

## Beginnings

In 1945, after the end of the war in Europe, I learned that Fryda was alive in a refugee camp. Wishing to find my girl friend, I tried to join UNRA, a United Nations organization helping displaced people in Europe. At the time I had two years of college and was proficient in English, Polish, and some Russian as well as my mother tongue, Yiddish. I never received a reply from UNRA and, for reasons I shall now explain, never chose to pursue the matter.

### Essie

In February of 1946, a new chapter in my life began. I met your mother.

Morris Entis, my friend from the Herzl Zionist District, worked at O'Donnell-Usen Fisheries, a wholesale fish place at the pier in Boston. One day Morris called me at Glaser's to tell me that one of the secretaries in his office was having a hard time getting ladies' hosiery because of the rationing. At the time there was a shortage of hosiery, especially of nylon stockings. So it was natural for him to call me. Morris asked me to wait for him at the store after work so that he could stop with the secretary before going home. I told him not to be late as I had classes at B.U.

Not too long after he arrived with his co-worker. He parked his car, came into the office and we both walked back to the car. He then introduced me to the people in the car, among them your mother. I took a look at her and decided right then to skip my classes that evening and go home with them.

I asked for the size stockings she wore and went back to the store to get them. She asked for nylons but I gave her rayon stockings instead without telling her; I had just met her and nylons were very scarce. I told Morris that I had decided to go home and asked if he would take me with them. I lived on Schuyler Street in Roxbury, not too far from Michigan Avenue in Dorchester where he resided. He agreed and I was seated near Estelle Zonn, my future wife.

I looked her over. She was a beautiful girl with long hair and a nice smile. After a few minutes of conversation with her I asked her for a date. She told me that day she was busy playing bridge but that I should call her some other time. This happened in February, sometime between St. Valentine's day and George Washington's birthday.

Before meeting Estelle, I had made arrangements with Fryda's cousins in New York to visit them to check on Fryda's whereabouts. I did go to New York and spoke to them. As soon as I returned, I called Estelle to try to arrange a date. Soon after we had our first date.

I remember coming to her house at 30 Vesta Road in Dorchester. The house was a three decker, her apartment being the second floor. We went to town to see a movie. After the movie we took a cab back to her apartment. I brought her to the door and said that I had had a good time and hoped to see her soon. I was told later that she was surprised that I had not even tried to kiss her. Morry had told her to keep her legs crossed all evening and she had been somewhat nervous about the evening.

I did not have a car. As it was too late for public transportation I walked home after midnight through Franklin Park. In those days the park and the streets in Roxbury and Dorchester were safe during the day and night.

I called her for a second date not long after. During our conversation I told her I was going to marry her. She told me that I was crazy. We started to see each other almost daily. Right

after my classes in school, I would go directly to her house and we would spend time together.

Estelle's family's apartment had a long corridor with many doors to different rooms. At that time her brother Max and his wife Hilda, her sister Marion, and her parents Charles and Rebecca Zonn were all living there. I was accepted very graciously by all of them.

Estelle's father used to go to bed early as he had to open his store at 6:00 A.M. As a result I did not meet him until Estelle arranged for him to stay up late one night to meet me. On a Thursday night after school, I met him for the first time. Little did I realize that this would be the only time that I would see him.

We played cards and I won. He said next time he would win. He was dressed in a shirt and tie and a smoking jacket and we had a general conversation. After a while I said good night. On leaving, I said I hoped to see him again soon. Fate decided differently.

The next morning Estelle woke up very early to tell her father that we were going to be married. He wished her luck and told her to make sure this was a right decision as you cannot pick a husband as fast as you buy a fur coat. This had special meaning to Estelle. A compulsive shopper, she had just recently bought a fur coat and very soon after decided she did not like it.

Early on Saturday morning I received a telephone call from Estelle's cousin Phyllis who told me that Estelle's father had died during the night. I proceeded right to Estelle's house to be with her and her family. It was pre-destined for me to have the pleasure of meeting Charlie, as he was called by his friends. I was glad that I was there when Estelle needed me most.

Every morning I went to their house to participate in the daily service. Every evening I returned there after work and school. After the 30-day mourning period, we decided to announce our engagement. Estelle felt it would be all right to do so as her father had given his blessings. We set September 8,

1946, as the date for the wedding as this was between semesters at school. Shortly before the wedding, I became a citizen of the United States.

Estelle had too much to cope with during our brief engagement period. She had just lost her father, was working full-time, and had to plan her wedding. I was attending summer sessions at B. U. so as to complete my degree program.

As soon as we got engaged, I introduced Estelle to my family. It was my regular practice to give my mother my pay check. When I told her I would be unable to continue doing so, she was not too happy. She said "whatever you will need, father will buy and give you." I prevailed and saved money to buy an engagement ring. A short time before the wedding my father took me to a factory in Rhode Island and bought me two suits.

My brother Saul had joined the Marines. He met Estelle just once before leaving for Parris Island. He wrote Estelle a very nice letter extolling my virtues. He wrote that my only fault was that I like potatoes very much.

It was a busy summer. My uncles, owners of the Prime Restaurant, gave a shower in honor of our engagement. The shower was held on the second floor of the Prime. Estelle's cousins had us for dinner. The time flew by quickly. I became a permanent fixture at Estelle's house as I spent every weekend there.

The wedding reception was to be held in Estelle's house after the ceremony. Prior to the wedding she baked and prepared all the desserts almost single-handedly. As we did not have a refrigerator and there was not enough room in the icebox, we kept the tonic for the reception cold in the bathtub, using large blocks of ice brought by the iceman. Estelle's mother, with a limited income, did the best she could. As far as I was concerned it did not matter. The important thing was that we were together.

The wedding was to be held at the Mishkan Tefila, a beautiful conservative temple located on Seaver Street in Roxbury. The ceremony was supposed to be officiated by Rabbi Rab-

inowitz of Mishkan Tefila. The Friday before the wedding the temple office called to say that the Rabbi would not be able to perform the ceremony. I was given the names of five other Rabbis. I chose Rabbi Golden as I knew him personally.

September 8th that year was a very humid and hot day. It was a noon ceremony. Due to the small size of Estelle's apartment, we could only invite a limited number of people to the reception. But we had invited a lot of friends to the ceremony, explaining the problem to them. My mother, not realizing this, invited whomever she saw and knew to come to the house. The hot weather and the unexpected crowd made the reception very uncomfortable. Estelle and I were the last to arrive at the house. It was so crowded that we could hardly get in the door. My mother now realized what she had done. After a while, she invited most of her friends and family to her house on Schuyler Street.

That evening we took a train to New York City for our honeymoon. We stayed at the St. Moritz Hotel near Central Park. It was a busy week. We saw Ethel Merman in *Annie Get Your Gun*, Fred Waring in a radio studio, the Statue of Liberty, and the Empire State building. We shopped in the New York stores. To pay for our trip we used all the money that we received as wedding gifts, which was much less than a thousand dollars.

As the week progressed Estelle felt more and more sleepy with no energy. We cut our trip short and took a plane back home to Boston. This was the first time on a plane for us. Arriving home, we called the doctor as Estelle had a slight fever. His diagnosis was wrong as she did not get better. It was the third doctor that finally took a blood test and found that she had mononucleosis. Estelle stayed out of work for a few weeks. When she returned to work, she took a lot of ribbing in her office.

It is important to describe our living conditions at 30 Vesta Road. It was almost impossible to get an apartment at that time. Housing was very scarce after the war and our total in-

come was under fifty dollars per week. Under those circumstances we moved in with Estelle's mother, sister, brother, and his wife. We were three families living under one roof.

Estelle and I moved into her bedroom, Marion moved into her mother's room, and Max and his wife had their own bedroom. There was a kitchen, a den, and a living room. There was only one bathroom. Somehow we survived without any problems. We all shared in maintaining the house. Estelle's mother was in charge of the kitchen. It took me some time to get used to her cooking, inasmuch as I was used to my mother's.

Many evenings I heard Estelle's mother yell out "O My God I forgot to empty the pan of water from under the ice box." I still remember the ice man yelling "Ice! Ice!" He would carry a block of ice on his shoulder and place it in our ice box. During the summer months, when the weather was hot and humid, I sometimes slept on the porch and got eaten up by mosquitos. In those days I would say that we were in the low middle class, a step above poverty.

Around the time of our marriage, father was becoming restless working for my uncles in the Prime Restaurant. He worked very hard there and moonlighted as a waiter weekends and evenings in order to make ends meet. An opportunity arose for him to become a partner in the New York Cafeteria, located on Blue Hill Avenue in Dorchester.

To raise the money for this venture, as he had little of his own, my sister and I lent him whatever we had. My boss Leo Cohen was nice to lend father some money as well. With these loans and with whatever small savings he had, father was able to proceed with the purchase. A new and more meaningful life began for him.

The investment was a good one. Not long afterward father was able to pay off his loans, to Leo Cohen first, to me next as we were expecting the birth of our first child, and then to my sister. As our children grew up, it was father's greatest pleasure to have his grandchildren go to the New Yorker for lunch or dinner.

## A Family and Home of Our Own

Not too long after our marriage, Estelle's brother moved to Cambridge with his wife. Their room became available and we started to think and plan for a family. We were in no position financially but decided to go ahead regardless of the cost. It took about a year for Estelle to become pregnant. Finally on November 27, 1948, our first born arrived. We named him after Estelle's father Charles (Betzael in Hebrew). The middle name was Frederick, after my paternal grandmother Zipora.

Estelle stopped working in her third month to wait and get ready for the birth of our first son. Our families were thrilled with the new addition as he was the first grandchild in both families. We were now on one income. To pay the hospital and doctors' bills, we took out an installment loan at the Shawmut bank. The spare room became Chuck's. He brought great joy to all, especially to his maternal grandmother, who helped Estelle take care of him. His arrival was a turning point in our life. I became a father and with it I had a new responsibility.

On Chuck's first birthday, we bought a Zenith 8-inch television set, our first luxury purchase. On February 27, 1951, our second son Mark Howard was born. He was named after my paternal grandfather Moses. His middle name Howard was after Estelle's uncle who had remained in Russia. By now, our financial situation had improved. We had a car and I was traveling on the road as a salesman.

Chuck and Mark were only two years, four months apart. Estelle had her hands full taking care of them. On August 10, 1954, our third son, Richard Jacob, was born. The name Richard was for my maternal grandmother Rasha, who was left behind when we fled Russia and was later killed by the Germans. Jacob was for Estelle's paternal grandfather.

In the early fifties Estelle was up to her neck bringing up the children and maintaining the house. Our income didn't increase with the expenditures. To survive we had to charge and make monthly payments. There were many nights that Estelle and I couldn't fall asleep worrying about the payments. I be-

came an expert at consolidating our debts, going to the bank and taking out a loan to pay the accumulated bills and then worrying about one payment.

During the 1950s, an exodus of Jews from Dorchester and Roxbury to Brookline, Newton, and the outlying suburbs increased rapidly. We noticed the changes in our neighborhood and decided we should look for new quarters. Around that time the Miller family, our neighbors on the third floor, moved out and bequeathed their old gas refrigerator to us. No more did we have to worry about the drip pan overflowing.

The house we lived in was sold and the new landlord moved into the third floor. There was still rent control at the time; rent control prevailed for some time after the conclusion of the war. Nevertheless, the new owner illegally raised our rent, not getting permission from the rent-control board. He threatened us with eviction if we didn't comply. We went along as we were not yet ready to move.

This landlord did not care about the property and conditions went from bad to worse with his neglect. We reached the end of our patience when a large leak developed in the bathroom and part of the ceiling fell from the constant dripping of water, which had become a flow. We complained several times. The situation went beyond endurance when, on New Year's Eve, we called and told him that the water was really pouring down. He replied that he had tickets to the theatre and that we should use an umbrella when we went into the bathroom.

This so angered us that I complained to the rent-control board, showing my cancelled checks as proof of the illegal rent increase. Foolishly, the owner had accepted checks for the illegal rent. The rent-control board revoked the increase and fined him, giving us the triple damages for the amount that he had overcharged us.

As I mentioned before, when I traveled for H. Glaser and Son promoting the new Ballet hosiery line throughout New England, I was paid an additional \$100 a week. We saved all of this and, in 1958, we began to look for a house. The in-



centive to buy increased when our friends Jimmy and Mary Pivnick bought a house in Sharon. Our friendship with the Pivnicks developed in 1948 when Estelle would see Mary practically every day while pushing their baby carriages on Blue Hill Avenue. Estelle was with Chuck, Mary with her daughter Elaine. When Mary and Jimmy's second daughter Ronna was born, I was named her Godfather. We are still close friends. Unfortunately Jimmy passed away a few years back.

The real estate agents took us to Nantasket, Brookline, and many other suburbs. Finally we found a house we liked and could afford, a two-family house at 114 Redlands Road in West Roxbury. We moved in October of 1958. We joined Temple Emeth in South Brookline. There the children attended the Hebrew school and celebrated their Bar Mitzvahs.

Much transpired in the seventeen years from my entry into the United States in May of 1941 to the purchase of our first home in October of 1958. Never did I dream prior to 1941 that I would be so lucky as to have all these things happen to me. I am sure that it was "WITH GOD'S HELP."