

The Buyer's Buyer

May 18 was a memorable day in my life. This was the day I first set foot on the free soil of the United States. The long journey that began in Lida, Poland, on December 31, 1939, was almost over. It remained only to cross the United States from the shores of the Pacific to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.

Arrival

As we neared the U.S., the excitement increased with each moment that passed. The night before the ship was scheduled to dock we were packed and awaiting our future. The thought of seeing father shortly made that night very long. Finally the morning arrived and we went on deck to see our first American city, Seattle in the State of Washington. It was a beautiful sight.

The immigration officers came on board the ship and the process of debarking began. I will never forget two events that occurred that morning. While we were waiting on deck to be processed, a Rabbi traveling with us relayed the information that Mr. Stalin, mother's cousin in Seattle, was waiting for us on shore. At first mother could not figure out who this Mr. Stalin could be. Eventually she realized that he was a cousin with whom the family in Europe had lost contact many years before. It seems that my uncles in Boston had been in contact with him and had alerted him of our arrival. He and his family were awaiting us, a very pleasant and welcome surprise.

The other event was the process of debarkation. Each family had to show that it was financially solvent to prove that it would not be a burden on the government. But many of us on the ship had no money, only tickets to our final destination. The ingenuity of our people came to the rescue. Someone on board had 25 dollars. This was given to the first family interviewed for debarkation. This family then turned the money over to the next person or family in line. This continued until all the people who needed the money to debark were able to show their solvency. I am sure that the immigration officials must have realized what was going on, but they were very sympathetic.

After we were processed and given an entry permit, we left the ship to be greeted and embraced by our cousins. They told us we would spend a week at their home before leaving for Boston. My cousin's name was Sol Stalin, a name I found difficult getting used to. A business man, he owned a large dry cleaning plant and had been on the west coast for a long time. He had two sons, Max and Joe, and a daughter named Libba.

The city of Seattle, located on the Pacific coast, was big and beautiful. From the distance we could see Mount Rainier covered with snow. I was taken by my cousins to see my first baseball game, a minor league match as there was no major league team in Seattle at that time. For the life of me I could not understand my cousin's explanation of the game. I was used to soccer, where there was personal contact between the teams. It was much later that I finally understood baseball.

In the town I saw people sleeping on the streets. I had never seen this before and found it very upsetting. I walked around town dressed in my best clothes. One day while walking with my cousin I noticed that people were staring at me. When we returned home I asked the reason. I was told that it was because I wore knickers, that knickers were worn only to play golf. In Poland knickers were fashionable. Mother had special ordered them for me before we left for Japan. My cousins had not said anything so as not to hurt my feelings.

The week flew by quickly. We were put on the train to Chicago, where we would transfer to another train that would take us to Boston. The train ride to Chicago was long and tedious. My sister Mira spoke a little English and the people on the train were helpful.

Arriving in Chicago at LaSalle Station, we were taken by taxi to Union Station, the departure point for the trip to Boston. I remember the loop in Chicago between the stations. After riding all night we finally arrived in Boston at South Station.

Father was not there to greet us. I never did understand why he did not come. He sent Eddie Kramer, who worked for my uncle and who had a car. Mr. Kramer drove us to the Prime Restaurant where my father and rest of the family waited. From that moment on I ceased to be a refugee and a new life began.

Greenhorn

Too excited to think about the future, I was glad to finally have a home. The waiting and uncertainty had ended. GOD was with us and I am thankful for that.

Mother's family had found us an apartment in Roxbury, on 327 Blue Hill Ave. at the corner of Gaston Street. The apartment was above Sam's butcher shop. Next to our building was a basement where herring was sold from barrels. The neighborhood was not the best, predominantly lower-middle-class Jewish people.

As soon as mother arrived there, she was very unhappy with the location and started to think about moving. Mother's brothers and sister lived on Schuyler and Cheney Street, in the better areas of Roxbury. Why they didn't look for a home for us near them, I can't understand. We were not a charity case. Father worked as a counterman in the Prime Restaurant and moonlighted weekends and nights as a waiter. He became a member of the union and worked very hard. Soon after our

arrival, my sister and I began working as well and we turned all of our salaries over to mother. So money was not the cause. I suppose it was better for mother's family not to be too close to "greenhorns."

The building we lived in belonged to a Mr. Kolodny, who was very nice to us. We were given furniture by Sara Pike, a cousin of mother's who lived in Chelsea. Sara's son Louie, who was a plumber, had a truck and took me to his mother's house to pick up our bedroom furniture. This was the first time that I passed through the Sumner Tunnel. When told that Boston harbor was above us, I found it hard to believe.

After a few days settling in at home, I took the Blue Hill Avenue street car to Dudley Street and from there the elevated train into Boston. This was the first time I was alone among strange people. Listening to a strange language, I was uncomfortable and worried about my safety. The fear of anti-Jewish remarks and actions were on my mind as the train moved toward my destination, Essex Station. Nevertheless, the train ride was interesting. From the elevated tracks, I saw the outskirts of the city for the first time.

I was on the way to my uncle's restaurant, the Prime Restaurant, located on Harrison Avenue just a short block from the station exit on Washington & Essex Streets. The restaurant, which served Jewish-style cooking, had two rooms on the first floor and a large dining room on the second floor. The area near the Prime was the center of Boston's garment industry, wholesale leather companies, and dry-goods stores.

The people I met at the Prime were nice and tried to be helpful. I came to Boston at a time when new immigrants were rare due to the War in Europe. I was sort of an endangered species who had survived. For a while plenty of attention was paid to me and my family. The span of this attention was not long though. The realities of life became more acute.

While our special status lasted, an interesting episode occurred. Louis Posner, a distant cousin of father's, installed

two-way radios on fishing boats. One day he took me to his place of business on Northern Avenue, where the fishing boats were tied to the pier. There he explained the working of the radios and so on. When he finished his work he asked if I would like to visit a fisherman's home while he made a service call there. We walked from the pier to the fisherman's apartment in the North End. I don't remember the street but do remember the apartment being on the second or third floor. On entering, Louis introduced me to the man and his wife and I was offered a glass of wine. I drank the wine and then another glass; I felt good. The good feeling didn't last too long though. While walking down the steps I became sick and wobbly. Louis explained that the wine was homemade and very strong. It's no wonder he had asked if I wanted the second drink. I had learned a lesson.

We did not stay long on Blue Hill Avenue. Mother was persistent. She felt that living there was detrimental to my sister's future. So we moved to 25 Schuyler Street, in the better part of Roxbury and very close to my mother's brothers and sister. We were in a three-story apartment building on the corner of Maple and Schuyler Street. Our apartment was on the third floor. I shared a room with my brother Saul.

The location was desirable; Franklin Park and a street car stop were just a few minutes away. The street car ride from the stop at the corner of Seaver and Maple Street to the elevated train station at Eggleston Square took only 5 minutes. From Eggleston Station the train went into Boston proper.

Integration

The first step in the process of integration in the community was to be able to communicate. To do this it was necessary to know the English language. The closest school to our first home on Blue Hill Ave. was the Patrick T. Campbell school. I enrolled in the Evening Elementary School and immediately began to learn English. I spent my evenings at school and during the day I looked for work.

There is very little I remember about that period. On April 16, 1942, I received my certificate stating that I had completed the required subjects and was ready to enroll in a high school. In September of that year I became a student at the Roxbury Evening Commercial High School, located on Warren Street. The school was known to day students as Boston Clerical. On April 15, 1943, I received a certificate for completion of English I and II and was also granted six credits toward a high school diploma. Mr. Stickney, the principal, asked if I would like to continue in High School and receive a diploma. I told him that I already was a High School graduate and that I had a diploma to prove it. He informed me that there was then no need to get another diploma.

During this conversation I mentioned that I had a great desire to go to college. I explained that I had not been able to attend in Poland for many reasons, among them lack of money and the quotas on Jewish enrollment in the Polish universities. I was very surprised when Mr. Stickney said "no problem." He advised me to take my high school diploma to Mr. Eddy Pitts, the registrar at the Boston University Evening College of Commerce.

I met with Mr. Pitts and found him to be very helpful and friendly. In a short time we became very close friends. I was registered for a degree program after my records were translated into English and accepted. I shall tell of my experience at B.U. later.

The second step in my integration into the community was to find work. Inability to communicate was a problem. My father knew a lot of helpful people because of his work at the Prime Restaurant. Father first took me to a machine shop on Albany Street in Boston. This didn't work out as I was never meant to be a mechanic. That still holds today.

He then took me to a furrier shop, Gochberg & Rozeff Inc. on the corner of Essex and Chauncy Street. The owners used to eat in the Prime and my father waited on them. This was my first job. My pay was \$12 a week. I was issued a Social Security card and was on my way to being an American.

I recall vividly two episodes at the furrier shop. The first one was when I met the union agent. This was a union shop and I was not a member of the union. The union agent asked my name. When I told him, he realized that I didn't speak English so he spoke to me in Jewish. He asked where I came from. When told Poland and the Soviet Union, he commented that Russia is a wonderful country and that I should have stayed there. I replied that if Russia is so good why does he not go there? He did not like the answer and his face showed it.

The second episode was when I used a Jewish word that meant something else in English. My job was to stretch furs on boards and nail them down. One day, in the presence of a female customer, I asked Abe if I should put the piece of fur on the "cunt." He grabbed me by the collar, pulled me out of the room, and told me that I should not use such language in front of a lady. I showed him that I meant the corner of the table, which is the meaning in Jewish of the word I had used. He explained to me the meaning in English of what I had said. I never used the word again.

I worked at the furrier shop for six or seven months and decided that the job was not for me. Abe Gochberg and Joe Rozeff were nice to me and helpful but I knew I was not going to be a furrier. Again father was helpful and I was hired to be a shipper at Green and Freedman's bakery on Harrison Avenue. My uncles bought their breads for the Prime Restaurant at that bakery. That's how I happened to get the job.

Working in the bakery was an experience in human relations. This was my second job involving a union but I had no problems. Most of the bakers were Jews from Eastern Europe. They were hard working men who could drink on the job and still perform their work. They were physically strong but also kind. Some played cards from Saturday evening until Sunday morning. While working in the bakery, I had eclairs and pastry available at all times at no charge. I can still taste the chocolate milk and pastry.

My work began at eight PM and continued until eight in the morning. I filled orders and sometimes helped to deliver them.

It was interesting for a while but when I complained to the owner about working twelve hours a shift, he said to my father "this greenhorn wants to be a union man." Not long after I left.

As time went by, my English improved and I began to look for a more permanent position. Again the Prime Restaurant was my best employment agency. The United States was at war and business people were looking for help. I was available and I got a job with International Dry Goods located on Essex Street in Boston. That job was my introduction to the marketing of hosiery and underwear. After 46 years I am still in the business.

I was hired as an assistant to the shipper and hoped some day to become a salesman. The closest I got to merchandise was to put items into cartons. I delivered bundles to the nearby stores but was not permitted to unpack and put the merchandise on the shelves. It became obvious that my chance of learning the business was nil. It took only one incident for me to want to part company. One day I was told by the shipper to wash the floor in the store. I refused and told the owners that I was quitting. They tried to persuade me to stay by saying that they would treat me like a son. I told them that I was not a janitor and was not hired to do this kind of work.

I next worked for Yellin Dry Goods, a small concern next door to my previous employment. This job didn't work out either. The owners were very stingy; they made me measure rope before using it on a bundle.

One day in April 1943 I was asked to go for an interview at H. Glaser and Son. There I was hired by Leo H. Cohen as a stock boy in the ladies' hosiery department. I stayed with the company from April 1943 to October 1982.

Two events in 1941 had changed the world, the Nazi invasion of Russia in June and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7. God was with me as somehow I had stayed a step ahead of events. We had left the Soviet Union in

February of 1941 and had departed Japan in May of the same year. Now in the U.S. after Pearl Harbor, I received a draft notice.

I was rejected for service because of a double hernia. I was told to have an operation and then to come back. Returning home from the draft physical, I told my mother that I would like to be operated on and go back to the draft board. Mother became upset. I will never forget her saying that "You left one fire and you are looking for another one. If they want you they will find you and call you."

I finally had to have the operation in February of 1947. I had waited so long that complications set in. When I recovered I informed the draft board that I had had the surgery. Not long after, I received a letter telling me to come in for my physical and that I was to be drafted. Just before my appointment the draft was discontinued. Again the Almighty was with me.

B. U.

In September of 1943 I was enrolled in the Evening College of Commerce at Boston University. Going to college was very important to me for many reasons. Most important were the opportunity to become integrated in the American way of life, regardless of my accent, and the self-assurance that college would give me. I must say that I succeeded in both. I never felt inferior regardless of what people thought and said about my accent. I always felt that, if I could do this, nothing could stop me from any endeavor I might choose. During my lifetime there have been many times when, facing a problem, I would think about my college years. These thoughts helped me to achieve my aims.

My first evening in the university was filled with apprehension. My English was poor, I knew no one, and I was lonely. I was enrolled in Accounting I and Economics. The first class was accounting and I sat alone in the back of the class.

The first hour went by quickly without any problems. After a short intermission, I joined the economics class, again sitting

by myself. The professor did not take attendance and during the discussion he called upon me. For the first time I had to participate in the discussion. As soon as I opened my mouth and said the first word the class turned their heads toward me. They looked and waited for my answer. I gave the correct answer and the ice was broken. From that moment on I was no longer by myself. I was accepted by my classmates, who were helpful to me. We used to go out for coffee and beer after class. The professors were understanding and helped me with my English.

In order to complete my requirements rapidly, I decided to take as many courses as were allowed in a semester. I had classes five days a week from six to nine o'clock in the evening. As the years went by, the schedule required me to take some classes on Saturday and some times during my lunch hour. Leo H. Cohen, my employer, helped by letting me leave work early so I could get to my classes on time.

In my sophomore year, I became active in extracurricular activities. I was the Treasurer of my class, I represented my school on the Hillel Council, and I was awarded the Hillel Honor Key. I was a member of the Student Council of the Evening College of Commerce and served as the school's Junior and Senior representative on the All-University Student Council. I was appointed to the last position by Professor John Waters, the Director of the Evening College of Commerce. I was fully accepted by my peers.

During my term on the All-University Student Council, the Council members were invited by Daniel L. Marsh, President of the University, to a formal dinner at his home. By that time I was married. Buying or renting a tuxedo for the occasion would certainly have been a financial burden. Estelle, my wife, suggested that I buy a navy suit that I could use for other occasions. This I did.

I will never forget the reception and dinner. I entered the President's home, located near the University on Bay State Road. We were greeted by a butler and ushered into the reception room where members of the other schools of the Uni-

versity were present. I knew no one as I was the only one representing the evening division. The others were full-time students from their respective schools; medicine, law, etc. I was introduced to them and waited for Dr. Marsh to come in.

Dr. Marsh arrived and we were introduced to him. A short time later we marched by pairs into the dining room. What I remember most about the meal is that I was introduced to clam chowder. It was with great difficulty that I swallowed the first spoonful. After a while, and with great consternation, I managed to finish the chowder and found that it wasn't that bad after all. During the dinner the President handed out quotations. Each of us was asked to give our name and school and then read the assigned quotation. When it was my turn, I read my quotation. Dr. Marsh looked up and said to me that he has the highest respect for students that attend college in the evening while working full time. He said that we night students were there to learn and not to play. It was a memorable evening.

The hardest part of going to college was the travel. I returned home each night by street car and elevated train. It was a real treat when, on occasion, I got a ride by car. In December of 1947 I finished all my required hours. In May of 1948 I received my Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration. Graduation day was very exciting. My dream of going to and completing college had become a reality.

I had a great desire to continue my education further. I would really have liked to enter law school but financial conditions did not make this possible. Years later, in September 1981, I enrolled at the Metropolitan College at B. U. for a graduate degree. In 1983, thirty-five years after receiving my Bachelor's degree, I received my Master's Degree in Liberal Studies (M.L.S.). This new experience gave me great satisfaction. I still regret my not being able to go to law school.

H. Glaser & Son

I worked for H. Glaser & Son, 84 Essex Street, Boston, in different capacities for 39-1/2 years, from April 1943 until Oc-

tober 1982. Mr. Isaac Glaser, owner of the firm, used to eat at the Prime Restaurant and arranged with my father for me to see Leo H. Cohen for an interview. I remember entering his office on the street floor, near the men's room and near steps leading to the second floor. I was hired to work in the ladies' hosiery department, under Cohen's supervision. I started at eighteen dollars per week.

We occupied six floors of the building. The ladies' hosiery department at that time was located in the basement of the store. My job was to receive merchandise, lay out orders, and keep the inventory. In no time I learned the sources of delivery, the different styles of the items, the prices, and the location of the style numbers. I became very proficient in my work and, after a few years, was allowed to wait on customers in the sales-room and to take telephone orders.

As the older salesmen retired, the inside men were usually promoted to go on the road. At the end of 1948 I was promoted to be an inside salesman and hoped soon to be able to become one of the traveling men. One of our part-time salesmen, Mr. Hamilton, traveled the Cape and the southeastern part of the state. When he retired, I asked to be given a chance to cover his territory. My request was refused and I was told my turn would come. I am sure the real reason was my accent; the territory had very few Jewish customers. I was in no position to quarrel and waited for my time.

By then I had my degree and I was full of confidence. I was the only college graduate in the organization except for L.H. Cohen. I was sure that, given the opportunity, I would perform well. Meanwhile I was given full charge of the ladies' hosiery department, including re-ordering from the mills when necessary. I became acquainted with many mill men and that didn't hurt.

While working in the stock room, I had an experience that taught me a lesson I still apply. When cases of hosiery came in from the factories, I checked them for styles and quantity. I

marked each case with a number and recorded the number in an inventory book. As goods were sold and shipped, the case number was given to me and removed from the inventory book. In this way, we knew what the inventory was at all times.

I had a habit of keeping the case numbers of shipped goods and the original memos written by Leo Cohen in my desk for future reference, should I need them. One day Leo gave me a slip of paper asking for 10 cartons to be brought into the shipping room. There was no customer name or any other shipping instruction on the paper. The goods listed were nylon stockings, which were in great demand and short supply. A few weeks later, I got an order for nylon stockings and I couldn't find the goods. I told my boss and he was very upset. I felt very bad about it, worrying that he might think I stole the nylons. I looked through the papers that I saved and, sure enough, found the slip of paper directing me to bring these cases to the shipping room. I showed him the paper. He said nothing but from that day on I was never questioned about mislaid goods again. I was a saver then and still continue to be one to this day.

I was becoming impatient waiting to be a salesman on the road. In 1950 I realized that I would have to force the issue. I told Leo that I wanted to go out and break in new territory. In order to travel I would need a car. It was the policy of the firm to advance money to the salesmen to cover expenses. The advance would later be deducted from the end-of-year bonus. I asked for a down payment for a car loan and was refused. I told Leo that I would travel by bus and train in order to prove that I was ready. I was told to go ahead and try.

I was able to get rides with two of the salesmen, George Gruber and Joe Rosen, to the big towns such as Providence, Rhode Island, and Fall River, Massachusetts. From there, I used local busses to reach the small towns. I lugged the sample cases from store to store, looking for new customers.

A friend of mine, Hy Fradkoff, took me with him to Connecticut, where he sold jewelry. While he attended to his business, I looked for new opportunities to sell. Traveling with

him, I discovered that Connecticut was virgin territory. No one in Glaser's traveled there. In the year of 1950, without a car or customers given to me, I brought in \$50,000 in new business. I was very saddened a few years later when my friend Hy, at a very young age, died suddenly from a heart attack.

Within a year, Mr. Cohen recognized my potential and advanced me money to buy my first car, a 1951 black Chevrolet Coupe. In those days the heater was an extra so I didn't purchase one. The car cost under \$1,000. After completing driving lessons, I took the test and failed. I passed on the second try. I bought the car in February. The first time I took the car on the road, my sister-in-law Marion went with me to Boston, where she worked. It was a snowy day and slippery. She never forgot the ride.

In 1951, my salary was increased to fifty dollars a week. From this amount, I was supposed to pay my own travel expenses. I traveled Connecticut, parts of Rhode Island, and parts of Massachusetts.

Seven years later, in 1958, I was asked to travel extensively through the entire New England area to promote a new line of Ballet hosiery made by Burlington Hosiery Mills. For an entire year I was to be away every other week crisscrossing New England. On alternate weeks I would cover the local area. I was to be paid an additional \$100 per week by the mill.

This was the first and only break I ever got at Glaser's. Unfortunately, because of jealousy within the firm, my assignment was curtailed after nine months. During those months, we put away the extra \$100 each week, saving for a down payment on a house. With great difficulty, we made do at home and I paid my travel expenses from my normal salary alone, which also was \$100 at that time.

In those nine months, I learned much about the art of selling. It gave me confidence and increased my self-assurance. I had been chosen for this promotion because Leo felt I had an imaginative way of promoting and merchandising. I learned that selling to large stores and high-quality specialty shops was

easier than going to the papa and mama stores. I was very upset when I was told that the Burlington subsidy would cease. The excuse Leo gave made no sense to me. I had to swallow the decision and go on with my life.

Another time, Leo told us at one of his monthly sales meetings that the Kayser Roth Mill would give a mink stole to the salesman who would open up the most new accounts selling their Nolde brand of ladies' hosiery. Here again the jealousy of my co-workers led Leo to change the rules of the contest. I was the leading salesman and had opened the most new accounts. But I was told by Leo that he had decided to split the money among all the salesmen. He said that my wife didn't need a mink stole. There was one salesman in particular who was short on ability but big on demanding all the breaks. When I complained, Leo's standard answer was "you are a college graduate and should understand." I understood that no matter what I did, I had to be better in order to survive there.

In Connecticut, I opened accounts and developed business at many specialty stores in small towns and at three city department stores, G. Fox and Sage & Allen in Hartford and D. M. Read in Bridgeport. I was the only man on the road that arranged meetings with the sales personnel of these large stores. I had the pleasure of meeting and traveling with mill representatives and introducing them to the various buyers.

In my first few years traveling Connecticut, I stayed overnight at the Hartford home of Lou and Rose Goldman, cousins of Estelle. This was a big help financially. As I developed the territory, I was eventually reimbursed for some of my expenses. When George Gruber and Joe Rosen retired, their territory was divided among the remaining salesmen. I received part of Rhode Island, including Providence. George and Joe were top rate gentlemen.

To increase our earnings, Leo decided to give the salesmen extra commissions for sales of ladies' hosiery. Irving Glaser, who was in charge of the men's department, didn't want to do

the same. Naturally, I was interested in selling whatever I could to earn extra money. This made Irving very unhappy with me as I was not pushing any of the men's items. There was no reason for him not to go along with Leo other than that he may have resented the salesmen receiving the extra money. Not too long after he was forced to go along.

The way that commissions were set up, the firm made money not only on what we sold, but also on the salesmen who made the extra commission. The prices for the merchandise were in four tiers. The lowest price bore no commission, the next price had a 3% commission, and then there were prices bringing 5% and 10% commissions. For example, if style X was selling for \$10, the 3% price might be \$10.50. So the salesman would receive 32 cents extra and the firm would get an extra 18 cents for a product whose original price was \$10.

Financial security was the reason I continued working for H. Glaser for such a long time, even though I was very dissatisfied. When Leo's son Milton came in to the business, the conditions for me became unbearable. He and I disagreed on many things and my situation worsened. I was taught by his father to be a salesman and he wanted me to be an order taker. So we clashed. I was glad that I stuck with my convictions. When I left the firm after 39 years, my experience in selling came in handy right away.

I attribute my success in selling mainly to my honesty and to my knowledge of what my competitors were doing. The best compliment that I received was when Leo would refer to me as "THE BUYER'S BUYER." The fact that I was discriminated against by Irving, who did not provide me with men's samples, and the fact that they tried to dehumanize me in many ways, made me finally decide to leave the firm, to protect my sanity. This was after giving them the best years of my life.

When I left the firm I took with me my reputation as a reliable and honest salesman and the friendships that I had developed after so many years with my customers. I am only sorry that I didn't have the guts to do this earlier. I have been associated with Gold Medal, Division of Preger & Wertenteil

Inc. in New York since October of 1982. My relationship with them is just the opposite of what it was with Glaser's. I'm sorry that I didn't know them before.