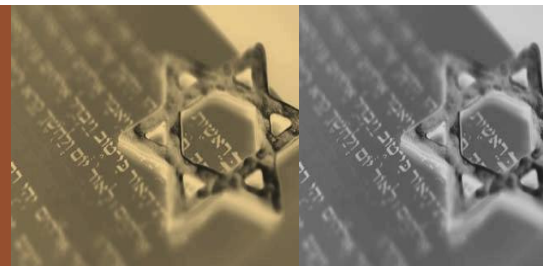


CHAPTER EIGHT: COMMUNITY NUMBER ONE THE JEWS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



The United States is the largest Diaspora community in the world and has been since the mid twentieth century. It is an extraordinarily successful community, on the whole, and there are many who argue that it represents a totally new chapter in Jewish history in that there has never been a community where life has been so good for the Jews and where Jews have been able to create such a strong community and at the same time contribute so greatly to the wider society. In many ways, it would appear that the Jewish community of the United States does not represent other Diaspora communities, simply because it is so large and so different. A closer look at the story, however, might suggest something different. It can be argued convincingly, that many of the processes that have occurred to the Jews of the United States over the last few generations do indeed reflect the processes in other western Diaspora communities, but simply on a much larger scale. This is one of the things that need to be examined. As with all the contemporary Diaspora communities we will examine the community by asking twelve questions about it. So, welcome to America!

1. Who are the Jews in the national community? Where did they come from? How many are there? What is their geographical distribution inside the country?

For the last half-century, the Jews of the United States have represented the largest Jewish community in the world. This is likely to change in the not too distant future as it loses its hegemony to the State of Israel but at this point in time it is still true. However, the question as to how many Jews there actually are in the community, is far more difficult to answer. Part of the difficulty is deciding who constitutes a Jew. To what extent do you count Jews with one Jewish parent as Jewish? Traditionally the answer is that you do if that parent is the mother, but there are many who consider themselves Jews in the American community, who have a Jewish father only. Indeed the American Reform Jewish community has accepted such Jews as officially Jewish. These and other questions, into which we will not enter, make it controversial to define a specific number of Jews. The officially accepted number is between 5.2 million and 6.1 million out of a total population of about 270 million.

Like many other Jewish communities, the American community has developed in a “layered” way through different immigrant groups of Jews spilling into the general community. The early Jews, almost all of Sephardi (Spanish and Portuguese) background started appearing with the early generations of European colonisation. They mostly settled in the ports and towns of the eastern seaboard and by the time of the Revolution, in 1776, their number was between 1500 and 2500. The nineteenth century saw a major wave of immigration in the mid-century years from



the 1820's to the 1870's. This wave, commonly called the "German" wave, in fact comprised Ashkenazi immigrants from all over Central Europe. They also started off on the east coast but soon started to penetrate westwards in a search for economic opportunities. Perhaps 200,000 immigrants came in these years and the total Jewish population in 1880 stood at around 280,000.

The 1880's see the beginning of what was to become the dominant wave in the community, the huge Eastern European wave that would bring millions in by the time that the United States changed its policy and closed down its open immigration policies in the mid-1920's. By that time over 3.5 million Jews lived in the U.S.

This community was augmented, amidst enormous difficulties and great controversy by many tens of thousands of European holocaust survivors in the immediate post war years.

More recent groups of Jewish immigrants include some 250,000 Israeli Jews who have left Israel since the 1970's. It is not clear to what extent many of these can be considered permanent additions to the community since, more than any other element, many insist, even after many years, that they see themselves as temporarily in America on their way to a return to Israel. For the moment, however, they are certainly there. Two other identifiable groups are the former Soviet Jews, the estimation of whose numbers varies from 150,000 to more than double that, and some 30,000 Iranian Jews who arrived during the nineties after the fall of the Shah. These represent only the large most identifiable units of immigration within the Jewish world. Plenty of other Jews from places as diverse as Syria, Latin America and South Africa can be found among the rich mosaic that makes up American Jewry.

Jews can be found all over the United States. Traditionally, for geographical reasons, the majority of them have been centred in the East and most especially in New York, by far the largest "Jewish city" in the world, but that percentage has been falling over the last generation. If at most times from the late nineteenth century through to the 1960's, around half of the U.S. Jews lived in the New York metropolitan region, the percentage started to fall off at that point and now the number is around a third. In general, over the last decades Jews have moved south and west. California and Florida have each accumulated very large communities. More and more Jews have moved out of the cities and into the suburbs or even further out causing an unprecedented dispersal of the population.

2. How can they be defined economically? What are their professions and occupations?

The general occupational pattern of Jewish life in the United States has provided a classic model of occupational development in the western, immigrant, communities of the Jewish world. In the nineteenth century, up to the large-scale Eastern European immigration, most Jews became involved in small scale trade, as pedlars or small shopkeepers before slowly working up the economic scale within the same sector. The late nineteenth century immigration, however, gravitated to the slums and the sweatshops of the big cities and became largely proletarianised (part of an



urban working class) in the process. The next generation moved away from this and started moving in one of the two classic economic directions of the second and third generation – business or the professions. The trend has continued in these directions with the addition of many extra directions over the last thirty or forty years. Large numbers of Jews have moved towards academia and others have gravitated towards the communications world and the arts, as newspaper journalists or in television or film.

3. What is the religious orientation of the Jewish community?

The religious orientation of the American Jewish community is highly diversified. It is also interesting in that as opposed to many other communities where modern forms of Judaism arose in time to challenge the control of the dominant traditional Orthodoxy, the two dominant forms of Judaism before the mass immigration of the 1880's and 90's were Reform and Conservative Judaism. The central European immigration of the mid-19th century created an impetus for religious innovation that placed its stamp on the community very early on. The Eastern European immigration created the basis for the rise of a strong Orthodox movement that has been present ever since. The immigration around the time of the Holocaust added strong Chassidic elements and fortified a Haredi community that has claimed a vocal place within the community.

The only real “homegrown” stream of American Judaism is the Reconstructionist movement that broke off from Conservative Judaism in the 1930's.

An assessment of which of these religious movements is currently healthier and growing would probably point to Haredi Judaism and Modern Orthodoxy as the two increasingly strong streams. The two largest streams, Reform and Conservative Judaism, seem in certain ways, to be on the defensive in recent years.

One interesting trend is that more and more American Jews – following the influence of the general culture – are talking about a search for meaning and spirituality. There is a clear feeling among many that the established streams do not offer what they are looking for and we see efforts by individuals in all of the different streams to open up and suggest answers for the new spiritual hunger. Congregations and streams that succeed in suggesting directions and answers are likely to become more attractive in coming years. Chavurot and non-denominational “Renewal communities” have become attractive to many in recent decades and quite possibly will become larger and larger, providing a challenge for the more established movements in the near future.

Traditionally, American Jewish life has organized around synagogue communities, but despite the fact that synagogue membership has actually gone up in the last few years, it is clear that large numbers of Jews find synagogue Judaism as something foreign and alienating. This has led to an increasing number of people defining themselves as cultural Jews or secular Jews. The institutional support for such definitions is not necessarily particularly strong as yet, but seems likely to grow.



4. What Jewish educational and cultural life is there in the community?

As far as Jewish education is concerned, it has become more popular in recent years as expressed in the rise of the Jewish day school. At present there are some 350 day schools in Jewish America, most of which are elementary. The majority of these are Orthodox (perhaps 80%) but the trend is growing much stronger in the non-Orthodox world. In the 1990's some 25,000 extra students are estimated to have joined the ranks of the day schools and the majority of these did so in the framework of non-denominational community schools. The percentage of Jewish students who attend at least Jewish elementary day schools stands at 29% at the moment and is rising. The move towards day schools within the Jewish community has grown so strong, indeed, that there is a major shortage of teaching and administrative personnel within the community. Also there is a search for large-scale funding that is going on in the realisation that the demand for Jewish schooling is likely to increase greatly on the future.

The reason for this concern with education sees to be a turn about for many Jews from the traditional melting-pot concern for a good general education out of a feeling that Jewish education could be safely relegated to supplementary (Sunday morning and weekday afternoon) school. This strategy clearly has not worked for many, the supplementary schools, on the whole failing to provide the sort of education that could provide an anchoring for a strong Jewish identity. As a result, among parts of an increasingly wealthy and educated community, a realisation has come that intensive Jewish education is more of a priority. Jewish camps of different kinds have also flourished in America for many decades and are an important feature of informal education, more so than the traditional youth movements that are stronger in other countries. Youth organisations, however, especially those connected with synagogues, have done well. A new and increasingly popular form of education is family education, an integrated inter-generational approach to education which is being ever more emphasised.

With regard to higher education, there are two major "Jewish" universities, Brandeis University and Yeshiva University, as well as a number of smaller colleges. There are, in addition, Rabbinic and educational centres connected with each of the major Jewish streams. Some of the greatest scholars in the modern Jewish world have been associated with all of these institutions. It is worth noting, too, that many general American universities have employed scholars to deal with various aspects of Jewish history, literature and culture. Around a thousand scholars of Jewish studies are estimated to be employed by American universities at present. This partly reflects – and perhaps partly causes – an increased popularity of Jewish studies among many young Jews.

One factor that should be singled out is the increasing number of Orthodox girls and women who are seeking a deep Jewish education, something that was denied to them in the traditional world of the past. Demanding the right to learn, they have



caused a minor revolution in Jewish studies within the world of Orthodoxy including the setting up of new institutional frameworks to enable that learning to occur.

As far as culture is concerned, this is a very broad field and can only be briefly mentioned. The Jewish press is perhaps weaker than it once was, but in other areas we see more and more initiatives. Arts festivals of different kinds (films, literature, music) are doing well and new initiatives in this field are common. Museums (not only dedicated to Holocaust memory) are becoming a much more prominent feature of Jewish communities and there are many initiatives to turn such places into educational and cultural attractions rather than passive monuments to a fading Jewish past. Jews are very evident in American culture and letters and substantial numbers of Jewish writers for example have been recognised over the years by the general community. What is interesting is that the output of many of these writers is itself becoming more noticeable Jewish, dealing with issues of Jewish life and Judaism above and beyond the more traditional issues of assimilation and anti-Semitism – i.e. interaction with the outside world, that have fueled countless previous works.

5. What is the situation of assimilation and intermarriage in the community?

There is no question that there is a great deal of assimilation in the American Jewish community and there has been for as long as the community has existed. The lure of the general society has proved extremely strong and coupled with a most tenacious melting-pot myth (i.e. the idea that the goal of Jews in America must be to become as American as possible, as quickly as possible) that has been active up to the last generation, it is not surprising that many Jews have lost a great deal of their distinctive Jewish identity in the struggle for acceptance.

If we confine ourselves to recent years, it seems that there are a number of factors that are working in different directions. On the one hand we have a definite change in the melting-pot ideal for an alternative ideal of multi-culturalism with an attendant legitimisation of ethnic pride has made separate community identity more acceptable. On the other hand, many young Jews have found little attractive in the relatively hollow and superficial Jewish life or Judaism that they have found offered up to them. As a reaction to this, we see an attempt to reach out to Jewish alternatives and a large number of potentially attractive initiatives have been launched over the past years. Many in the traditional movements, especially the non-Orthodox ones have begun to analyse the factors that render them unattractive to so many young people, and to try and improve the situation. Recognised authoritative organised religion is less attractive to many. On the other hand the search for spiritual fulfilment is on.

As far as intermarriage – or as many prefer to call it today, "out-marriage" - is concerned, the objective picture is far clearer, although the meaning of the picture is a cause of disagreement. The facts are as follows. Not only is there much more intermarriage than ever before – about 54% on a national average, and way higher in many parts of the country, especially on the West Coast and in small communities -



but there is more acceptance of it than ever before. The taboo of communal disapproval has clearly been broken for a large part of the Jewish community. Inter-marriage is an accepted part of Jewish life. Many see it as inevitable in an open society and some even see it as desirable. The non-Orthodox religious movements have gone towards a policy of outreach that condones – at least retrospectively – the practice of inter-marriage and tries to bring the non-Jewish partner into a positive relationship with Judaism. Inter-marriage workshops are common throughout the community. The argument that is not solved relates to the long-term effects of inter-marriage on the Jewish community. There are those who argue that it strengthens the community by bringing in “fresh blood”. Others are far less optimistic and believe that it is part of a continuing weakness that forces the non-Orthodox section of the community into larger and larger compromises.

6. Are there any major historical circumstances that affected the inflow or outflow of Jews to and from the community?

The truth is that almost every major historical event that has affected the Jews in one way or another over the past centuries has had an effect on the Jewish community of America. For centuries it has been seen as the first choice for many of the oppressed and starving all over the world and it has acted as a magnet for Europe’s “huddled masses”, conspicuous among whom have been the Jews. The Inquisition and Expulsion in Spain, the oppression and counter-revolution in mid 19th century Europe, the pogroms and poverty of Eastern Europe, the Holocaust, the fall of the Soviet Union and the consequent anarchy and the difficulties for the Jews in post-revolutionary Iran – all these have been the foundations on which the American Jewish community has been built.

In addition the rise of Israel has, of course, had an immense effect. Restricting ourselves here to the direct demographic implications of Israel’s rise, we see that there has been a two-way result. On the one hand, almost 75,000 American Jews have gone on Aliyah – in smaller numbers, perhaps it should be noted, than the overall community numbers would suggest. On the other hand, America, more than other places in the world, has served as a magnet for hundreds of thousands of Israelis who have been disappointed, for whatever reason, with their own land.

7. Are there welfare problems within the Jewish community? Are there welfare organisations within the community?

The American Jewish community is on the whole a wealthy community. Some of its members are among the wealthiest people in the world. The average annual income of American Jewry is around \$50,000. This is not just a stereotype; it is reality. However, the image of a rich and fortunate American Jewry should not disguise the fact that there are pockets of genuine poverty within the community. A recent survey estimated that there are about 180,000 Jews below the poverty line in New York alone, a number that is believed to have increased by some 40,000 in the past decade. The main groups who are affected are the recent Soviet Jews – presumably a temporary step as an immigrant group on the way to integration with better



economic prospects – and Haredi Jews, a more structural problem connected with lifestyle and education. In addition, there are plenty of problems of poverty and welfare among the elderly. The tendency of the Jewish family – like the American family as a whole – to break down under the tensions and strains of modern life, has produced a high divorce rate and many single parents – especially mothers – who also contribute to the economic problems within the community.

The major Jewish agency dealing with poverty and welfare is the Jewish Welfare Board founded in 1917. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee founded three years earlier and dedicated to helping needy Jews all over the world, was, perhaps significantly, the first American Jewish institution that cut across all denominational boundaries and united American Jewry.

As far as more general problems are concerned, we find within the Jewish community most of the problems that plague American life as a whole: drug abuse, alcoholism, Aids, homelessness, domestic violence and abusive families, can all be found within the Jewish community. The number of Jewish agencies that deal with social problem is large and has got larger in recent years as there has been more recognition that these problems *do* exist in this most affluent of communities. Large amounts of energy have been expended in recent years on trying to educate the community to the reality of the situation.

8. What is the feeling of physical security of the Jewish community? Has there been and is there today a problem of anti-Semitism?

Unlike the situation in Argentina and France, the American Jewish community has not suffered much from anti-Semitism. In the immigrant neighbourhoods at the turn of the last century there was plenty of local rivalry between different national groups who used negative stereotyping as part of their arsenal against other groups. Anti-Jewish feeling existed to be sure, but no more, perhaps, than anti-Irish or anti-Italian feeling.

The major period of anti-Jewish feeling was in the inter-war period and in the years immediately after W.W.2. It was at that time that America closed many of the doors to its clubs and other institutions to the Jews. Whispering campaigns about the Jews were common in those days too. Rarely did any of this break out into full-fledged violence, however. Since that period, the amount of anti-Jewish feeling in official America has fallen away and to a large extent anti-Semitic rhetoric has been restricted to extreme right fringe groups. The one community where there has been repeated tension over the last generation is the black community. Here it seems that economic factors (“exploiters” and “exploited”) have played a role: once again, the amount of rhetoric exceeds the amount of actual violence.

With the recent outbreak of Moslem fundamentalist terror against the west, and the mention of Israel as a focal point or even a cause of the tension with the west, it remains to be seen whether this will have any repercussions on the local Jewish community. There are a number of Jewish thinkers and writers who have talked of a



new kind of anti-Semitism rising in the Moslem world against all Jews. Whatever the truth in the charge, it seems notable that the Jews of America are scared of terror attacks as Americans. They do not seem not noticeably scared of terror attacks as Jews.

There is one further thing to be noted here. The successful integration of America's Jews into the life of the American nation has been borne out recently by the near election of an American Jew – and an observant Jew at that – as Vice President of the U.S. The nomination which caused enormous excitement to break out among American Jews, and the fact that it was accepted on all sides of the political spectrum as a valid political move, say a great deal about the strength of the Jews in the American political culture.

Summing up, it seems true to say that of all the Diaspora Jewries in the world, the American community has been blessed with less hostility and more tranquillity than just about all others.

9. What are the major problems on the agenda of the Jewish community?

There are a number of major problems that the community is facing. Some of them have been mentioned. The question of assimilation and intermarriage poses serious question marks for the community. Whether or not intermarriage seriously harms the community demographically, it is clear that in general the increasing numbers of the community hide a worrying reality. The core of committed Jews, Jews for whom their Jewish identity is a core part of their overall persona, is clearly going down. The number of Jews who are not just consumers of Judaism for whom aspects of Judaism are an option if they are sufficiently attractive is clearly large. But the number of Jews who are prepared to give something to Judaism or Jewish life because they feel some kind of responsibility for it, is declining steadily. This is part of a larger universal western trend that hallows the individual and his or her autonomy and plays down the control of the collective over the individual or the individual's responsibility for the collective. This clearly poses a problem for any concept of Judaism that we have known in the past, which is based on commitment to a larger set of values. In this religion of personal autonomy, the individual is only committed ultimately to him or herself.

A related problem is finding a grander cause that can unite the majority of American Jews and make them feel like part of a larger unity. The American Jewish community largely crystallised during the 20th century around certain causes. Helping oppressed Jews and aiding immigration and integration in the early years of the century: protesting the Holocaust and supporting the setting up of a Jewish state in mid-century: supporting the young State of Israel, rallying for freedom for Soviet Jews and to an extent for Ethiopian Jews and aiding their integration in the free world or in Israel. But those times have to a large extent passed. Where is the cause now? Perhaps Israel's current fortunes as a nation beleaguered by terrorism can provide a temporary focal point for some, but it will not be for all. American Jewry is clearly a community in need of a cause.



The problem of the relations between the different streams of Jewry is particularly acute in America. Streams dismiss and delegitimise other streams. The relations between them are acrimonious. Even here the concept of service to a wider Jewish community of כלל ישראל is problematic. The problem is made worse by the fact that sections of the liberal community have become more radical in recent years accepting patrimonial descent and gay marriages that can only cause schism with the halachic community. These are just some of the main problems that beset the community.

10. What are the demographic trends within the community? Can anything be said about the future of the community?

To an extent the predictions of demographic trends bring us back to the first point made in respect to demography. It depends on how you count Jews. However at a certain point in the future it seems likely that the community will shrink demographically as many of the more marginalised elements fall by the wayside without any meaningful subjective (or objective) connection to Jews or Judaism. But quite possibly, there will be a strengthened centre of more knowledgeable Jews of all denominations who will constitute a new basis for the collective. In this smaller but more knowledgeable group, it is a fair prediction that women will play a larger role than in the past, empowered with knowledge that will enable them to play new roles in the public Jewish sphere. It seems unlikely that large numbers of American Jews will be attracted towards Aliyah to Israel although one cannot discount the possibility of more Israeli Jews coming to America. As far as other Jews are concerned, it is impossible to predict. Will more Argentinian Jews, for example, respond to their present difficulties by seeking to move north to the United States? To an extent, this depends on what happens to Israel in the future. Israel and the United States will likely remain in the foreseeable future the chief addresses for Jews who find themselves in such trouble that they wish to leave their present community. The more attractive Israel becomes, the less America will be seen as the major option. In the reverse situation, the more attractive America is likely to remain.

11. What is the general contribution of the community to the U.S.A. as a whole?

America has been good to the Jews and it seems fair to say that the Jews have been good to America. They have made an enormous contribution to the country, well over and above their relatively limited numbers. The fact that they are a community which has always placed great value on education, has been a major factor in helping them to move upwards in society. Thus they have been a community which has provided a large percentage of educated and skilled personell to major sectors of American society. In recent years Jews have played key roles in American industry and economy, academia and culture. As mentioned many key figures in American literature have been Jewish. Names such as Philip Roth, Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud are familiar to all educated Americans. The film industry was also transformed in the early to mid twentieth century by a whole host of immigrant Jews



who became key figures and studio owners in Hollywood. Popular music would not have been the same without the contributions of artists like Bob Dylan, Simon and Garfunkel and Carole King. It is fair to say that the Jews have made their mark on American society and that just as America has transformed the Jews, the Jews have played a part in building modern America.

12. What is the relationship with Israel in the community as a whole?

American Jewry was very involved in the post-Holocaust years in the struggle for a Jewish state. In the first generation of Israel, too, the contribution of American Jewry was enormous. Many Jews in the community gave large amounts of financial and moral support to the young state. They were part of a generation that had known the reality of a world where Jews were vulnerable without a state of their own and they were determined to do whatever they could to make sure that the young state was as strong as possible. Israel was seen in ideal terms as a young state standing for a just and moral cause against a world of evil which had tried to destroy the Jews once (the Holocaust) and would like to do it again if given the chance (the Arab world). That feeling continued after the 1967 Six Day War, reinforced by an enormous pride in what Israel had achieved in the war. Since the seventies however, there has been the beginning of a critique among some sectors of American Jews about the policies that Israel has followed in the territories taken in the 1967 war. While some American Jews have strongly applauded the settlement effort and have provided large amounts of money to deepen it, the majority of involved American Jews have expressed doubts and unease about the policies of the various Israeli governments. The Lebanese war and the first intifada reinforced these feelings, and began to cause an attrition in the support of many American Jews towards Israel. To an extent the attempt to reach an agreement with the Palestinians and the terrible merciless attacks on Israel in the terror attacks of the Al Aksa intifada, brought more support for Israel, but these were accompanied by a strong critique of some of the actions of the Sharon government towards the Palestinians. Another effect of the second intifada was to make many American Jews, including strong supporters of Israel, frightened to come to Israel or to send their children to activities in Israel.

The result of all this is that on the whole many of the younger generation who have risen to adulthood since the 1970's tend on the one hand to take Israel for granted and on the other hand to be less unconditionally supportive towards all that Israel stands for. This is reflected in less financial and other contributions to Israel coming from the children of those who gave so freely in the pre-state and early state period. In addition, those young American Jewish leaders who are involved in intensive contact with Israel are more critical towards many aspects of Israeli society. The fact that non-Orthodox Judaism goes unrecognized in Israel is a major point of tension between much of the current leadership of U.S. Jewry and Israel. Many involved American Jews feel the desire and the need to be seen as partners with Israeli leaders in the shaping of a future for Israel as a Jewish state.

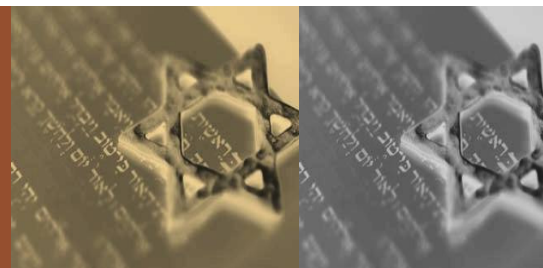


It is important to point out that contrary perhaps to popular image most American Jews have not visited Israel. Many feel no desire to do so and feel little connection with the state of Israel. In all, some 35% of American Jews are believed to have visited Israel. There is no question that Israel is no longer as attractive as it has been in the past for many young American Jews. On the other hand an initiative like the Birthright programme (תגליית) which already in its first attempt brought some 6,000 young people to Israel at the end of 1999, clearly has had widespread success in “turning on” many of the participants to Israel. The picture is unclear and full of contradictions.

We have mentioned that almost 75,000 American Jews have gone on Aliyah and at the same time America, more than other places in the world, has attracted hundreds of thousands of Israelis who have been disappointed, for whatever reason, with their own land. It is clear that for some American Jews the dream of Israel is intact, if a little more tarnished than was once the case, while for many Israelis, the American dream is still very much alive.



Introducing American Jewish voices.



Sophie is an American immigrant in the first years of the twentieth century. She came with her parents when she was in her mid-teens.

"I live in Chicago. I can't tell you how excited I was when I heard that we were going to America. We had friends and relatives who had gone before us and it was their letters, so enthusiastic, that persuaded my parents that the time had come to say goodbye to Rumania for ever. So we left our village and came. I remember how difficult our ship's journey was but I also remember the intense excitement of seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time. That made us all forget, at least for the moment, the difficulties of the journey. We had arrived! The immigration procedure at Ellis Island was scary. They examined us all very carefully for diseases, and there were those who were not allowed to come in. They were turned away. We were so worried that the same thing might happen to one of us. There were families who were split up when one member was found to be diseased. Btu we all got through. I thought that God was shining on us that day, like the sun.

However since then, I have to say, it has been very difficult. We live in a high tenement building with dozens of other families and the building is so dark. It is surrounded by the walls of other tenements on all sides. The sun can never penetrate here. There is no sun here and little God. Our lives are too hard and exhausting. In Rumania, we lived in a small town on the edge of a forest. Here you have to go for miles to find what they call a park, a piece of greenery with trees. We all work. I work in a factory, what is known as a sweatshop. We make cigars for rich Americans. About a dozen girls sit for tremendously long hours. We start our day when it is dark and we finish in darkness too. The boss - he's Jewish too - shouts at us a lot and we daren't answer back because we have no rights and can easily be fired. I still hope that America will be good to us but I have to say that I struggle to hold on to the hopes and dreams that I had when I used to think of America back home in Rumania.

One thing I'm sure of. If I marry and have children, I will do everything in my power to make sure that they don't follow me in this way of life. I'm sure that America – the good America – is out there for those who can take advantage of it. I'm sure that if you have an education, you can get a good job and rise among the misery of the masses in which I find myself today. My children will learn. They will be part of America, but not the one in which I find myself trapped today."



Josh is Sophie's great grandson. He is twenty years old and also lives in Chicago although he goes to college elsewhere.

"I barely know anything about my great grandmother. I know that she had a hard life and that she was very concerned that her children got an education. That much is family folklore, but more than that I really don't know. She had four kids – one died early and that left three. My grandfather was one of them. The truth is that he didn't get such a great education: he left school early to get a job in a small factory, but he was lucky. With the ambition that he'd received from his mother and his own determination and talent he rose up to become a manager in the business after only a few years. He was the one who managed to give a good education to both of his kids. My mother is a doctor in a large Chicago hospital and my aunt is a research scientist. For myself, I'm not sure what I want to do. I'm taking a liberal arts program and I have a feeling that I might like to try journalism. The fact is though that there's plenty of time. I want to travel and I am thinking of going to Europe as soon as I finish my degree. I spent a semester in my second year of college in Paris. That was terrific. I love the age of parts of that city. It's something that we don't have here in the States, at least not in the same way. I love old places. What's that? Israel? No, I don't think so. I know it's older than Paris, but it doesn't really appeal to me. I mean I'm Jewish and all that, and while I'm not very connected, I'm certainly not ashamed of it, but I'm American and America is my country. I don't think Israel would mean very much to me. I don't know anyone there and the truth is that I don't know anyone who's ever been there. On the other hand, I guess you never know what happens to you in life. Everything is so unpredictable. Let me get to Europe first. Then you know what? Give me a ring and make the suggestion again. Maybe I'll take you up on it. It might be cool. My parents would have a blue fit, though, what with all the danger there. Now that might be a reason to go!"

