, so the custom was they would stop near the synagogue where there was sometimes a little fire going.

When he and the rest of the men came in, my mother's father, Joseph Ezra, was so engrossed in his studies, that he did not even lift his head to see what was going on. So my father's father said to the men, G-d should only bless me with such machuten. Then he found out that there was a marriageable daughter, my mother. This is how they met. The shiddich was made. At that time the only thing that mattered in a marriage was the families. The yichus.

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My husband, Louis Sassower, his mother, Freida Shapiro. There was Louis, Rose Futtersak, Esther Damashek. Feivish, your great-grandfather, married again Eva (Chava). The children: Ida Parness, Joseph Ezra Sassower, Minnie Balsam, Rebecca Kaplan, Heime Sassower, Sylvia Berkowitz, Harry Sassower.

Your Grandfather Louis and I had the same great grandfather Sassower. He went to Palestine to die, but married there. Had one son, Liber. This Liber died in Israel and left about 12 (?) children in Israel. I met most of them in 1955 in Israel. One daughter came to America in about 1930. Her name was Ana (?) Holzman, moved with her children, Linda and Alex to California, where I saw them in 1968.

My father's father, Moshe Akner, had 6 sons and 3 daughters. Shulem [Akner?] had about 10 children. I remember Clara, Sabrina, Eva, Chava,

Carey dear I received your letter from France, and you mention the book. So I glanced through it, and it sure would be hard to follow. I feel like tearing it up. That spelling terrible.

Since I wrote, Joe, both Gertie's brothers, and Sabina are gone. In fact, last week I received a letter from Al in Israel. He is retired and spends much time in the Tel Aviv University and libraries, where he met a Professor Sadau, who knows or knew of our family. He is writing an encyclopedia, a book and wanted more information about the children of my father, his brothers and sisters, where they are and what they do. Al too knows very little because they lived in another town, and he left for Israel without his parents when he was a very young man. I wrote to Al all I could which is not much. You see most of us came to the USA or even Trinidad without parents. My father and mother were the only ones here from all my father's or mother's family. Gertie's father and mother came later, Gertie's mother was my father's sister.

There are a lot of stories I remember when I was very young. I must have been about 4 years old when my mother's father died. I remember the house, I remember the funeral. We had a big house, like a double house. On the left my grandfather lived, where there was a concession from

the government to sell tobacco stamps for about 150 years. To the right there was a smaller part where my parents lived. It was very hard to make a living. When I was very small, my father left for Scotland. He imported some ticking material from Austria where we lived and sold it there. He wanted my mother, my brother, and me to come there, but my mother would not leave her father, whom she dearly loved. So my father came back home, but could not tolerate living in this little shtetel after seeing the world. He went back to Scotland and we were ready to join him, in the meantime my mother's father died. By the time we were ready to leave the war in 1914, the first world war, started and we were left stranded. My mother with 2 children and, as I wrote before, we were on the Russian border. The army came in, burned the whole row of houses in the main street, and ours among them.

We ran away on foot. I remember all we had to eat was a lump of sugar. My mother would let me and my brother lick the sugar. We were hiding in the woods because we were afraid to use the road, with our few clothes that we carried. I remember my brother developed a blister on his foot, and we tied the foot with a rag, and that is how we traveled, for days.

We came to a big city, Lemberg, where my mother had a distant relative, where we slept on the floor. My mother tried to earn some money by buying and selling things. She was a very capable woman, and we kept moving from one place to another and managed.

Meantime, my father was in Scotland and he was an enemy alien so all these people were interned like the Japanese here. He was a religious man, could not eat the non-kosher food, so he lived on tea, baked potatoes, and bread. The climate there was damp, he caught a cold, he developed tuberculosis. We did not hear from him for almost 6 years.

What we went through in these 6 years and our journey to America would take up a book for someone with some talent to write. Six of us traveled together, we had very little money. My mother, my brother, and myself, Hilda, & her mother, and Sam Newman. His mother came to us for advice. She still lived in that small town in Toporov and their father was in America. Mrs. Newman, Rebecca, Sam and Moe came to us in Lemberg. Mrs. Newman knew that her husband does not do well in America, he was a poor Hebrew teacher sort of, and she had a house, a cow, and a little store, but my mother said to her – for you it is all right but what future is there for your children. So she left Sam, went back home to sell everything. Meantime a civil war started between the Polacks and Ukrainians and they were cut off from us. So we had to take Sam along when we started our journey to Italy. They came later. I was 15 years old and the leader of our group. Knowing nothing, I heard someone, a mother and daughter, go through Italy. So presto to Italy we went without money, very little. We traveled almost one year. We came with an American ship that had soldiers that died in Russia in the hold. It was an old troop ship, the Pres. Grant on her last voyage. We were a whole month on the ship going with one engine. They used to give food with a pail for 10 people, something. We, of course, did not eat that because it was not kosher, all we had was bread, black coffee, sometimes potatoes. There were 2000 people on the ship.

In 1920 immigration was tremendous. So companies formed, they had no ships, but when a ship passed they paid \$10 a head. That is how they made money off the people that looked to go cheap. We traveled like first class cattle, in hammocks about 300 in a room.

I'll never forget when we got to America and we came in to my uncle's home on the east side. A 2 bedroom apartment, 8 children, and all of us, this was not important, but the white large bread on the table, cheese, butter, herring, sardines. Mostly, I'll never forget that bread. I can still feel the taste of that bread.

We were distributed among relatives to sleep. The next day, when I heard Rose, Esther, Ida and the rest speak English, I did not understand a word, I was miserable. If I would have had a place to go back to, I would have. I felt like they can buy and sell me.

Right away I only wanted a job, any kind of job. We found an apartment on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor for \$17 a month with a toilet in the hall shared by 4 families. I got a job for \$4 a week, 6 days. My bother also got a little job. My mother was a wonderful housekeeper and everything was very cheap. A year later, my father came. He had \$200 English pounds so we paid up the money that we owed for the passage that the relatives sent us. They were very poor themselves. I remember my uncle asked my mother a day after we came, maybe she had some money left as they had no money for Shabbat.

But we were young, I started night school, but my parents took out homework. Did you ever see the leather band in men's hats, they had pieces of ribbon pulled through that you had to paste them in the ends. The pay was very little so my mother worked far into the night. I could not take that, so I stopped going to school so I could help. They called me the express. As soon as I got home from work, I sat down to paste the leather instead of going to school.

Aug. 1976

I was just listening to the radio and they were talking about mental telepathy research that they conducted in a prestigious college (can't think of the name). So I'll relate to you what my mother related to me years ago. Of course, being very young, I was skeptical. This is the story. When my mother was married a few years and did not get pregnant. She went to another town to doctors, she suffered back pains and was very depressed. One Friday when my father came home from synagogue in the winter, as usual he made kiddush and she served him. A fish being in winter, the service ends very early and she was tired and had this back pain, so my father told her to lie down, and they will eat the rest of the meal later. She fell asleep and a woman came over and said to her, my child where does it hurt you? When she pointed to the place, the woman rubbed her with some liquid, so she asked her who are you that you are so good to me, and she answered, I am your mother. Just then, my father woke her, and she became hysterical saying the first time in my life I saw my mother and you had to wake me. I believe I told you before that my mother's mother died when my mother was 3 weeks old, and all her life she envied people that had mothers. Now, in back of their house lived a woman. I remember her. She used to sell milk and butter, cheese. She of course was friends with my mother's mother and that same night she had a dream that she saw my mother's mother rushing and carrying something in her apron. They used to wear these large half aprons. So she asked her, Henie, where are you rushing? So she said... my mother's name. This woman woke up, and could not fall asleep anymore, so about 5 in the morning, she woke my mother's father who lived in the next house and told him her dream. 9 months later, I was born.

Now my own experience. In 1955, when I was in Israel, I stayed with the Ackners. Your mother was going to law school. They lived in the village and, of course, I did not think that they would want a child now. Frances tried to become pregnant, went to doctors, and every letter I was hoping that I'll hear that she is pregnant. Every morning before Al went to work, he would come in to my room because I had trouble with a leg to ask how I slept. So I told him that I had a funny dream. It was raining and George came into the house carrying a little girl with dark hair. I started scolding him why he took out the baby in the rain, and as I took her from him I sort of dropped her and I felt a bump on her head. I said to Al I did not even think about Doris. I hoped to hear that from Frances, so he smiled a dream – is a fool. About 3 he would return from work, and he would bring up the mail. I was still in bed because of the leg. He brings me a letter from your mother that she is pregnant. I immediately answered and told her I saw it is a girl with dark hair. Of course, I did not mention the bump on the head. I called in Al to verify my dream and I sent the letter to your parents. When I received the telegram that I became a grandma and it is a girl, I rushed home. Elena was just out of the hospital, looked just like I saw her, and I went for the head. There was the bump. I was told that most children that that, then it disappears. This story, you can believe, I will not kid you or be able to explain, but this is the truth that I'll remember always.

Your Grandfather Louis, that Larry, Beth, and Sandra Paley's boy are named after, was the most courageous man I knew. As a child he had rheumatic fever and was left with a severe heart condition. He was 15 when he came to America. At the age of 11 he worked in Lemberg in a candy factory till he came to America. His mother died when he was very young. He was the oldest of 3 children: he and 2 sisters. Rose, that is now gone, and Esther Damashek, she was a baby. His father remarried and had new children. Ida, Joe and another girl that died of measles, when they came to America. I think it was 1912 or 1913.

They were very poor. Your grandfather had to go to work. They were very poor. Children came. Minnie, I think, was born 1914. Rebecca 1915, then Hymie, Syliva, and Harry. When he was 16 years old, they would not take him into the organization because of being a bad risk. He and his friends organized a Young Men's organization that was very dear to him. I still belong there. It is where he is buried and I have a place reserved near him.

May 1, 1977

I just watched an interview with Alex Haley. ...Gordon that I love to watch his program from did the interview. He said that the book and TV showing of Roots is such success because everyone in the USA is ignorant of their roots. ..we all came here not too long ago and we know very little of our past. He said that it is regretful that children live away from their grandparents.

He said, find the oldest person in the family, ask and listen to their stories of the family. Don't throw out their momentos, their pictures. These are treasures. Of course, we Jewish people have roots, our history is known and written. We have a culture. A treasure, but the problem is that it is in Yiddish. I think I told you that I belong to a Yiddish cultural circle. We have among our members Jewish scholars and my greatest pleasure is the meetings when I hear them lecture on these gifted poets and writers that left such wealth of books.

I had no opportunity to grow up in normal times. My father left home when we were small children. My brother and I, my mother had to work for a living.

The war started when I was small and from the beginning of the war our home was destroyed and we moved from one place to another. I had to help earning when I was 10 or 11 years, then when I got to America, at 16, I went to work and soon after married.

Things were very hard for us. We wanted to become Americanized quickly and earning for the necessities took up all our time. G-d is my witness that I did not want to move away from my children. I always felt that I have so much love to give to my grandchildren. I have wonderful memories of your youth. This is why I miss you so much.

June 30, 1979

I tried to make a tape on the recorder, but it is not easy for me. Somehow, it does not work out. I was looking forward to going to the Kaplan bar mitzvah and Robin's wedding. I did want to see the family. I am the oldest member of the family now, but I could not make it being it is only 2 weeks since the eye...

My mother's family as much as I know. Great Grandfather Sassower. I don't know the first name. Grandfather Joseph Ezra Sassower, his wife Henie. Joseph Ezra married again a niece Sarah. The children, Cina Alta Akner, my mother. Other half brothers and sister, Feivish Sassower and Beila, in America. The others died in Europe, in the first world war.

Father Yechiel Akner and Cina Alta's two children: me and Morris Akner. I married the son of Feivish, my mother's half-brother's son, Louis Sassower. My children, may they be blessed, are Joseph Ezra Sassower and Freida Ness. Grandchildren, Etta, Cina Alta, Louis Sassower: Elena Ruth, Carey Adina, Lizbeth Avery. Larry Ness, named after his Grandfather Louis, like Geth. My brother Morris Akner married Dotty Klein. Children Jeffrey Akner and Lois Akner, girls are Tracy, Stephany, and Marissa. My mother's half sister married Sam Rabinowitz. Their children are Lou Rabinowitz, Eva Aronowitz, Joe Robbins, and Harry Rabinowitz.

My husband, Louis Sassower. His mother Frieda Shapiro. There was Louis, Rose Futersak, and Esther Damashek. Feivish your Great-Grandfather married again Eva (Chave). The children: Ida Parnes, Joseph Ezra Sassower, Minnie Balsam, Rebecca Kaplan, Heime Sassower, Sylvia Berkowitz, Harry Sassower.

Your Grandfather Louis and I had the same Great-Grandfather Sassower. He went to Palestine to die, but married there, had one son Liber. This Liber died in Israel and left about (12)? Children in Israel. I met most of them in 1955 in Israel. One daughter came to America in about 1930. He name was Ann Holzman, move with her children Linda and Laex to California, where I saw them in 1968.

My father's father, Moshe Akner, had 6 sons and 3 daughters. Shulem Akner had about 10 children. I remember Clara, Sabina, Eva, Chava, a son in America, Pesach. Todres Akner had about 12 children. I knew one, Yony. Shmuel Akner, also about 10 children. Dave in America, Al in Israel. Mendel Akner's children: Helen., Nellie Mandl, Zindel Akner, Henry Akner, all in

America. Zudek Akner, Sabina, Liza, Lola, married a cousin. Yachiel, my father, that makes 6. Daughters Shiva Fish, 6 wonderful children, none in America, all perished except Pepi and Nanko (in Israel), both died. ...Gabe, many children in America. Sam Gabe and Joe Gave, Ella Parnes, children Gertie Segal, Max Parnes, Sam Parnes, Jack Parnes, Esther Richman, in America. One daughter and family perished in the Holocaust.

Dec. 20, 1980

I was born, as I already mentioned, in Toporov. My father left for Scotland, I believe, when I was about 3 or 4 years old. My mother, she should rest in peace, was a remarkable person. She had a store to attend to, two small children, a sick step-mother, her father had died about 2 years before, therefore there was no family and very little security. When I was 7 years old, the war started and the very first few days our home and all our belongings burned down. We ran away to Lemberg, no money, no home, nothing. When we left for America, we did not know of a home where you sit at a table, have 3 meals together. I of course had no friends my age. I had cousins that I loved very much, .. the youngest Marvia (?) was 10 or 11 years older than I. I did not attend school. I was busy helping my mother sort of eke out a living. My brother being a little younger and a boy as it was the custom. My mother had private teachers for him, while I had the responsibilities of helping earn a living. I really did not mind that because there was no other life for me. I do not tell you this because I feel sorry for myself. I just want to tell you that I had no childhood, no friends of my own age, no family. Therefore, I did not have very much to give my children. I used to think that money gives you security, always afraid of having to ask for help from someone. I know a little better now not that there is at my age a better feeling than being financially independent, but everything in moderation. There were times that I could have had it easier by not wanting to save and denying myself and my children a little luxury.

Your grandfather, my husband Louis, had some money saved up. He did not live at home because he had to work on Shabbat and his father being a rabbi would not allow that. He lived with a friend when he was in Toporov being 6 years older than me he used to babysit for me and remembered me. So they talked him into buying with this money passage for us. Tante Beila was the matchmaker. They knew that he had this heart condition, but we did not know. So they cooked up a story that in order for him not to pay tax we should just get married in court. A few months later, we were married. We bought a little store in Newark, N.J. Things did not go well. He went into business in Newark with Sam Rabinowitz, Tante Baila's husband. We lived together. Then I became pregnant, had my dear George, went back to New York, with debts over our head, moved to the Bronx, with my mother, father, and brother. Your [grand]father got very sick, then I found out that it was dangerous for him to go back to the shop to work.

With two small children, and my father also being quite sick with tuberculosis, which was then incurable, so again I could not have a normal family life with ...friends my own age.

I also knew nothing about raising children. There were no books at that time and if there were I had no time to read. There were no washing machines or diaper service. I was busy from morning to night, cleaning, washing, taking care of my father, brother, they had a little business on the east side, so I had to take care of them.

...



In 1935, my father died and the doctor said that should your [grand]father go back to work in the shop he would not last 6 months. In 1936, we begged and borrowed from my mother that had a little money. You children were 11 and 9 and had some presents money. We needed \$2,700 to buy this store with a partner. This your father must remember. I worked in the store from 7 in the morning until after 11 at night, []-1/2 days a week.

My Grandfather's Father.

His name was Sassower. I don't know very much about that side of the family. My grandfather died when I was very young. I can only remember his funeral. However, his father left for Palestine to die, that was the wish of every Jew. When he came to Palestine that must have been sometime in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century; he got married; there was a ...Louis (like your grandfather's name) was born.

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