To the Memory of Paul and Eva Stein Waldoff

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Introduction

Since leaving Mississippi more than sixty years ago, I've often been asked, "How did your parents from Russia come to settle in Mississippi?" It wasn't a question I heard when growing up there. Our small Jewish community in Hattiesburg of approximately thirty-five families in the 1930s and 1940s consisted almost entirely of immigrants from Russia and Poland and their children born here. The first few arrived around the turn of the century, followed by others well into the 1920s, including my father in 1924. In the 1940s his small department store was one of six clothing stores and one shoe store owned by Jewish merchants on the same side of the street of one city block. For the first eighteen years of my life, my parents' history didn't seem so unusual. I heard the question for the first time during my freshman year at Northwestern. Although it continued to turn up on occasion in the next fifty-plus years, I gave it little thought. But several years after I retired from the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, where I had been an English professor since 1967, my daughter Jessica asked that very question and this time it struck a deeper chord. By then both of my parents had been dead for many years. She had never known my father, who died two years before she was born, and she knew my mother only from brief visits during Jessica's first nine years.

I began answering her by describing how my father's family came here, mentioning how their experience was part of a general pattern in which networks of immigrant relatives helped one another (what historians call chain migration), and then added several of my parents' stories about their early lives in Russia and Mississippi. Jessica said the stories were fascinating. What I heard in my answer, however, was a lot of stumbling and uncertainty, making me realize how little I actually knew about my parents' experiences as young immigrants who had to learn a new language, find a way to make a living, adapt to the laws and customs of segregation in Mississippi, and survive the Great

Depression. Trying to answer Jessica's question proved to be an unsettling and eye-opening moment that would eventually lead me to begin researching my parents' experience as young immigrants and to discover that their story was indeed remarkable.

The first step was deceptively easy. I began to make a record of my parents' memories of experiences and events, as they had been told to me, from their early lives—for example, that my mother's father had been stripped and beaten during a pogrom in Warsaw in 1905, that she had once heard Trotsky speak, and that guards at the Russian border with Romania stuck pitchforks in the hay wagon in which she and other emigrants were hiding as they made their escape out of the Soviet Union in 1921. I also recalled that when I was eight or nine years old she showed me two small pencil drawings her brother Scholym had sent her (which now hang in my sister Fay's home). He had been an artist before Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union, become a soldier, and been killed at the front in 1942. Although tinged with sorrow, and at times interrupted by an outburst of bitterness against the tsar more than twenty years after he was assassinated, her stories gave me a sense not only of certain deep resentments she still harbored about her life in Russia, but also of the strong bond she felt with the family she had left behind.

My father's memories, by contrast, were rarely about his family and more often about his observations and experiences. When the Germans occupied Kiev in the last year of World War I, he told me, they brought a much-needed sense of order to the city. In recalling how he'd once sold cigarettes on the streets of Kiev, he emphasized that he'd been able to do so with some success until the Bolsheviks came to power and confiscated all the tobacco he had kept stored in a loft until it could be rolled into cigarettes. He told my brother Milton that in his first year as a peddler in Mississippi, walking from one small town to another, he at times had to get off the road and hide in the woods to avoid being robbed. He once surprised me with the story, still amused by it himself, of a man who had come to his store to see what a Jew looked like, believing Jews had horns.

But it was the story my father's sister Rose told a day or two after his funeral in 1962 that stood out above the others: their father had left for America without first informing his wife, in effect abandoning her and their three children, something neither my father nor my mother had ever said a word about. Then, following, my mother's death twelve years later, my sister Fay, my brother Milton, and I found a batch of letters in Russian my father had written to my mother while he was courting her. Once we had them translated, they proved

to be a treasure trove. Here was my father in his own voice as a young man of twenty-one on his way to America with his mother, sister, and brother, revealing his thoughts and feelings to my mother and, after they were both here—he in New York, she in Baltimore—telling her of the conflict with his parents over his plan to go to Mississippi. We also found other letters from my mother's family, most of them in Russian, a few in Yiddish, which we added to a small collection of documents and photos. Later I found ship manifests, naturalization papers, and census records that enabled me to establish basic information about dates, ages, name changes, and the like.

Yet there was so much more still unknown to me. My parents' memories and the family letters referred at times to historical events and to the social and economic restrictions under which Jews in Russia lived. I began to see that I needed to know a great deal more if I had any hope of understanding how my parents' early history had shaped their lives before they arrived at Ellis Island. Even though I had grown up in Hattiesburg, I knew little about its history at the time my father went there, and nothing about his experience as a Jewish peddler going from one small town or rural community to another. I also knew very little about the history of our Jewish community, both the years before I was born and the years after I had left Hattiesburg. I realized I had a lot to learn. I began reading memoirs and histories of Jews in Russia, of their experience as immigrants, of Jews in America and in the South, as well as histories of the South, of Mississippi, of peddling, and other related subjects. I also searched through city directories, the Ellis Island website, court records, more than twenty years of the old *Hattiesburg American* on microfilm, and other materials held in archives in Hattiesburg, Jackson, New Orleans, and Cincinnati.

One of my father's stories of a long-forgotten incident in the history of the Jewish community in Hattiesburg proved to be a turning point in my research and helped me to understand the larger story beginning to take shape in my mind. His memory of the incident, mentioned to me only in passing when I was a teenager, and about which I failed to ask any questions, began to haunt me. Chapter 3 is devoted to it. It concerns a young Jewish man—at seventeen, perhaps more boy than man—who with his black accomplice robbed a local gas station in 1931 and was tried and convicted of a murder committed during the robbery. The story of the murder, trial, appeals to the Mississippi Supreme Court, and strange death of this young man in his jail cell, I would come to see, revealed the underlying fear with which Jews in Hattiesburg lived in the 1930s, despite their generally positive but qualified acceptance by the predominant white Gentile majority and their eventual financial success.

The more I pondered this story, the more I began to understand how the concerns in my father's memory of the case and the fear generated in the Jewish community were inseparable from the larger story of Jewish life in Mississippi, a story that reached a climax during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

Two men who played important roles during those years were Rabbi Charles Mantinband of B'nai Israel Congregation in Hattiesburg and my brother-in-law Adolph Ira Botnick (known to everyone as "B") of the Anti-Defamation League. Rabbi Mantinband arrived in the fall of 1951 when I was a junior in high school. At that time, I failed to appreciate how fortunate I was to know him and be able to meet with him to discuss questions I had about Judaism and, more generally, religion, as well as to benefit from the generous concern he showed for me. It was only after beginning the research for this book and reading his correspondence, diaries, and published essays, as well as essays about him, that I learned of the courage and wisdom he displayed during the crucial years of the civil rights movement and saw its significance for the story of Jewish life in Mississippi I was writing. His congregation wanted him to maintain the long tradition in the South of Jewish silence about segregation. As a tiny minority, they feared for their personal safety and financial security. He understood and sympathized with their concerns, but he also saw segregation as "the supreme sin of our day" and a "monstrous" evil, and he felt bound to speak out against it.

A year after he left Hattiesburg in 1963 for a pulpit in Beaumont, Texas, "B," whom Rabbi Mantinband had recommended for a position with the ADL in Atlanta, was promoted to regional director (for Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi) in the spring of 1964 and moved with Fay and their three children to New Orleans. He was suddenly thrust into what would become the most violent years of the civil rights struggle in Mississippi, 1964 to 1968, when the Ku Klux Klan directed a terrorist campaign against Jews, bombing the synagogues in Jackson and Meridian, as well as the home of Rabbi Perry Nussbaum and his wife in Jackson. As a result of his work with local law enforcement officials and the FBI in their efforts to apprehend the perpetrators, "B" himself became a target of the Klan's best-known assassin, Byron De La Beckwith, the man who had shot and killed Medgar Evers in Jackson in 1963. The individual roles of Rabbi Mantinband and "B" form an essential part of the story of Jewish experience in Mississippi in this memoir.

Since much of the memoir is based on events and experiences in Russia and Mississippi either before I was born, while I was young, or after I had left

Mississippi, I've had to rely on various primary materials and historical studies to inform and supplement the basic story I knew from my parents' memories, my own experiences, and the recollections of others. In telling the story, I've made liberal use of quotations from letters, diaries, memoirs, newspapers, histories, and the recollections of family and friends in an effort to be as true as possible to actual events and experiences. My aim has been to let the people who lived the story be heard in their own voices and in that way to bring them to life, to the extent one can, on the printed page. But I sensed early on, and came to feel ever more strongly the deeper I got into the story, that my wanting them to be heard in their own voices came as much from my being haunted by memories of those I had known as it did from the more rational concern for accuracy and truth. I realized it was the increasing recurrence of those memories as I got older and the relationships at the heart of them, still very much alive for me, that was driving me to write the story this book tells.

CHAPTER 1

From Russia to Mississippi

My father saw my mother for the first time in the office of the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society in Bucharest in November 1921. They had heard of each other's family while still in Belaya Tserkov, a small city southwest of Kiev, and would learn during their courtship that their fathers had once known each other in Warsaw. But it was only after she had died and my sister, brother, and I discovered my father's letters to her and had them translated that I learned he had a vivid memory of their meeting and the time they spent together in Bucharest. In a letter he wrote to her five months later in Bremen, a week before his ship would leave for New York, he tells her he's sitting and holding a small picture of her in front of him: "Looking at the eyes, the whole period of our meeting presents itself: the house of Trakhtmanaya, Elizabeth Boulevard, the steps of the butcher, the first days of your move, the fence, your foot . . . everything!"[1] In another letter, he again says he's holding the picture and tells her he's enclosing one of himself on the back of which he's written that his "image" would have to substitute for the "original" "until we meet again."[2] I wish I had the picture of her he mentions, which may have been a duplicate of her passport photo. But I have another from that time in Bucharest in which she's sitting with a woman friend who's smiling and more fully in the light. My mother, with her long black hair falling across her forehead, her head turned towards the camera at a slight angle, leaving her half in light, half in shadow, looks out from the darker side of the photo. Although the pose she adopts may have been suggested by the photographer, and although my father would have seen her in many other settings and circumstances during those four months in Bucharest, he must have seen her often in the striking way she appears here.

They looked back on that time as an especially happy period in their lives. My mother told me they used to take strolls at night with other young emigrants under the light of the streetlamps alongside one of the grand

My mother (right) with a friend in Bucharest in 1921 or 1922.

boulevards of the city, presumably the one my father mentions in his letter, Queen Elizabeth Boulevard. But it was nonetheless his fault that her English wasn't better, she liked to complain, because too often he persuaded her to go out with him when she should have gone to class or spent her time studying. For my father, their first meeting appears to have been one of love at first sight,

but for her, with none of her letters from that time to reveal her thoughts and feelings about him, only the fact that she'd saved his letters for five decades, leaving them to be found after her death, I have to assume that it was at some point during their time together in Bucharest when she came to know him and to return the feelings he had for her. In the next three years, however, as I would learn from his letters, there would be long separations, many uncertainties, troubling differences, and postponed meetings until they were married in January of 1925.

She was the fifth of seven children and the third of three daughters. Her oldest brother, Abraham Stolin, had left for America in 1914 and by 1920 had done well enough to be able to offer to bring other members of the immediate family over. But she was the only one interested. A half-century later, and after her death, her youngest brother, Joseph, writing from Kiev, remembered her as "a girl with rosy cheeks and braids almost down to her heels. Willful, energetic, full of the joy of life, stubbornly realistic, she alone of the large family, then, set off on the long journey."[3] Much of what he says about his young sister rings true to me about the woman I knew as my mother. But as much of her character and spirit Joseph was able to capture in so few words, she was a far more complex person than could be conveyed in a couple of sentences. She was extraordinarily capable at any task she took up and she demonstrated remarkable courage in different periods of her life, beginning with the decision to seize

My mother's parents Malka and Moishe Stolin, with sons Lev and Joseph.

the opportunity for a new life in America. One reason she may have been eager to accept her brother Abe's offer and leave Russia, however, was that she hadn't been allowed to continue in school because of a severe case of psoriasis that left parts of her body scaly and her skin broken with sores. With some bitterness, she told me she'd been made to feel like a leper. My father saw the disfiguring effect of the disease and the anguish it caused her during their time together in Bucharest. After they had both been in America for some months but were living in different cities, he in New York, she in Baltimore, he wrote to her about a young woman he saw in night school who suffered from the disease: "By the way, in my class there is a girl who has *that* on her face, not to mention the other parts of her body. She has not been in school for a few days, but will probably come back. Every time I look at her, I cannot listen to the teacher, remembering every time the separate scenes of your suffering seen by me." He thinks this girl's condition is far worse than my mother's and he tries to reassure her: "You cannot imagine, Eva, how you should now enjoy yourself, dance and be happy with life. This girl is thin, as if tortured. One can see by her face that she suffers much from it."[4]

It may have been as a result of her experience with psoriasis that she began training as a nurse, perhaps working as a nurse's assistant, while still in Russia. I have a photograph of her dressed in what appears to be a white uniform. She kept her Russian textbook on skin diseases and I remember from my childhood being both fascinated and repulsed by the full-page color pictures of diseased arms, legs, necks, and other parts of the body disfigured with ugly sores. To persuade her parents to let her leave, she had used not only her wish to go to America but also the need to find a treatment. In one of her father's letters to her while she's still in Bucharest, he urges her to give up her "ideas" and come home: "Eva, you know full well that I was against your trip to America. But on the other hand, I hoped with God's help you would find a health resort so that you can straighten things out. . . . Let God help you . . . and then come home." His pleading then becomes insistent: "Your mother misses you terribly. As you already well know how she can. . . . If I had known earlier that your mother would miss you so terribly and sadly, then I would never have let you go. . . . I hope to God you will recover and come home. In any event, as God grants quickly, do come home."[5] But the psoriasis continued to disturb her. She told my father she often couldn't think of anything else. She may have been afraid that discovery of it in a medical exam would result either in denying her passage then or entry into the United States later. The extent to which she felt disfigured is reflected in the concern my father showed for her in a letter he wrote from

Bremen warning her about the boarding procedures for immigrants. Among East European immigrants, the German route (most commonly through Hamburg or Bremen), in contrast to ports in Holland, Belgium, and France, had for many years become notorious for its "severities," especially the required bath.[6] Familiar with the procedures from his mother's and sister's experiences, he offered advice: "I just this minute remembered that when you have to leave, they will take all the women to common baths and everyone in one room to see the doctor. . . . I suggest the following: stop off before leaving to see Professor Nikola and get a document with a letter, written in German, requesting that you not be taken together with all the women because you don't want the other women to know about it."[7]

She was on her way to Baltimore to live with Abe and his wife Anne. Like other Russian-Jewish men, he may have had more than one reason to emigrate, not only the restrictions on life in the Pale, the pogroms, and reports of opportunities in America, but also, as a young man who had just turned twenty-one in April of 1914, fear of being conscripted into the army. His son Buddy suggested still another reason when I asked him a few years ago about his father's decision to emigrate. He remembered his father's "adventurous spirit," never hesitating to try something new. He'd already sought opportunities in Warsaw and Odessa. In June of 1914 he boarded a ship at Emden, Germany, and arrived in Galveston in July.

Galveston had not been a port of choice for most Jewish immigrants until 1907 and became one then for only a relatively small number. Jacob Schiff, the distinguished German-Jewish banker and philanthropist, had for a number of years been interested in diverting new Jewish immigrants away from New York and the other eastern port cities, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Charleston. Because they tended to settle in these cities, especially New York, he feared their steadily increasing numbers would result in greater anti-Semitism. He lobbied successfully for the passage of a bill to establish an immigration station at Galveston and then personally financed the establishment of an office of the Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau there.[8] How did Abe become one of the relatively few Jewish immigrants to arrive in Galveston? He may have learned about the Galveston Plan from advertisements and literature distributed by the Jewish Emigration Society, which was based in Kiev and actively recruited emigrants. Participants in the plan received funding, along with promises of relocation and employment. To a young man emigrating alone and without the kind of financial help from a relative in the States that in just a few years he would be able to offer members of his family, the funding must have

been an added inducement to his adventurous spirit. He would be traveling on the same ship with his and my mother's first cousin, Barney Auerbach (whose mother, Chaia Stolin Auerbach, was the sister of Abe's and my mother's father, Moishe Stolin). They were lucky in their timing, though it wasn't all luck. I've recently learned from my cousin Maurice, Barney's son, that Barney had been warned by his father that war was coming, a fear that may have been based on what he knew of the Balkan wars of 1912–13. Abe and Barney arrived on July 6 with 181 other immigrants, eight days after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo. On July 23, fifty-six Jewish immigrants arrived and they were the last to arrive as part of the Galveston Plan. In August, World War I began, and the Galveston Plan was shut down a few months later.[9] Barney had been promised a job by a merchant in Hattiesburg.[10] The job may have been arranged with the help of HIAS, the Industrial Removal Office, or the Jewish Immigrants' Information Bureau in Galveston. Abe's first destination was Nashville, presumably because one of those agencies had found a job for him there. I was able to find an Abraham Stein (single) in the Nashville City Directory for 1915, but not for 1914 or 1916. By 1916 he was in Hattiesburg, probably because he had stayed in touch with Barney. There he would meet Anne Greenberg, marry her, become the owner of a clothing store, and remain there—except for the years 1920 to early 1923 in Baltimore, where they would move to take care of Anne's dying father—until 1932.

A striking irony of the Galveston Plan is that it was conceived and initiated by wealthy German-American Jews such as Schiff who wanted to help their fellow Jews from Eastern Europe seeking an escape from the anti-Semitism of the Old World but who feared that those same Jews would cause an escalation of it in the New. Their fear intensified in proportion to the steadily increasing number of Jewish immigrants arriving and settling in New York or one of the other port cities on the East Coast at the beginning of the twentieth century. Having come here in the previous century, achieved a considerable measure of financial success, fought in the Civil War, and made strides toward assimilation without giving up their Jewish identity, these German-American Jews were embarrassed by their co-religionists from Eastern Europe. What the newcomers needed, they thought, was "more polish, less Polish," something Buddy told me he remembered being said about—as well as to—Jews from Eastern Europe. It was, according to historian Stephen J. Whitfield, among "the standard instructions that *Ostjuden* received."[11] It's not surprising that the new immigrants came to resent the sense of superiority they perceived in the way the German Jews treated them or that they mentioned to their children the resentment they

felt. My father was not alone in believing German Jews took a condescending attitude towards other Jews, meaning those from Eastern Europe.

The German-Jewish community's fear of *Ostjuden*, however, was not an unusual experience among ethnic groups. "Intraethnic hostility was by no means uncommon in American history," historian Howard Sachar points out. "Italian and Irish immigrants faced a similarly cool reception from their nativized kinsmen. So had German Jews themselves at the hands of the Sephardic community." What concerned American Jews most about Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe wasn't their poverty or the extent to which they would need financial help. It was their striking differences in appearance and religious practices, which they feared would stir anti-Semitism and impede the progress toward acceptance and assimilation into American life made by those Jews already here. With "their outlandish garb and exotic Yiddish patois, their often fundamentalist version of religious Orthodoxy, their evident unfamiliarity with hygiene, the newcomers projected a gauche, even terrifying image to their Western fellow Jews." Sachar believes that "the reaction of America's German-Jewish community was one less of snobbery than of plain and simple culture shock." Yet, as he also points out, that same German-Jewish community worked hard to defeat anti-immigration bills in congress. Those that made it to the desks of Presidents Cleveland, Taft, and Wilson were all vetoed and it was the German-Jewish community's efforts that made the difference.[12]

Upon arriving at Ellis Island, my mother's name was changed from Yoheved Stolina to Eva Stein, using the new surname Abe had adopted. Her journey to this country, unlike my father's, was beset with many difficulties. Aside from her parents' objections and the disease she tried to conceal, she encountered problems at the border between the Soviet Union and Romania. I don't know if in 1921 the new Soviet government was continuing to require, as the imperial government had, that emigrants get an exit permit. Under the tsar, the permits had been so difficult to obtain that most emigration, between 75 and 90 percent, was illegal.[13] Needing help in getting a permit may have been the reason my father turned to a friend in the Communist Party when making arrangements to emigrate. But the group my mother was with, she told me, had to pay off guards and cross the border hidden in a wagon covered with hay, only to face more guards on the other side who at times would randomly stick pitchforks into the hay looking for illegal immigrants. Then, after several months in Bucharest when she was seeing my father and learning English, her first application for a visa was rejected. Later, after obtaining a visa, her departure was again delayed, this time by a vindictive official.

Aunt Rose, Grandmother Celia, and Uncle Ben, with Norman and my father Paul behind them, in Bucharest in 1921.

When he asked her about the book she was holding, she handed it to him and said, "You can read. Read it yourself." He told her to step aside and refused to let her proceed. For many years I thought the book was the nursing textbook she had brought with her, but on another occasion when she recalled the encounter with the official, she told my wife Alice it was *Anna Karenina*. As much as I would like to know the title of the book she was reading then, it's her feisty answer that's the most striking feature of the story. Despite minor variations in the story each time she told it, the official's question and her reply remained the constants in it.

When I asked her what happened then, she said the captain of a Turkish ship, an elderly man standing nearby, intervened in her behalf. He offered to take her to Constantinople and from there she could travel to America. That's what she did. The only thing I remember her saying about the captain is that he looked after her and treated her like a daughter. She remained grateful to him. Although she liked to think of herself as a "free-thinking" woman, something my father mentions in one of his letters to her, she tended to look up to certain men in positions of authority like the captain, her doctor, and her lawyer, and the important men in her family—her father, her brother Abe, her husband and the father of her children, and, after he died, Milton. I don't know how long she

was on the captain's ship or in Constantinople, but she sailed from there on the *Madonna* and arrived at Ellis Island on September 1, 1922, five months after my father, and went to Baltimore to live with Uncle Abe and Aunt Anne (as I would come to know and remember them). She apparently gave up the idea of becoming a nurse and found work as a seamstress in a coat factory and as a clerk in a clothing store, though I'm not sure which came first.

When my father met her in Bucharest, he was traveling with his mother, sister, and younger brother. His father had emigrated in 1913, but the story of how he left the family remained unknown to Fay, Milton, and me until after our father's death. It was Aunt Rose, my father's sister, who in the days following his funeral in March of 1962 revealed the story to a small group of us sitting in my parents' living room in Hattiesburg. As the co-owner—with whom Aunt Rose didn't say—of a flourmill in Belaya Tserkov, he was often away from home for several days or a week making deliveries and taking orders. One day my grandmother received a postcard from him with a picture of a ship on the front and the following note on the back: "I am on my way to America. When I have saved enough money, I will send for you and the children." Aunt Rose's story was confirmed more than a half-century later by a cousin on my grandmother's side of the family, who left the Soviet Union for Israel in the 1980s and whom I saw several times when he came to the States for graduate study at Northwestern. Our maternal grandmothers were sisters and he had heard the story from both his grandmother and his mother. Whatever my grandfather actually said on that postcard, the story, condensed into the two short sentences Aunt Rose remembered, suggested to me the shock my grandmother must have experienced as she read his words.

He arrived at Ellis Island on December 18, more than eight months before the outbreak of war in August of 1914 and any subsequent interruption in mail service. But he wasn't heard from again for seven years. His failure to contact the family made me wonder how his nine-year absence affected my father. In one of his letters to my mother after she had arrived in the States, while telling her about his family's opposition to his plan of going to Mississippi, he reports that "father says I have lived with him only for 8 months and he did not know me before that time, because he left me when I was still a child."[14] I've often wondered if the check my father sent each year to Father Flannigan's Boys Home (popularized in a 1938 film my father liked, *Boys Town*, with Spencer Tracy playing Father Flannigan) and the sympathy it expressed for orphaned boys were in some way related in his mind to his own experience. He kept one of the thank-you letters from Father Flannigan under the glass top of the desk

in his office at the small department store he owned in Hattiesburg, along with pictures of our family and other memorabilia.

In telling the story of how their father left, Aunt Rose also told us he wanted to escape from a clinging mother and a demanding wife, implying he had no intention of staying in touch and eventually sending for his family. But in turning her story over in my mind many years later, and thinking about the first sentence of the postcard, "I am on my way to America," I wondered what knowledge he assumed his wife had and expected her to use in understanding what he was saying to her. What was there in the historical context of the time that would have prepared her to understand that brief, arresting sentence? I found the beginning of an answer in Mary Antin's first memoir when she described Jewish life in her hometown in Russia where, she said, "America was in everybody's mouth. Businessmen talked of it over their accounts; the market women made up their quarrels that they might discuss it from stall to stall; people who had relatives in the famous land went around reading their letters for the enlightenment of less fortunate folks."[15] Her father left Russia for America in 1891 and he and my grandfather were two of more than a million Russian-Jewish men, among them many husbands and fathers, who left their families for America between 1880 and the beginning of World War I, as did great numbers of men from Ireland, Italy, Greece, and other countries, most, presumably, with the intention of coming back for their families or sending for them after gaining a foothold somewhere, as Mary Antin's father did three years after settling in Boston.

While I knew that for Russian Jews anti-Semitism was a major consideration in the decision to emigrate, I knew little about the extent of it and the effects it had on individual lives that spurred mass emigration until I began to read about the severity of the restrictions—or disabilities, as they were also known—and desperate economic conditions in the Pale of Settlement under which most Jews were forced to live. Following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, Alexander III had imposed the old restrictions on Jews with a new force, as well as some additional ones, creating an "atmosphere of aggressive Orthodoxy and Russification" that became a spur to emigrate.[16] The restrictions were economically disabling. In addition to those on where Jews could live, there were others on the businesses and trades they could engage in, the number admitted to schools and universities, the number admitted to the bar, and the kind of medical practice Jewish physicians were allowed to have (private only, and no government appointments). There were also restrictions on religious organizations and on travel. These anti-Semitic policies resulted in the impoverishment of the Jewish population, forcing half of the people in