SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

2023
Volume 26

PERMISSION STATEMENT

Southern Jewish History

Southern Jewish History is a publication of the Southern Jewish Historical Society available by subscription and a benefit of membership in the society. The opinions and statements expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the journal or of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

Southern Jewish Historical Society OFFICERS: Josh Parshall, *President;* Eric Goldstein, *Vice President and President Elect;* Anna Tucker, *Secretary;* Jay Silverberg, *Treasurer*; Jay Silverberg, *Immediate Past President.* BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Rachel Barnett, Gemma Birnbaum, Catherine R. Eskin, Karen Franklin, Joshua Furman, Stephen Krause, Jacob Morrow-Spitzer, Anna Tucker, Ellen Umansky, Ashley Walters, Steve Whitfield; Bernie Wax, z"l, *Board Member Emeritus*.

For submission information and author guidelines, see http://www.jewishsouth.org/submission-information-and-guidelines-authors. For queries and all editorial matters: Mark K. Bauman, Editor, *Southern Jewish History*, 6856 Flagstone Way, Flowery Branch, GA 30542, e-mail: MarkKBauman@aol.com. For journal subscriptions and advertising: Bryan Edward Stone, Managing Editor, PO Box 271432, Corpus Christi, TX 78427, e-mail: bstone@delmar.edu. For membership and general information about the Southern Jewish Historical Society, visit www.jewishsouth.org or write to PO Box 71601, Marietta, GA 30007-1601.

Articles appearing in *Southern Jewish History* are abstracted and/or indexed in *Historical Abstracts; America: History and Life; Index to Jewish Periodicals; Journal of American History; Journal of Southern History; RAMBI-National Library of Israel;* Immigration and Ethnic History Society *Newsletter;* and the *Berman Jewish Policy Archive* (www.bjpa.org).

Full-text content of recent issues is available to subscribing libraries on EBSCO*host* Academic Search Ultimate. Full-text content of most back issues is available free on Academia.edu at http://independent.academia.edu/SouthernJewishHistory.

ISSN 1521-4206

MEMOIR

From *Goldene Medina* to Gold Star Father: The Georgia "Jew Store"

by

Lance J. Sussman *

Memoirs of Oscar Dreizin of Butler and Macon, Georgia, c. 1948, ed. Lance J. Sussman and Karen Franklin[1]

Osher Drazenstock, later known in America as Oscar Dreizin, was born on July 17, 1890, in the village of Kublitz in the Vitebsk Province of the Russian Empire (today Kublichi, Belarus).[2] Family members lived in nearby villages as well as in Vilna (today Vilnius, Lithuania) to work and go to school.[3] Fleeing Russia after a brush with the law for distributing contraband political literature, Oscar travelled alone over land to Berlin and then to Antwerp with the belief that the streets in America were paved with gold. Shortly after his fourteenth birthday on July 19, 1904, Osher, as he was still called, arrived at Ellis Island where he was met at the docks by an older brother, Loui, who had previously immigrated to the United States. Smart and adaptable, Oscar quickly learned to speak English and Americanized. Typical of the period, Loui would introduce Oscar as his "green" brother.

Although initially unable to speak English and without any industrial skills, Dreizin found a variety of jobs in several locations to support himself. In search of opportunity, he moved to New Haven, Connecticut, back to New York, then to Sheboygan, Wisconsin, repeatedly relying on extended family for work connections and a place to stay before returning to the Big Apple a third time. Still skeptical of his prospects in New York, he decided to move to Hazlehurst, a small town in southeast Georgia, just

* The editors may be contacted at lancejsussman@gmail.com and karenfranklin@gmail.com.

prior to the outbreak of World War I to live with his bride-to-be, Rebecca (Becky) Coolik, a distant relative.[4] The Dreizins were married in Hazlehurst on January 30, 1916, by two rabbis from Atlanta.[5]

After he was excused from army service to fight in Europe against the Axis Powers in World War I, the Dreizins moved to Reynolds, Georgia, where other members of the Coolik family lived and operated a business.[6] Subsequently Dreizin, a naturally gifted salesman and astute businessman, opened his own "Jew Store" in Butler, Georgia, in 1920, where he remained for over twenty years and developed an extensive national network of suppliers.[7] By any measure, he exemplified an American—and Jewish—success story.

In Butler, a small town without a synagogue, the Dreizins raised their four children, Bessie, Miriam, Isaac (Ike), and Aaron, who was killed during an Army Air Force combat mission over Germany in January 1945.[8] Aaron's body was quickly recovered and interred in a community cemetery near Lübeck, Germany. Unable to recover from the loss of his son and with a worsening heart condition, Dreizin retired after the war, sold his business, and moved to Macon, Georgia, which had a larger Jewish community and a business school where he was determined to learn to write and type in English.

Taylor County,
Georgia.

At the suggestion of friends, Dreizin agreed to write his "Memoirs" to improve his new English language and writing skills, document his success "against all odds" in the *Goldene Medina*, as well as to share his battle with grief over the loss of Aaron. The memoirs do not cover the last twenty years of his life.

Oscar Dreizin died on June 27, 1968. His wife, Becky, followed him in death on May 14, 1977. They are buried in the Sherah Israel section of the Rose Hill Cemetery in Macon. Subsequently, a copy of the "Memoirs of Oscar Dreizin of Butler and Macon, Georgia," as well as a small collection of other family documents and photographs, were donated by members of his family to the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Bremen Museum in Atlanta. The complete Dreizin memoir is nearly 150 typed pages long. Because of space limitations and to sharpen the story line, the redacted version presented here has been reduced from fifty-one thousand to approximately eighteen thousand words.

Although a modest work by comparison, the Dreizin memoir is, in part, reminiscent of Abraham Cahan's classic 1917 immigrant novel *The Rise of David Levinsky* and of Stella Suberman's 1998 novel-like memoir, *The Jew Store,* which recounts her childhood and her family's business in Concordia, Tennessee. In the full memoir, Dreizin concentrates on the details of his business activity, select family memories, and occasionally includes some humor. He generally pays more attention to the names of places than to the dates of events and often provides extensive detail about his personal health challenges. Expressing no personal animosity toward his Black clientele or the Black community, Dreizin, nonetheless, is unfiltered in many of his racial comments, which reflect the racism of the American South during the first half of the twentieth century. Although much of his work concentrates on small-town life in Georgia during the 1920s, he only sparingly reports on antisemitism and does so mostly as a tactical problem more than as an existential threat. In general, he conveys the sense that he was accepted by his white, non-Jewish neighbors as a worthy but exotic member of the community and an honest businessman. His limited and sometimes veiled comments on Jewish life mostly focus on life cycle events.

From a historical perspective, several themes in the Dreizin memoir stand out. First, scattered across the manuscript are reports about chain migration and immigrant family networks. Beyond his natural business

acumen and luck, these sociological factors are essential in understanding Dreizin's success in America as well as that of many other Jews. Second, Dreizin was geographically mobile. As a child in Russia, he moved from village to village and then in America he followed the trail to success until, finally, at the age of thirty, he settled in the tiny town of Butler, where he found a niche to conduct business and raise his family.

Perhaps the biggest surprise in the memoir is Dreizin's limited discussion of antisemitism. Although he moves to Georgia at the end of the Leo Frank saga, he does not report on it at all, which, in a way, confirms the notion that the Frank lynching may have been of greater concern to the established German Jewish community than to the new eastern European immigrants. In reporting on the Ku Klux Klan in Butler during the 1920s, he seems more wary than afraid. Dreizin does not report on the infamous 1946 lynching of Maceo Snipes in Butler. As the memoir ends before 1950, he also does not report on the KKK in Georgia during the civil rights movement.[9]

Finally, his son Aaron's death during World War II dominates the end of the memoir. Earlier, Dreizin reports on his own willingness to serve during World War I. Despite both his sons' eagerness to serve in World War II, Dreizin does not link Aaron's willingness to fight to the Holocaust or a need to defeat Hitler and Nazism. Indeed, it was only around the time of Dreizin's death in 1968 that the Shoah emerged as a major theme in American Jewish life. Nonetheless, the Jews in Georgia and throughout the country were aware of Hitler's antisemitic policies from their beginning in 1933.

For Dreizin, Jewishness and Judaism served as facts, not fascinations. He never hid his Jewishness nor did he seek to amplify or nurture it. In that regard, he typified first-generation American Jews who mainly focused on adaptation, survival, and creating a base for their family's future. He does not blame anyone for the death of his son, but one must question if he did not wonder why his sacrifices were insufficient to justify his path to and success in America. Unsurprisingly and tragically, neither of the fallen airman's parents fully rebounded from the loss of their son over the skies of Germany toward the end of the war. In his humble way, Dreizin provides posterity with the moving testimony of grief-struck Gold Star parents, a stark reminder that even beyond "the last full measure of devotion," the pain of a family's loss endures.

-o0o-

Memoirs of Oscar Dreizin of Butler and Macon, Georgia, c. 1948, ed. Lance J. Sussman and Karen Franklin

CHAPTER I

I was born July 17, 1890, in the small town of Kublitz, Vitebsk Gubernia. This is in the [western] part of Russia. I am one of [many] brothers and was reared in a home of moderate means. My father was a teacher of Hebrew—not Yiddish. The charge for teaching at that time was $2.00 per month for a student. He had about twenty-five students, so you can see the "great" sum of money he earned each month. With that amount he was trying to rear his family and was giving us as good an education as he could afford at that time.

Most of my brothers were reared at home. As soon as they were old enough to understand a profession, they migrated somewhere else. For instance, my brother, Alter, had gone to the city of Vilna, where he started his education at the Yeshiva named Rahmiless Schul.[a] He took up bookkeeping and later on made a career of it. He had a very good knowledge of Hebrew, Russian, and some of the English language.

As I remember, when I was nothing but a kid of six years, my brother Alter came home. At that time, he was engaged to be married to a cousin of ours; she was my paternal uncle's daughter, Freda Leah Drazenstock. I remember it as though it were yesterday. I went to their wedding in Glubocka, fifty miles from our town. They took me with them as their chaperone. In those days, they had a funny idea that a bride and groom should not be allowed to go by themselves; therefore, I went as their chaperone! The wedding was a very nice affair. I remained in Cheder (school) in the town of Glubocka for one term.[b] I was staying with my grandparents. . . .

In the meantime, my brother, Loui, left for the United States. He was the pioneer of our brothers coming to America. Loui, as a boy, was powerfully strong. What he was doing in America for a living then, we did not know. He was a fellow to dream of big things all his life. The letters he wrote home pictured America very beautifully. Money was just lying on the streets, and you needed somebody to pick it up. I was young then and

---

[a] The Ramailes Yeshiva was an Orthodox Jewish yeshiva in Šnipiškės, Vilnius, Lithuania. It was established in the early nineteenth century, most likely in 1815.

[b] Glubokoye, now Hlybokaye, Belarus.

didn't have much to worry about. I decided that I wanted to go to America. That was where my troubles began. My brother Alter tried his best to convince me that things were not shining with gold as Loui had written home. "Do not believe every word that Loui writes," he said. "If he is doing so well, then why doesn't he send something to Papa and Mama to help them out, so they would not have to suffer trying to make a living?" . . .

At that time everybody in the city of Vilna was connected with some organization, [a] Socialistic organization. He was either a member of the bund of the Russian Revolutionary Force, which they called S. R., a terroristic organization.[c] If a higher official was not treating them right, they would kill him. Some member of the organization would go ahead and sacrifice his own life to carry out the order of the organization. They used to have demonstrations on the streets. They printed illegal leaflets and literature and distributed them among the masses of the people, which was not allowed by the Government. Whenever the police caught one with [this] kind of literature, they would arrest him, try him, and sometimes send him off for several years to Siberia, to a very hard jail. They used to punish them severely.

One morning an elderly salesman in the store where I worked asked me if I would like to make a couple of rubles (dollars). With no thought of becoming a lawbreaker, I said, "Oh, yes!" He said, "I will give you some leaflets and you distribute them among the working people on the street." I didn't know what they were. In fact, I couldn't read them and didn't realize the danger in the undertaking. I distributed the leaflets, and the secret police caught me in the act and threw me in jail. For four days and four nights they kept on questioning me. "Who is the one who gave you the literature?" I told them I did not know. I had sense enough to know that if I gave the names there would be more arrested, so I made up my mind I would stay there before I would tell them, and I didn't tell them a thing.

It was a political prison and they used to keep very hard criminals there. Everybody in Vilna knew that jail was a tough one. It was on Lukesskie Street and got its name from the street. They kept me there six months. They found out the name of my father and where I came from. Naturally, they sent a secret service man to investigate my family. That

---

[c] The Socialist Revolutionary Party, also Party of Socialist Revolutionaries or Social Revolutionary Party (the SRs, CP, or Esers, эсеры, *esery*; Russian: Партія соціалистовъ-революціонеровъ, ПСР), was a major political party in late Imperial Russia, both phases of the Russian Revolution, and early Soviet Russia. The SRs were agrarian socialists.

was about seventy-five miles from the town in which I was born, the town of Kublitz.

When they took my father on a cross examination, he did not know what was happening. He told them he didn't know a thing about it. "I know that I have a son in Vilna, but he is nothing but a kid. How can he be a revolutionary or belong to that organization? I can hardly believe it," he said. Mother and father were scared as the police threatened that if they didn't tell them the truth about me, they would send me to Siberia for the balance of my life. However, they could not help it.

One morning the keeper of the prison knocked on my door and said, "Get your clothes ready!" I didn't know what he was up to. They took me downstairs to the office and told me to go home and they would let me out on probation; that I would have to come twice a week to report to the police that my conduct was good. This was to prove that I was in town. I also was not allowed to leave Vilna without consent of the police.

The reason they let me go free was that the police had made a mistake in my name. My name was Drazenstock and there was another fellow whose name was Winestock. When they freed me, I went straight to my brother Alter's house. When I walked in, Alter got frightened. He said, "Why, I have just come from the police station, and they told me they were going to ship you out somewhere else. What are you doing here, and how did you get out of the jail?" He said there must be something wrong. Maybe this was a trick of the police.

"I will not let you stay here," he said. "You go to a neighbor's house to spend the night. I don't trust the police around here. Maybe they are playing a trick on you, and you had better hide out a while. Then we will see what we can do." That I did, and sure enough, about a couple hours later, here came the police to Alter's house, searching for me. They discovered their mistake. They had turned out the wrong fellow.

So, the next morning, my brother Alter went to a contraband (that means one engaged in smuggling emigrants over the Russian border to a different country) and traded with him for 100 rubles to take me out from Vilna and over the German border. Alter gave me 100 rubles in a tobacco bag and told me to buy a ticket for America after I crossed the border. . . .

I stayed for a couple of days, sleeping one night in one house and the next night in another. My father insisted I must stay at home until I got bar mitzvah (confirmed). I will never forget the day of my confirmation. After the confirmation we hired a peasant with an old wagon to take us to the railroad station, which was sixteen miles to ride. My mother baked me some good biscuits. She said to me, "Promise me you are going to be a good boy." I promised her that I would do the best that I knew how.

CHAPTER II

The next day Alter traded with the agent for 100 rubles to smuggle me out from Vilna and take me across the Russian border to Germany. There were 35 men in the crowd to steal across the border, and believe me, it was some job to do it. However, we made it. The first village we hit was on the German border. I can't remember the name of that town, but the man told us, "You are out of danger now; you are in German territory. From here on you are free. I am through with you." So, we hired another man to take us to Berlin. We stayed in Berlin 24 hours, and I will never forget the beautiful sights in that city. From there, we bought tickets to Antwerp. When we got there, they took us to a Turkish bath, gave us a real scrubbing and sterilized our clothes before they allowed us to stop in the boarding house.

We missed the boat, so I had to wait in Antwerp and get organized to buy a ticket for America. The price of that ticket was a little better than $100, and that was third class, down below, next to where cattle and freight were shipped. The name of the boat was the "Mississippi," and I will never forget the trip I had.[d] I do not exaggerate when I say we had a little over a thousand passengers, from every part of the world you can mention. There were Polish, Hungarians, Russians, some of them had escaped from the Russian Army and were seeking refuge in America, and some of them were just going to America like I was. We had a very nice trip. It took me thirty days to cross the ocean from Antwerp. A lot of the passengers were seasick. I was the only one that the trip had not affected, and I ate all the food I could get. I was strong and healthy, and my appetite was pretty sharp.

Baggage, I did not have. All I had was a suit of underwear and the clothes that I wore. Oh yes, I had two stiff collars. I was considered a city slicker. The passengers on the boat looked comical to me as they cried and prayed to the Lord to reach the shore safely. I didn't care much if I got drowned or got to America. I imagine I was too young to realize the danger of the trip. When the boat came in Friday morning, July 19, 1904, it was a very hot day. When I left Vilna, Alter wrote to my brother Loui to be sure to meet me at Ellis Island, and when he met me there I did not recognize him. His face looked familiar, but when he left Europe for America, I was about seven years old and the only thing I had was a picture of him that I had memorized in my mind, but I didn't know him.

When a man on Ellis Island asked me if I had a family in America, I said, "Yes." He said, "Who are they?" I replied "I have a brother in New York and uncles in New Haven, Connecticut, but I don't know them. I

[d] The *S. S. Mississippi* left Antwerp in July, 1906, for New York.

have my brother's address with me." He said, "Let's see it." I showed it to him. He asked me, "Would you recognize him if you saw him?" "I think so," I replied.

My brother was standing in the office waiting for me. The man in the room said, "Follow me and I will see if you recognize your brother. " When I got in the office, I saw a handsome looking fellow in a straw hat and a nice suit of clothes and the thing that attracted me was that he had a gold front tooth. He looked aristocratic and I thought, "He must have gotten rich in America. Look how he is dressed up." I pointed and said, "I think that is he." My brother Loui came up, grabbed me and said, "This is Osher! What a big boy you have grown up to be! Let's go!" I left Ellis Island with my brother. The first thing he did was to buy me a couple bananas and said, "Eat that and it will do you good." I had never seen a banana before in my life. I started eating the peel. He laughed and said, "Wait a minute," and he showed me how to peel it. . . .

The second attraction that came to my mind was when he put me on a boot black stand to get a shoeshine. I had never seen a Negro before in my life. This one was so black he shone. His teeth were white and his eyes were brown, and his face was so black he looked like a looking glass to me. I kept looking and I asked my brother in Jewish, "How come he is so black?" My brother smiled and said, "Well, if you stay in America as long as he has, you may be blacker than he is." I said, "Does everybody turn black in America?" He said, "No, that is a race they call Negroes. I will explain to you when you get home."

He took me to the ferry boat to get to New York. He looked at me and said, "Osher, how do you like these little boats to cross this ocean?" I answered, "Well, I think I had enough boat as far as I am concerned crossing the ocean." When the ferry boat stopped in New York we took a hack and drove to the elevator station, and he told me, "This is something different from what you have seen in Vilna." I said, "Oh, no, I have seen those kind of trains in Berlin that run in the air." He said, "That is right."

Then we came to the boarding house where he was staying. We climbed up five floors and I was wondering how high those people had to climb to get to their houses. The first thing my brother Loui did when he stepped into the kitchen was to holler out, "Here is the green I have. This is my green brother." I was a little bit embarrassed over the remark he made to everybody, "Meet my green brother who has just come from Europe." I was wondering why they used that word "green," as my face was really rose, and my cheeks were filled out. I looked ''green"? But I thought that must be the English language for a newcomer that they call green. I figured, "Well, I have learned one word in English!" . . .

The next morning when I woke up, Loui was gone. . . . I remembered the previous night Loui paid twenty-five cents for my supper. I did not have twenty-five cents with me to pay [for breakfast], so I decided I had better wait until Loui came home to ask him for twenty-five cents and then I would go and eat. [The landlady] said, "Oh, don't be a fool, go on and sit down and have a glass of coffee and a bagel (roll). Never mind about the twenty-five cents. I will charge you for it and when you go to work and make your own money, then you can pay me." I was very much obliged to her as I was hungry, and I could have eaten more than one bagel. I could have eaten a dozen if she'd had them. There were only two and one-half bagels on the kitchen table and I ate them.

Then she told her son, "Take him downstairs and show him the park." (They called it at that time Hester Park.)[e] That was the main park for the oldest immigrants who came to America and stopped in New York. Their hangout was there. You could hear people speaking all kinds of languages there, Jewish, Polish, Italian, and others were spoken.

While I was sitting on the bench in the park, I saw a young man who looked shabby. His feet were sticking out from his shoes. He needed a shave, and I don't believe he had bathed his hands for a long time. He walked up and began asking me something. I looked at him and I told him, "I don't speak English. I don't understand English. Can you speak Polish, Jewish, German, or Russian?" He said, "Yes. You are a Jewish boy, aren't you?" He started talking to me in Jewish and asked me for a dime or a nickel. I told him, "I am sorry, my friend, and, believe me, I surely would give it to you, but I have been in America only one day, and I didn't bring any money with me. I am waiting for my brother to come back from work and [will] ask him to give me a few cents." He turned and looked at me and said, "I hope you will have better luck here in America than I have had." He then walked away. That left me with a very bad impression. I was sitting and thinking, "Is that the land where gold is lying on the streets? My, my! I have never seen people in that condition in Vilna where I was reared." I was a little disappointed with the wonderful country. It wasn't what I had pictured before I came over here.

CHAPTER III

In 1908 things picked up a little and I went to the shop where I had worked at making suitcases. I was working and making $25 a week. I was

[e] Hester Park may be a reference to the current Hester Street Playground in the center of New York City's Lower East Side, the site of the largest Jewish settlement of eastern European immigrants in the United States beginning in the late 1880s. Hester Street was named after Hester Leisler, the daughter of Jacob Leisler, an insurrectionist executed by the English colony of New York in 1691, and is one of the area's most famous roads.

a boy who had not saved any money. I was spending every dime I made. I believed in nice clothes and as soon as I saved up $25 or $30, I put it on my back, for something new all the time. I never figured that someday I would need the money for bread in place of clothes.

Sure enough, in 1910 the shop started organizing into a union and went out on strike. I was out, too. We stayed out about three or four months, and I really was up against it. I didn't have money enough to buy my breakfast and I became despondent. One morning I decided I had enough of that foolishness of striking and went back to work. Mr. Jacklowitz, the fellow who owned that shop, took me back to work very gladly. He traded with me for $25 a week working steadily the whole year around.

At that time the strikers called me a strike-breaker and they became pretty rough with us. The pickets used to come with knives and pistols, and it was really dangerous to go to work. My boss got police protection and gave us a policeman to take us to the factory, and at night the same policeman used to take us home. Loui didn't like it very much that I should be an exception to the other workers. He tried to persuade me to quit the job. I said, "Loui, who is going to buy my dinner?" I said, "I have 'striked' enough. I have enough of it. I don't care what you or anyone else says. I am not going to quit. If the other workers want to, they can go back like I did. It is foolish to stay out when they know it is a sure loss."

Well, the strike was lost, and all the workers returned to their jobs. It looked to me as if they ignored me in the shop. They didn't speak to me and didn't have much to do with me. I didn't care much about it for a while, but later, I became worried, and I made up my mind that I was going to quit New York and go to look in some other town to see what I could do. . . .

From there I went to Sheboygan, Wisconsin. There I had some relatives whom I had remembered from Europe. I will never forget as long as I live when I came to Sheboygan. I stopped in one of the finest hotels there. It was the Hotel Foster, and the cheapest room there was $5.00 a night. I didn't have five cents. I checked in and stayed there two nights and the third morning a slip was in my room under the door, "Rent Due." I left my suitcase in the hotel and my little clothes and never went back for them. . . .

There was a man by the name of Mr. Stein who was making brooms. He had a small factory and was making brooms for the creamery and the farmers. So I went to him and asked if he would trust me with about fifty or seventy-five dozen brooms to sell for him on commission. The commission was 25 cents a dozen. The brooms were really heavy. I rented a horse that I paid $2.00 a day for, and I was to feed the horse. I started on Monday

morning with a load of brooms. The State of Wisconsin was making cream and the natives were Bohemians and German people. I could speak their language and they understood me. I became a businessman.

I will never forget one day I was driving from Sheboygan Falls to Sheboygan and a heavy cloud came up. The farmers in Wisconsin live a mile and a half apart. It was about dark, and I decided I would have to spend the night somewhere or sleep in my wagon. There I had no feed for my horse, so I drove up to a farmer's house and hollered, "Hello, hello!" Here came out a barefooted woman who looked at me and asked, "What do you want?" I said, "Well, can I sleep with you tonight?" Instead of asking "Can I sleep here?" I said, "Can I sleep with you?" She got hysterical and ran into the house. The first thing I knew, a big fellow came out with a shotgun and hollered at me. "What do you want?" I motioned to him, trying to make him understand. He asked me, "Do you speak Danish?" I heard the word Danish but that was all. "Do you speak German?" I said, "Yes."

My German was all kinds of a mixture of all kinds of German and Yiddish, but I made him understand what I had said, and he started laughing. It tickled him and he went in the house and explained to his wife that I was a foreigner, that I was absolutely innocent and I didn't mean to hurt her feelings. This quieted her, and they invited me into the house and gave me supper, a night's lodging, and hay and oats for my horse. I slept in the barn that night.

The next morning at daybreak, the farmer was up, and I was up, too. I had breakfast and tried to pay them, but the wife would not take the money. She did agree to buy two dozen brooms from me, though. I sold her the brooms and made 50 cents profit. After that, my stopping place was with them. They were Mr. and Mrs. John Peterson. We have been friends since then and I sent them a Christmas card for years.

CHAPTER IV

I will never forget the time when I reached New York. Loui was in business on Hudson Street. He was running a cigar, candy, stationery, and newspaper business. He and his family lived in the back of the store. A son, Nat, was about 4 or 5 years old, and they had another son whose name was Benny.

When I reached New York, I stopped in a cheap hotel on Hudson Street. In those days it was a fine hotel—a dollar a night! The next morning, I went out to look for Loui's place. When I walked into his store my sister-in-law, Janie, was so swell and so good that she grabbed me and kissed me and started crying. "I am surely glad to see you back in New York. Before anything else I want you to sit down and have breakfast with

From "The Memoirs of Oscar Dreizin of Butler and Macon, Georgia."
(Courtesy of the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History
at the Breman Museum, Atlanta.)

us." In a laughing way, she said, "How do you like our living quarters? Don't you think they are as good as Mr. Rockefeller has?" I sized up the situation and I saw for myself that there was no room for me to stay there. But we had breakfast and she kept on questioning me, insisting upon me telling her what I had done while I was away from New York. She did not know the trouble I had gone through out west. I never wrote them anything about it. Tears came into my eyes and she knew that I was choking and could not talk much. She became frightened and she looked at me and said, "Please tell me the trouble."

I said "Oh, Janie!" And then I told her all about the experiences that I had gone through. She started encouraging me and said, "Oh, what is the matter with you? You are young and there are plenty girls in New York. You can find a nice girl and go ahead and forget all about it. . . .

One day I went downstairs to Izzie Coolik, [who was married to my cousin, Hannah]. He was running a tailor shop on Henry Street, right across the street from where my brother Herman and I were living. While visiting with him I noticed a nice young lady there. I asked, "Izzie, who is that girl?" He said, "That is my sister. Becky, come here. I want you to meet our cousin." She kind of snubbed me; I didn't say anything but went on.

I started coming more often, thinking that I may see her again. Sure enough, I met her again. I kept on talking to my cousin and said, "Hannah, try to make a match; I like your sister-in-law." "Oh," she said, "You are nothing but a tramp. You don't mean it. Before I know it, you will go back somewhere. You don't stay in one place." I said, "No I'm in earnest." She said, "All right. " Then I found out that Becky had left New York for the South. She had an uncle who lived in Hazlehurst, Georgia, and who was in New York on a buying trip. I met him in Izzie Coolik's store. Izzie introduced us, saying "That is Uncle S. B. Freedman. This is my wife's cousin."

That man sized me up from head to foot and asked me, "What are you doing?" I said, "I am working in a shop, making suitcases." He said, "By the way, how would you like to go South? I am running a department store and I need help. I could teach you the business of running a department store." I hardly knew what to say, but finally, "Where are you living?" He said, "South." I said, "Where all the Negroes live?" He said, "There are plenty of white people, too." I said, "Well, I will see you about it." He asked me to meet him the next day in Izzie's store. I did and we went out for a walk. He talked to me at length and explained what was what in the South. He said, "After you learn the business, I am going to open a store for you. You will have an opportunity to work up some day

to be a rich man." I could hardly believe a word he said, but I thought, ''Maybe I might."

During his stay, my cousin Coolik and I talked to Mr. Freedman and told him I was very much interested in Izzie's sister, Becky, and for him to see if he could talk matters over with her when he went back to Georgia and if it would be agreeable for me to write her. Izzie said to Mr. Freedman to see if he could make a match between me and the girl I had fallen in love with and whom I finally married. Later, I had a letter from her uncle, S. B. Freedman, for me to get ready to come to Georgia. Well, I studied and talked the matter over with my brother Loui and his wife Janie, and they tried their best to talked me out of it.

"Why are you going to that crazy country where there is nothing but Negroes? We can't see any opportunity for you. Oscar, please study that matter over. It looks to us that you ought to have learned a lesson. You have been out West and you have suffered a whole lot and have not accomplished a thing. You came back to New York disheartened and broken and now you have that kind of wild wandering blood in you; you want to go again and try your luck. All right, you don't want to listen to us. We are giving you good advice, but go ahead and just remember, you will write us and ask for your train fare to come back. However, when you get to that stage, don't hesitate. We will try to send you a ticket to come back to the North."

I was somewhat angered over that remark, and I told them, "What in the world do I have in the North? Nothing but worry and aggravation, working and trying to keep up Herman and his wife and children. That is all right. I will take care of myself and [you] don't have to worry about me."

I was determined to try my luck in the South. So I went in to tell my cousin, Izzie Coolik. I told him I had decided to go to Georgia. He looked at me and said, "Listen, do you want to take a little tip from me? Why don't you buy a little ring to carry along with you? Maybe you will need it over there." I told him I did not have much money—maybe about $300. So Izzie Coolik spoke up and said, "Oscar, do you know what I will do for you? I have a friend in the jewelry business. How about you and me going to see him and he will pick out a nice ring? Maybe you will need it later to give to Becky." I said, "Well, I will tell you, you are trying to fry two eggs before the hen lays them. I don't know if it is wise for me to do it." "You can always sell it," he said. I said, "All right, let's do it."

We called on the friend who was running a jewelry store. I don't know what Izzie whispered to him, but I know I had that ring in a box and I paid $185. I went home and told my brother Herman and his wife that I was going tomorrow for the South.

CHAPTER V

I picked up my trunk and the little belongings I had, took a cab, went to Grand Central Station, and bought me a ticket to Hazlehurst, Georgia. It was a very monotonous trip, and I had to change trains from Atlanta to Hazlehurst. The trains were dusty; in fact, they were filthy. When I got to Hazlehurst it was about nine o'clock at night. I was stunned when I saw the town. There were no lights; cows and mules were out on the streets. It was a very disappointing moment for me. When I stepped off the train, who came to meet me—Mr. S. B. Freedman. He said, "Hello, how are you feeling? How was the trip?" I told him I thought it was pretty good. I had better trips previously. He noticed I was very much disappointed. He took me to his house, which was only about two blocks from the depot.

When I walked into the house, an old dilapidated wooden structure, a kerosene lamp was burning. I can hardly describe how that house looked to me that night. I looked to see if they had a place to wash up, but I could find none, so I asked, "Where is your bathroom?" They told me, "It is outside on the back porch. There is a pan, water, and soap." Well, that was something I had not seen since I came from my birth town in Russia. In America that was the first house I had seen with so many inconveniences. I bathed my face and hands. I was too timid to ask where Becky was, but I found out afterwards that she was sick in bed.

They gave me a little supper and after supper all went to bed. The next morning about six o'clock, they all got up. They had about four boys working in the store, all related to Mr. Freedman. Two were Mr. Freedman's nephews. One fellow's name was Louis Perling. He lives now in Sandersville, Georgia, and has a very nice business. The other was a fellow by the name of Charlie Rutstien. He was a New York fellow. Another boy was there by the name of Abe Cantor. They were all working for him in the store and they boarded at his house.[f] Afterwards I learned the pay was very little and the work was very hard, because Mr. Freedman fed his clerks with the idea that later on, when they had learned the business, he would open a store apiece for them.

Well, I went to the store and looked the situation over. The store was crowded with sweaty farmers, and also Negroes, and their language was pretty hard for me to understand. I sized up the situation and thought to myself, "I believe I have made a big mistake by coming to Georgia. I ought to have listened to my brother Loui and my sister-in-law Janie, and I think

[f] Variant spellings for Rutstien might be Rutstein or Rothstein. Jews typically employed other Jews from far and wide and the position of clerk, like peddling, often served as a stepping stone to business ownership.

I would be better off."[g] However, I made up my mind regardless of what should happen, "I shall not go back to New York; I will try to tough it out."

About twelve o'clock I went with Mr. Freedman for dinner. I, being a guest, they had a little finer dinner than they usually had. As I recall, they had hamburgers and herring and old pumpernickel bread. They used to order once a week from Atlanta, and the bread would become pretty stale. I tried to eat it, however, and made them believe I enjoyed that dinner very much.[h]

In the meantime, Becky managed to get up and talk with me for a while. She asked the news in New York and how her brother Izzie and her sister-in-law were getting along and about other kinsfolk and friends in the North. I remained there the whole afternoon, just sitting and talking to her. Then about seven o'clock, all the clerks came home from the store. We all had supper and went out for a walk. It was pitch dark, but they were accustomed to that. They knew where they were going but I had to feel my way about. I was very amused at that town of Hazlehurst, Georgia.

Saturday morning, Mr. Freedman rapped at my door and asked, "Don't you want to go to the store with the boys?" I got up, dressed, and went to the store. He told me not to do anything that day. "Just keep an eye on the Negroes and see that they don't steal anything. And watch how the clerks sell, take notice of how they do it in the store. Of course, you will have to learn it sooner or later."[i]

I stayed all day long and was wondering if I would ever learn that kind of business. I got pretty tired during the day, just hanging around in the store. It was very congested and overcrowded with merchandise, and there were lots of customers, it being the fall of the year in South Georgia, when the farmers did most of their trading.

---

[g] Somewhat typical of Jewish immigrant storekeepers, Freedman's clientele including Black and White farmers who came into town to shop. Tragically, both a Jew, Samuel Bierfield, and a Black man, Lawrence Bowman, were murdered together during the first lynching conducted by the Ku Klux Klan on August 15, 1868, in Pulaski, Tennessee. See Paul Berger, "Midnight in Tennessee—The Untold Story of the First Jewish Lynching in America," *Forward,* December 8, 2014.

[h] Ordering food from Atlanta on a regular basis suggests that the family kept kosher. Such use of Jewish services from a larger city was somewhat typical of those who desired to remain religiously observant in peripheral towns.

[i] Freedman's practice reflected adaptation of tradition. The clerks were expected to go into the store on the Sabbath—the major shopping day—but, by not formally working, theoretically they were not breaking the Sabbath.

Mr. Freedman was building a new store across the street, and he told me, "We are going to move sometime next week. That will give you an opportunity to learn where every item is." I said, "All right."

One day his relatives from McRae, Lumber City, and Cochran, Georgia, came to Hazlehurst, I presume to look me over, but they pretended they came to visit the Freedmans and their family and to look over the new store that was just completed.[j]

Mr. and Mrs. Freedman really put on the "dog" that Sunday. They had a big dinner, and the visitors were entertained all day. They asked me a lot of questions but knew better than to ask why I'd come to Hazlehurst.

Monday morning, I started to work in the store like one of the boys. You talk about working, Oscar really put it out! I was determined to learn the business no matter how tough it was. In the meantime, I started taking Becky out for a walk every night, and I proposed to her one night which I will always remember.

It was a moonlight night. There was a circus in town, and we went to it and had a wonderful time. I spent, I believe, that night about 75 cents. In those days in the country towns in Georgia, that was a lot of money.

Coming on back about eleven o'clock, I asked her if she was tired and wanted to retire, or if she would mind sitting a while on the porch. She said, "No, I am not tired." I imagine she was smelling a rat; that she felt this was the climax of our courtship. I asked her how she would like to accept that little present I had. She looked at it, started crying, and said, "I will."

She woke up her aunt and told her that I had proposed, and she had accepted me. The next morning. Mrs. Freedman arose sooner than usual and fixed breakfast, and when I was up, she congratulated me and wished me happiness. The same for Mr. Freedman and the rest of the family. The next Sunday morning, we visited Becky's uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Canter, who were in business in Cochran, and we told them the news, too. The same thing was repeated over and over again.

After we moved to the new store I learned the business very quickly, which was a surprise to Mr. and Mrs. Freedman. The customers liked me and wanted me to wait on them. It didn't take long for me to catch on the art of selling to those natives in Hazlehurst. I got acquainted with the young set there and also with the old set. It looked as if they took a liking to me and my girlfriend, Becky. We were invited to all the parties and functions in Hazlehurst. We were among the crowd.

---

[j] These passages exemplify how extended Jewish families spread to local towns so as not to compete directly with each other in retail sales but, nevertheless, to remain in sufficient proximity to socialize with each other.

Thanksgiving came along and we were dressing up the windows for the Christmas business. I worked until two o'clock that night because it was a hard store to work, a two-story building. The clothing department was upstairs, with a gallery, and the piece goods and the shoes were downstairs. The reserve stock was in a room in the back of the store. Four large windows were to be decorated. Naturally, we all worked hard that night. We fixed up everything and were ready for the next morning's business.[k]

When I got home, I was very tired. I didn't eat much supper but went to bed, and next morning I overslept. Usually I was up at six o'clock. Mr. Freedman always had the store open between six-thirty and seven. Some way or another, they did not wake me up this morning. When I got up it was about eight o'clock. Mr. Freedman came home for his breakfast, and I sat down at the table with him. He looked at me a few minutes and said, "Oscar, do you know what I have decided? To set a date for your wedding." I said, "Well, all right. How about January 30, as that comes on Sunday?" He said, "You know it takes a little time to prepare for a wedding in a small town. I want to give Becky away and give her a nice wedding." I told him, "Well, it suits me. I am ready any time." So we agreed on the date of January 30, 1916.

I went back to the store and worked all day long and then I started taking stock of myself. "Why should I be in a hurry to get married when I haven't the first dime to get married on?" I was bothered and worried. Until now I had given little thought to the responsibilities the step would entail, or to my qualifications for meeting them.

When I went home, I asked Becky, "Do you know that your uncle and aunt have set January 30 as the date for us to be married?" She said, "Yes, we talked about its last night." I said, "Why didn't you tell me that?" She said, "I knew they were going to talk to you. There was no use of my telling you anything." So, she went ahead and wrote to her brothers in New York, and I wrote my family the news and the date of our wedding.

The happy day arrived, and Mr. and Mrs. Freedman really put on a big wedding, one to be remembered for a lifetime. It was solemnized in the Masonic Hall. There were over 500 guests. Everyone in Jeff Davis County was invited. The natives had never witnessed a Jewish wedding and were glad to come. The wedding, even at that time, cost a little over a thousand dollars. Freedman really "spread himself" this time.

---

[k] Jewish businesses aware of marketing opportunities frequently emphasized Christian holiday sales. By catering in this and other ways to their clientele, they nurtured a consumer culture.

As far as I was concerned, it was not necessary. Afterwards, I learned that he did it to profit his business and not for my benefit personally. They ordered about fifty cases of beer. Georgia was dry then and you were not allowed more than two quarts of liquor per person a month, but friends in town offered to order it in their names to have at our wedding. They had more liquor than they could drink in one night and it looked like everybody in Hazlehurst was drunk at my wedding. They were not confined, but I thought some of the guests should have been locked up.[1]

I was married by two Jewish rabbis from Atlanta. None of my own close kin attended the wedding, but Becky's family was well represented. There were uncles, aunts, cousins, and. so on. My best man was Morris Levy, now a prominent merchant of Savannah. We left on our honeymoon that night at 12:45 A.M. We went to Cochran, where my wife's aunt, Mrs. Canter, was living. We spent three or four days there and then went back to Hazlehurst, where Mr. Freedman had fixed us a room upstairs in the new store building.[m] The only furniture we had, which was given us as a wedding present, was one bedroom suite. That was all we needed. We were taking our meals with Mr. and Mrs. Freedman.

We worked pretty hard at that time to move the stock from the old store across the street to the new building, putting in 16 to 18 hours a day for a solid month. I began to like the business and determined to learn it as quickly as possible and then go into business for myself. I had been promised that Mr. Freedman would open a store for me, but that was nothing but a promise.

One night Mr. Freedman became very generous and said, "Oscar, you are a married man now. I am going to raise you $10," which was $25 for both my wife and me. I didn't have enough money to buy cigarettes, not to speak of buying a shirt, tie, or a collar. A shirt that sold for forty-nine cents cost me a dollar whenever I took one out of the stock, Mr. Freedman said. I did not have the money to pay for it and it had to be charged. But I did not care much about the money since I was laboring under the impression that pretty soon he would open a store for me, and I could pay what I owed him later on.

CHAPTER VI

I had written to Dave Coolik in New York what had happened to me and that I was contemplating going into business for myself. . . . Dave had

---

[1] Inviting everyone from the county was good for business, but it also demonstrated the acceptance of Jews in the community.

[m] Having two Atlanta rabbis perform the ceremony provides another example of center/periphery community interaction that enabled Jews in small towns to maintain tradition.

married in New York. He decided to come to Georgia and go in business again. . . .

To add to our worries, I was drafted for the Army. . . . In the meantime, my wife went to Cochran to visit her aunt, Mrs. Canter. I told Dave, "I'm going to Hazlehurst for my examination, and I know I will pass. There is one thing I want to ask of you, no matter what happens to me, promise you will take care of your sister. Forget she is my wife, but remember Becky is your sister." He said, "Oh, you will come back. There is no use to worry about it." I said, "Dave, I am not worried. I have a feeling something will happen for the best and that I will come back."

I left for Hazlehurst. When I got into Macon, to change trains for Hazlehurst, whom did I meet but my wife, Becky, going to Reynolds? She looked astonished and said, "What are you doing here, Oscar?" I said, "Oh, I have been called to Hazlehurst for examination. Now don't worry. I will be back." She was frightened and tears were in her eyes, but I told her, "I told you not to worry. I will be back. Go home and take care of yourself."

I took the train for Hazlehurst. When I got there, I went straight to the sheriff, an old friend, and he was glad to see me. I spent the night in the sheriff's house and next morning I was examined by Dr. Hall. He had operated on my wife for appendicitis when I was living in Hazlehurst. He was a good fellow and kind of a good friend of mine. He told me, "I don't believe you will pass the physical because you have flat feet. I doubt that you will ever see service. However, I am compelled to pass you on, for the military doctor to reexamine you."

I was with a crowd of boys that left for Camp Wheeler in Macon. It was terribly hot day—the second day of July. I will never forget that date as long as I live. They marched us from the depot of Macon to the camp just like a bunch of cattle. A sergeant was riding on a motorcycle, and we were walking with our little packages with us. When we got to camp, I was tired out, and the only thing I had on my mind was the condition in which I left my wife. It worried me very much.

There were no barracks at Camp Wheeler then. Only tents. I won't forget how they issued me a tin pan, a fork, a spoon, and a tin cup. We had to stay in line for supper. I had never seen that kind of food and I was nauseated when I saw how they were serving it. I couldn't eat it and went to bed supperless.

The bugle blew at six o'clock next morning and we all got up, dressed and went out for the examination. They had me worried for two days. Then they gave me a white card and told me that I could go home and stay there until they called me again. I was neither rejected nor accepted. But in case they would need me they would call me again.

Was I happy when they told me I could go back home! I called Reynolds, and I was greatly excited when I talked to Dave Coolik and told him that I was coming home. He said, "Where are you?" I said, "I am here," and he couldn't make out heads or tails whether I was in Reynolds, Hazlehurst, or Macon. And I was so wrought up I couldn't tell him. Anyhow, I got to the train, and I was in Reynolds at 3:30 in the morning. Was my wife happy when she saw me! Oh, oh, oh! I said, "I will stay home now."

They did not call me before the Armistice was signed, November 11, 1918. In the meantime, while I was at home, my wife gave birth, on November 2, to my daughter, Bessie. I presume she is the one who stopped the war, and that is one reason I have always loved her. Kaiser Wilhelm got scared when my daughter was born and quit the war!

When Armistice was declared, I went upstairs and told my wife, "Becky, don't get excited and nervous. They are going to celebrate here in town, and they are going to start shooting and cutting up because the war has ended." Sure enough, about nine o'clock that night, Jamie Barrow got happy and set his automobile on fire in front of our store! They started shooting firecrackers and pistols, and a jolly time was had by all. We were all happy. After the news came that the war was over and the boys started coming back from overseas, merchandise was very scarce, and prices were very high. We were doing a landslide business, but we worked hard.

In 1918 after Dave moved from our apartment over the store, I started looking for a house and succeeded in finding one. We moved into that house and were happy there. I started liking Reynolds very much, and I know the people in Reynolds and the surrounding territory liked us, too. They traded with us, and we gained their confidence and friendship.

One day Dave Coolik remarked that we ought to open a store in Butler, a town eight miles from Reynolds. He said that would give us a chance to get the trade from the other side of Taylor County. I said, "I think it is a good idea, Dave. We'll open a store in Butler." We went down to Butler and found a location across from the courthouse, a building belonging to Mr. R. S. West. I made him a proposition and he accepted it and rented me the store at $40 a month.

There were, at that time, more merchants in Butler than customers. The leading merchant was Mr. M. R. Cameron, better known as Murray Cameron. He ran a nice store, with a high-priced line of merchandise, including Hart Schaffner Marx suits and Manhattan shirts for men. He handled Edwin Clap shoes and carried a high-priced line of ladies ready-to-wear. In other words, he was the "King-Fish" of that town. When he learned I was going into business there, his comment was, "Well I would not give that Jew six months to stay in Butler."

Reynolds, Georgia, 1918.
(Courtesy of the Georgia Archives,
Vanishing Georgia Collection,
tay013.)

The town had three banks, the Farmers and Merchants Bank, the Butler Banking Company, and the Taylor County Bank. Mr. G. C. Smith was president of the Butler Banking Company at that time. I made a deposit in that bank of $5,000 before we opened our store. When we moved into Butler, we had a nice stock of goods which was priced at around $20,000, and $5,000 in the bank. The truth of the matter is, I didn't like Butler very much at first. I hated to move into that town.

Mr. Coolik matched me with a silver coin to see who should go to Butler, me or him. I lost. We could not rent a livable house in Butler for love nor money. Bessie, at that time, was a baby. She was about 16 months old. We moved to a house on top of a gulley. We had no water, no lights, nor anything convenient. I was thoroughly dissatisfied. "The indifference of the Butler merchants astonished me. I recall that when I walked into a store to buy a water bucket and a rope, the proprietor said, "I haven't got it." And that was that. I walked into another store, that of Mr. A. B. Chapman, trying to buy some little knickknacks and I won't forget how he was sitting outside. He and the sheriff were playing checkers. I said, "Mr., have you got some tacks, thumbtacks, for sale?" He didn't raise his head but moved the checker man and said, "I reckon so." I said, "Have you got some for sale"? He was so interested in his checker game that he paid me very little mind. He said, "I reckon so. Hasn't anybody in town got anything for sale?" I said, "Excuse me. I am sorry I interrupted your checker game."

I went back to our store and was I mad! I could not figure out what kind of people they were. Later, I found out they were kind and friendly, but that was the way they were doing business at that time. They had all they wanted and didn't care for anything else. To the merchants in Butler at that time, a game of checkers was more important than a customer spending a few dollars. I suppose that is why they were all out of business by the time I got started well.

I worked hard getting ready to open the store, which was opened on March 1, 1920, with a big sale. It was so cold that day that I was depressed. I had a spring line of merchandise, and I made the remark to myself, "Butler, is unlucky for me." I was disheartened. Friday and Saturday we took in a little over three hundred dollars, not a very happy beginning.

A few days later, Morris Coolik, a cousin to my wife, came from New York. He was not quite 16 years old. As I remember, I had a little trouble with the Board of Education in New York City, and I had to sign an affidavit and tell a lie—that he was going to school in Butler—because the law in New York was that a boy cannot go to work under 16 years of age unless they have working papers from the school. So I signed the affidavit and mailed it to New York and told them that he stayed with me and attended school. Morris stayed with me and worked with me very faithfully until 1938. He worked for me in Butler until 1927 and then I opened a store in Newnan and went in as partners with him. We were partners in the store there until 1938, when Morris bought me out. He remained in Newnan until he made a nice success for himself.[n]

The year 1920, or part of that year, was pretty good. Prices kept advancing and business was good. We bought a lot of merchandise from different sources and, the fact is, we had both stores jammed with merchandise in both Butler and Reynolds. On top of this, my partner, Dave Coolik, went to New York on a big buying trip and bought himself very rich—he thought. He bought a lot of stuff, but while he was in New York, Wannamaker's Department Store put on a reduction sale with 33-1/3 percent off. That scared Dave Coolik. He tried to cancel some of the orders he had placed in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and elsewhere, but the houses refused to accept cancellations.[o] When he came back, he called me and told me, "Oscar, refuse any shipment of merchandise when it comes to Butler because I am afraid the market is going to drop."

Then our troubles began. We owed better than $30,000 for merchandise. We had a stock in both stores valued a little better than $70,000, but when prices dropped, we could not have paid off if we had sold the entire stock of the two stores. We simply could not pay what we owed. In fact,

---

[n] Here Dreizin is continuing Freedman's tradition of hiring young Jews—often relatives—from elsewhere as clerks to be trained and then set them up in business in surrounding towns.

[o] Buying trips to big cities in the North were typical for small town Jewish store owners. They brought national merchandise and styles to their rural customers. In this case, a national economic decline after World War I demonstrated the precarious nature of small businesses relying on credit to purchase goods.

Oscar Dreizin, left, and Rebecca Dreizin, right, with an unidentified man in Dreizin's store in Butler, Georgia, 1930s. (Regina Satlof Block Family Papers, 014-010 V/F B. Courtesy of the Breman Museum, Atlanta.)

we were broke, but we had more nerve than brains. I especially was very stubborn, and I said, "I will fight to the last ditch not to bankrupt and try to sell and pay off." . . .

In the meantime, Dave Coolik used to put on a sale in Reynolds, and when it was over, I'd open one in Butler. We struggled pretty hard. I remember it as if it were today. A piece of goods that cost me 37-1/2 cents a yard, like Cheviots, or a piece of gingham, or a yard of sheeting, I advertised for sale at 16 cents a yard and I was tickled to death to sell it at that price. A suit of clothes I paid $27.50 for wholesale, I was glad to get $10 for it. Or anything in the house, we were glad to get thirty cents on the dollar when we could get it.

The only thing that saved us from going bankrupt was that we were very cool and did not pay one fellow at one time, but whenever we took in a hundred dollars, we'd give all our creditors the same amount, 10 percent of whatever we owed. We kept on that way until January 1, 1921, and

paid everybody every dime we owed. We were left with a capital of absolutely nothing and an old, depreciated stock of odds and ends. That was our reward for five years of hard work.

In the meantime, my wife gave birth to another little girl, Miriam. So we had two little children, and we could not live in that house on top of the gulley. We moved into Mrs. Benn's house, Charlie Benn's mother, let her rest in peace. She was a good woman. She was very good to my children and to my wife. She rented us one-half of the house.

During this time business was quiet, but I did the best I could, and we sent after my wife's mother, her sister, and her brother. They were in Europe, but we brought them over to America. We had a lot of trouble doing it, but by hard effort we managed some way or another to get them to the United States and then to bring them to Butler.[P] Louis, my wife's brother, remained in Reynolds, and I kept my wife's mother and her sister, Gussie.

CHAPTER VII

In 1922, [I] contracted typhoid fever. I was sick for 12 weeks. They thought I was on my dying bed. Doctors gave me up. We had nurses from Macon to stay with me day and night. Dr. Turk, of Reynolds, attended me and he told Dave Coolik, "if he pulls through today, I believe I will be able to save him."

I was delirious and once my wife's mother walked in my room where I was lying in bed and asked, "How do you feel?" I looked at her and said, "Mama, why don't you get married? What are you doing in here? Who sent for you?" She was alarmed and hurried to tell my wife and the rest of the family who were there at the time. "I am afraid he is crazy. He has lost his mind. He talked to me very funny."

Of course, I don't remember this, but later on my wife was telling me what I said to her mother. That night was the climax of my sickness and the crisis passed. When they changed my clothes, my bed clothes and everything I had on looked as if I had been lying in a tub of water. They were that wet with perspiration. They burned the bed sheets and everything that was on the bed. They changed my night clothes, packed me with ice, and I fell asleep.

My nurse named me "Iceberg" because I used about fifty pounds of ice a day to keep my fever off. I was burning up. My temperature used to run 104 and 105. It kept that up for about two weeks in succession. I remember the morning of July 20, Doctor Turk came into my room. He

---

[P] This offers another example of family chain migration.

looked at me and asked, "How are you feeling?" I said, "Doctor, do you know today is my birthday? Do you believe I will ever see another birthday?" He said, "Huh! I have been practicing medicine for over 20 years and I have never seen a dead gray mule or a dead Jew." The way he said it kind of tickled me. I burst out in a big laugh and laughed so hard that I became hysterical. The doctor had to give me a shot to quiet me down. I fell asleep and from that day on I started improving, slowly but surely.

The nurse I had used to stay with me and encourage me and played cards with me. And Morris used to come in from the store and tell me that business was good. "In fact, it is getting better every day," he would say. They all tried to hearten me and tell me that everything was going on fine in the store. They did this because when I was delirious that was all I talked about—the store. They figured, or rather Dr. Turk told them, that I must have the store on my mind. And I did, for I hated for Dave Coolik to work hard and keep up my wife and children. Naturally, he used to humor me and tell me about the wonderful business they were carrying on in the store without me, that I should not worry about anything because everything would be all right.

While I was in bed, I swore that if I ever get back on my feet, I was going to dissolve partnership with Dave Coolik, [which required arbitration]. . . . I picked for my [advocate], R. A. Hinton, the president of the Reynolds Banking Company at that time; Dave Coolik picked for his man, C. H. Neisler. . . . We all sat down in the bank of the Reynolds Banking Company and read through the contract. I explained why I didn't want to sign it that way, and Dave Coolik gave his reasons why he wanted it his way. The arbitrators decided in my favor. They told Dave, "Mr. Coolik, we believe Mr. Dreizin is right in refusing to sign. You know the towns do not belong to you as individuals. We are living in a free country. Why are you afraid of Mr. Dreizin being your competitor if he were to come to Reynolds? Mr. Dreizin said he didn't care if you came to Butler and opened a store next door to him."

Dave dropped his head and said, "No, I am not afraid of competition, but I think it would be best for both of us. That is the reason I have stipulated this in the contract, but if you gentlemen say he is right, I will abide by it." And that ended it. I signed it. Dave signed it, and the committee witnessed it. I shook hands with Dave and wished him good luck while he said the same thing to me and then I went to Butler.

CHAPTER VIII

At the time I dissolved the partnership, Reynolds was a far better business town than Butler. Reynolds used to take in three dollars to every one dollar in Butler. In fact, Reynolds had a large Negro population and the big farms from Panhandle and Garden Valley employed laborers and they made big crops. And Dave did business with cheap merchandise. But luck was with me when we dissolved partnership. Butler began to look like a boom town. Whittle & Slade, an immense lumber concern, moved in. They employed several hundred men in their planing mill, beside many in sawmills which they placed in the country to cut the timber. Also, small farmers in that section quit their farms to haul the timber to the planing mill. The concern had a payroll of from $75,000 to $100,000 a week.[q] . . .

1923 and 1924 were two of the best years I had. I made lots of money. Unfortunately, the banks started breaking on me and I lost a lot of money that way. I became so disillusioned that I didn't trust anybody. As soon as I deposited in one bank and did business there for a while, that bank would bankrupt and catch me for several thousand dollars. It was discouraging. In 1923 and 1924 I had to fight unfair competition, especially by one merchant in Butler. He and his clerks used to knock me on every occasion possible. They put out rumors to the trade that I handled nothing but shoddy merchandise, seconds, and stories of that kind. This was disturbing and made the going hard.

During that year they organized a Ku Klux Klan in Butler, and several merchants joined it, not because they believed in it, but as a business proposition. They thought that "Now is the time to get rid of the Jew store." I believe I used my head at that time. I hired every Ku Klux Klan member's daughter that I could to work in my store. Not that I needed them so much and was doing that much business, but merely as a means of self-defense. Whenever I found out that in a certain district a man was taking an active part in the Ku Klux organization, I immediately hired his daughter as a clerk and paid her well. I had trade from all the Klansmen in that country! . . .

The Panhandle Community was thickly settled and all the farmers in that section were prosperous.[r] They had a lot of Negroes on their plantations. They were called "sharecroppers." The entire community seemed

---

[q] Georgia underwent a gradual transition from being an overwhelmingly farming state to lumber and other industries during this era. See James C. Cobb, *Industrialization and Southern Society, 1877–1984* (Lexington, KY, 1984).

[r] The Georgia Panhandle is a landlocked peninsula on the state's southern border northwest of Jacksonville, Florida.

to be kinspeople and they stuck together. When you fell out with one, you almost fell out with the whole community. In the fall of the year, when they completed the harvest, they would settle with their tenants and the Negroes naturally would do their trading where their landlord did his. If the merchant had treated the white farmer well, he would bring his hands to do their trading with him too. I wanted a share of their business, of course, and I did my best to please them. It took a little time, but finally I succeeded in gaining their confidence. . . .

My business started to grow by leaps and bounds. In the meantime, my wife gave birth to a baby boy whom we named Aaron. We really had a very nice party in the house for his circumcision. The natives in Butler had never witnessed a ceremony like that, and they enjoyed the party very much.[s] . . .

On December 23, 1929, my store burned to the ground. That was the day I lost practically everything I had. I had cancelled one $10,000 insurance policy on the store one month previous to the fire. At the time I canceled it, I figured that the stock was getting smaller and there was no use carrying the full amount of insurance. But when the store burned and I lost everything, I didn't feel very comfortable about it.

I collected $23,000 insurance and I owed a little better than $18,000, so I was left with practically nothing. I owned one other store building, half of which was rented to Mr. Fred Peed for an insurance office. I used the other half as a storage house for reserve stock. This building was damaged by the fire, too, and Mr. Peed moved out. I didn't know what to do.

I went to Newnan, where I did business with the Manufacturer's National Bank. The president of the bank, Mr. Harvey North, took a liking to me. We were very good friends. He had heard about the fire and the loss I had and was sorry for me. When I walked into the Bank, Mr. North came up to me, shook hands and said, "Mr. Dreizin, cheer up. The world is not at an end. Why don't you go back in business?" I told him, "Mr. North, the truth is. I am broke. By the time I pay off my creditors I don't think I will have enough to start over again." "Oh," he said, "never mind. I'll tell you what you do. You deposit all the insurance checks right in here and I will write your creditors to leave you alone for a while and our bank will be responsible for your indebtedness. Mr. Dreizin, I have the utmost confidence in your ability. Take the money you have, build you a nice store and do business again. I know you will do well and that you will pay off what you owe. If you need additional capital, don't hesitate to call on me."

---

[s] This provides another example of maintaining Jewish tradition while also including the general community, the latter perhaps to help overcome the antisemitism noted in the previous paragraphs.

That made me feel very good, and I started getting confidence in myself again feeling I could swing it over. I said, "I surely do thank you, Mr. North. I will take your advice."

CHAPTER IX

[It was when] my store burned to the ground, and I had it in my mind to move to Newnan. I figured, "Well, I think now I will have a good chance to move there." However, I finally decided to rebuild the store in Butler. I rebuilt and was doing business--better than ever. . . .

Then the crash came on—part of 1931 and 1932. Things became tough. Business was at a standstill at Butler and Newnan. I sweated blood to make enough to make ends meet. We didn't owe too much money, but what we did owe, we couldn't pay. The banks shut down on making loans. The houses demanded money. The stocks in the stores were enormous and believe me, I lost many nights of sleep worrying about what the next morning would bring. Fifty dollars' worth of business on Saturday was considered good.

In Butler, things didn't bother me much, because I didn't have to meet store rent every month. As for myself, I pinched and economized as much as I could to live. But the Newnan store got on my nerves. . . .

I went back to Butler and started working on a circular, to put on a sale. I had advertised that I would accept cotton in trade, one cent above the market price. I knew as much about cotton as a Negro knows about the Jewish Bible. I opened up that sale with a bang. Talking about cotton, I bought ninety-six bales, with prices ranging to 7-1/4 to 10¢. I didn't know the grade of cotton, but I took the farmer's word. Whatever he told me he was offered at the warehouse, I gave him a cent more. The farmers really took advantage of me. They bought nothing but the staple merchandise, like work clothes, work shoes, sheeting, items that I advertised to sell without a profit. When the sale was over, I was in worse shape than I was before. I had to replenish the merchandise and didn't have the money to pay for it.

I hated to sell the cotton at a loss, and the best I could get for it all around was 7¢ a pound, which would make a loss of over $1,776 on the cotton alone. I felt blue—didn't know what to do. The only luck I had was, I had a clerk, Miss Nellie Turner, who was very honest and sincere. She looked after my business a whole lot better than she would look after her own. She did all the correspondence for me. She kept my books and knew all my inside troubles. . . .

In the year 1933, Mr. Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President. The first thing he did was to declare a moratorium to close all banks in the

United States, so that they could be checked to see if they were safe. I was very happy about his proclamation. I had a good excuse for not paying my bills for a while. That gave me a little breathing spell. I accumulated a few dollars and kept it in the bank. My creditors did not send me any statements and if they did, I could tell them my bank was closed and they would have to wait until it opened. The President closed the banks for ten days and I took ten days additional time. . . .

The year 1934 was the best in my business career. I made a net profit of a little over $16,000, which put me on my feet. Business started to climb. Merchandise went up as Mr. Cook had predicted. The farmers made good crops, and everything had a different attitude toward life. We had the CCC camps in Butler and the PWA.[t] Everything was on the upward trend, and I was doing a good business. My daughters, Bessie and Miriam, graduated from high school and then entered at the University of Georgia at Athens. Bessie graduated from high school in 1935 and Miriam graduated in 1936. Aaron and Isaac were going to school in Butler at that time. Aaron graduated from high school in 1939 and Isaac graduated in 1942.

We were living a very happy life. We used to look forward to the days when the children would come from school and bring their friends with them. We had a little orchestra in the house, one would play the piano and one the violin. Aaron played the harmonica; all kinds of musical instruments were being played. I don't believe there was a happier family in Butler, or anywhere else for that matter.

In 1938, I dissolved partnership with Morris Coolik at Newnan. I didn't see any profit from that store at that time. I made up my mind that I had better dispose of it—either sell my interest to Morris or, if he didn't want that, to sell out and divide with him. . . .

I went back home and made up my mind to build a new store next to the one I had. It would be a nice store, handling a better line of men's and ladies' ready-to-wear. I had in mind that some day, when my son Aaron graduated from school and then went to St. Louis and took a six-months' course of window displaying and card writing, that I would have it fixed up and later on turn the store over to him.

Aaron graduated from Butler High School in 1938 and went for one term to Cochran, which is a branch of the University of Georgia in Athens. He did a good job there. The next year he told me, "Daddy, I don't care much about going back to school in Cochran. I don't want to waste your money and time on something I am not interested in. I think I will just stay

[t] The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Public Works Administration (PWA, later the Works Progress Administration, WPA) were New Deal employment programs. See Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933–1956* (New York, 2005).

at home and take care of the store." I said, "Well, son, I had rather for you to go on to school and finish up—graduate from college. After that, you can look after the store. I know what it means trying to be in business without an education. I would give anything I have if I could sit down and write a letter in good English, to be able to attend to my correspondence myself and not have to depend upon somebody else to do it for me. However, it is too late now" (or rather, I thought it was too late to get a little education to satisfy the commercial world and to take care of me). He said, "I think I can take care of that all right."

I said, "All right, do as you please. I cannot criticize you. I can only advise you, based on my past experience. I wish you would listen to me, and do like I say, because I see what I am missing today myself. My father, let him rest in peace, and my oldest brother used to argue with me, 'Oscar, you had better go to school and get an education while you are young. Some day you will be sorry for not doing it.' I didn't listen to them, but believe me, son, I am feeling it today, and I am plenty sorry that I did not do as they advised me at that time. To tell you the truth, Aaron, it took nerve to go into business with a very limited capital and education. It just happened that I have been lucky to have the kind of help that could do all the correspondence for me. Otherwise, I think it would have been pretty tough for me to have done anything." . . .

He said, "Well, I don't think I would be handicapped as much as you, Daddy. I have met college graduates who don't have sense enough to stay out of the rain. I am not talking about their making a living. It is not always the bookworm that counts." I said, "Well, all right, son, I am with you 100 percent. I have always said, and always will say, that I will never object to my children's choice in their lives."

We went on that way. Aaron had a good time and everybody in the community was crazy about him—black and white. They all loved to trade with him. He did a very good business—himself very nicely and neatly. We used to have a lot of fun together. He never had any secrets from me. He would confide all his petty troubles in me. We played cards together and it tickled him when he beat me and made me pay him off. He would tease me on top of it. "I thought you wrote the rules for the game, but you don't even know how to play. You had better buy a small deck of cards, or I will get one for you and you sit down in the back of the store and practice up a little bit, then come and play a good man."

I realize now that I did not know then what a clever, good-natured boy he was. I have never seen him mad or ill-tempered. He used to tell me things that happened in town or out of town, things that some of the men and boys did, and I would ask him if he were guilty of the same charge. "Well," he'd say, "Yes, and no."

CHAPTER X

In the meantime, the air was filled with rumors that the United States was going into war. The President issued an order that all males between the ages of 18 and 60 must register. Aaron became very restless after he registered. He kept on saying, "I would like to volunteer in the Air Corps." He became so excited that he put in his application and insisted that I sign the necessary papers. It was necessary for me to sign because he was a minor. He explained that he wanted to join and not wait to be drafted because he would have a better opportunity to get in the branch he wanted and learn a trade. He wanted to become a pilot. He went to Mr. Rustin, the County School Superintendent, and got a record of his schooling and filled out the papers and signed them.

On November 7, 1943, he went to the induction center in Atlanta and passed like a top. They gave him ten days to get ready for the army. He left Butler the seventeenth day of November with 12 more boys for Atlanta. I had a feeling that would be the last of him—that he would not come back. Of the 13 boys who left for the army together, three were killed and four wounded. I am not of the superstitious type, but I cannot help but think that 13 is really tough luck.

Two days after he left, I received a letter from him saying that he was stationed in Miami, Florida, for his training. He wrote very cheerful letters—that he was having a good time enjoying the army life very much, and for us not to worry about him. He said he was doing all right. We used to hear from him about twice a week.

From Miami he was sent to Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and then to Las Vegas, Nevada. The climate was very cold there. He stayed there until some time in July when he flew over to Butler to see us. He had a furlough for a few days, and we really enjoyed the short time he was with us. He surely looked nice in uniform. I learned later that he told Walter Jarrell in the store, "Walter, I think I am going to be shipped out overseas. Don't tell Daddy about it. I will wait until I get overseas and then let him know. I will write him a letter. I don't want him to be worried about it."

He received a wire from his Commanding Officer to report immediately to his station in Las Vegas. I had a "hunch" that I would never see him anymore. He left us on Sunday afternoon, going to Atlanta to catch a plane for his station. Words cannot describe how we felt the day of his departure. Aaron tried his best to brace himself up and to brace us up, but you could tell by the look on his face that he was worried and bothered. He told me, "Daddy, don't worry. I will be back in a couple of months. It is only a matter of a couple of months and the war will be over."

Aaron Dreizin in uniform, c. 1943. (Aaron Dreizin Family Papers, ADF 611.001. Courtesy of the Breman Museum, Atlanta.)

He went to see Mrs. Harley Riley and got Harley Junior's address and said, "I am going to try to look him up." When the news reached Butler that Harley Junior was missing in action over Germany, he promised Mrs. Riley that when he had a chance he would try to locate the fellows who were in Harley's outfit. He said he would try to find out more about it and write her. He was sure, or rather he pretended to be sure, that the war was not so serious, and that nothing would happen to him; he seemed sure everything would be all right and that he would come home.

I will never forget the Sunday morning when he said, "Pop, how about loaning Uncle Sam's boy about $100? I think I will need some money until Uncle Sam pays me back what he owes me for my traveling expenses." "Well," I said, "son, here is $200 and take a few blank checks along with you. You can always write a check on me. But don't try to lose all the money in a crap game at one time." We were laughing about it. He said, "Oh, that is the army life!"

A couple of weeks later we received a letter from him in which he said, in confidence, that his crew would take a cross-country flight before they were shipped out, that they would be in Gulfport, Mississippi, about three or four days and he would like for us to drive up to see him. I went into the O. P.A. rationing board. At that time, Mr. Charlie Stone was head of the O. P.A. Office, and I told him, "Charlie, I want to ask a favor of you, if you can do it for me. I received a letter from Aaron, and he writes me that he is going to be in Gulfport, Mississippi, for a few days and if we can make it, he would like very much for us to drive over to see him. I haven't

enough tickets to buy gas. I wonder if you could give me some gasoline stamps, enough for me to make the trip."[u]

Charlie asked me, "Mr. Dreizin, about how many miles is from here to Gulfport and back?" I said, "I think it is about 1,600 miles, going and coming." He said, "When do you want to make the trip?" I said, "I would like to start tomorrow morning, Sunday." The board did not meet on Saturday, so he said, "Well, I will tell you what I will do. Go back to the store and I will see what I can do for you."

In the meantime, the news got out in town that I wanted to go to Gulfport to see Aaron before he went overseas and that I didn't have enough gas coupons to make the trip. Talk about the people of Butler being nice to us—they were really swell. They brought me enough coupons to make a trip to Europe and back. That is one time I really appreciated my friends and Aaron's friends.

The next morning, Sunday morning, Miriam, my wife, and I started out for Gulfport. I wired for reservations at some hotel there. I can't recall the name now. We made the trip very nicely and met Aaron at the camp. We drove out to the airfield to see him. Talk about a manipulator, Aaron was one of them. How he got by with it, I really don't know, but he had a wonderful and winning personality. The next day Aaron came out to see us. We spent three days together and we had a good time. That was the last time we saw him. I gave him $100, and he and his crew checked out for London.

We used to get very encouraging letters from him from overseas about the missions he made and the damage they had done to the German country. He used to write that it wouldn't be long before he'd made a few more sessions and would be back in the states.

In the meantime, Miriam left us and went to Macon and worked at Robins Field as a secretary in the Finance Department. Ike graduated from Butler High School and entered college at Emory University in Atlanta. With the children gone, we were very lonesome but full of hope that the war would soon be over, and Aaron and the others would be back, and everything would be as happy as before.

Ike kept on worrying me about wanting to sign up in the V-12 Navy in school. He kept asking, "Daddy, why wait until they draft me? Then I

---

[u] The Office of Price Administration rationed items for civilians so that the military would have priority for supplies. See Andrew H. Bartels, "The Politics of Price Control: The Office of Price Administration and the Dilemmas of Economic Stabilization, 1940–1946," (Ph.D. dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1980).

won't have a choice of which branch of the army I would like, but if I volunteer, I do have a chance."[v] Ike was a minor (he wasn't seventeen years old at that time), and I didn't want to sign the paper for him, but the trouble was that my children were very determined and I hated to be against them. So, I went to the Recruiting Station in Atlanta and asked the officer there to explain to me the meaning of the V-12 Navy and what it was all about. He told me that as long as Ike was in Medical School, he didn't think they would send him overseas. They would let him finish his course. I said, "All right," so I signed for him. Before I knew it, Ike was sent to New York to Columbia University for his boot training. He graduated as an Ensign in the United States Navy. After sixteen weeks' training, he was sent out to the Pacific, where the war with Japan was going on.

On Saturday, January 30, 1944, we received a wire from the War Department stating, "Sorry to inform you, but your son, Staff Sergeant Aaron Dreizin, was lost in action. Letter will follow." And the wire was officially signed. When I received the telegram and read it, I lost my speech. I could not say a word. I was waiting on a customer, but I sat about ten minutes without moving from the chair. My wife fainted. I insisted that Miriam take her home and put her to bed until she could get over the shock. I stayed in the store all day without knowing a thing I was doing. I was completely blank—like a machine waiting on customers, oblivious to all that was going on. Thirty days later, we received another wire from the War Department stating, "Sorry to inform you that your son, Staff Sgt. Aaron Dreizin, was killed in action instead of missing in action. Letter will follow."

That put the finishing touch to me. I cannot describe how we felt. My wife did not believe the second wire and letter, and she was hoping and praying that the first wire was correct—that Aaron was a prisoner of war. It just seemed that it couldn't be that he was killed. We kept on corresponding with all of the other nine boys' families of his crew. We had their names and addresses and wrote, asking if they had heard anything from their boys. We kept on like that for about a year until one day I told my wife, "Becky, please forget about it. Try to give up the idea that Aaron is still alive."

Some time later I received a letter from the Captain of the plane. He was taken prisoner of war. When the war was over, and he returned to the States, he wrote me a long letter explaining all the details of their missions

---

[v] Begun in 1942, V-12 Navy was a college training program designed to prepare officers for service in the navy. See V.R. Cardozier, *Colleges and Universities in World War II* (New York, 1993).

to Germany.[w] . . . That convinced my wife that Aaron was dead, and she gave up hope of ever seeing him again.

CHAPTER XI

I had been a very healthy man, but this tragedy caused me to lose my strength. The trouble with me was I didn't complain to anybody but kept it on my chest. I used to worry about the loss of my son Aaron, and then my son Ike was in training in New York in the Navy and we expected him at any time to be shipped overseas. Miriam's husband, Izzie Chanin, was stationed in New York, and we didn't know when he would be called for overseas duty. Bessie's husband, Dave Satlof, was in training in Aberdeen, Maryland, and Bessie was there with him. She was working as a dietician in a hospital.

They broke up their beautiful home which they built in Columbus, Georgia, and all that, with the other troubles that were on [my] mind, worried me almost to distraction. I tried to forget my worries by hard work. I would work in the store from early in the morning until late at night straightening the stock, dusting the clothing, just anything to pass the time away. The harder I worked, the stouter I got. I started gaining a lot of weight.

CHAPTER XII

After Christmas, my wife and I took a trip to Springfield, Illinois, to visit Dr. Rosen. He put me in a hospital there for two weeks, to recheck me, because he wanted to be satisfied that I was doing well. I was checked by the best doctors in the state of Illinois, and they found the same thing as my little country doctor in Butler, Georgia.

After my discharge from the Springfield hospital, I asked my brother, "Nathan, tell me the truth. What is the matter with me?" He said, "The trouble is, you have an enlarged heart. You must take care of yourself. The main thing is to rest and not work too hard. If you will take care of yourself, you will die of rusty old age." I asked him, "Do you think it would be well for me to sell out my business in Butler, since I am not able to attend to it myself? You know, Nathan, I never did believe in somebody else running my business for me."

He said, "No, I would not advise you to do that. That would be going from one extreme to another. You must have something to do to occupy your mind. You could go to the store once or twice a day and see what

[w] The complete text of the letter, written by Lt. Frank E. Upson, Oakland City, Indiana, August 19, 1945, is embedded in the Dreizin memoir but is peripheral to southern Jewish history and too long to reprint here.

your clerks are doing. Check up on the cash register and see that everything is all right. It is not necessary for you to wait on the customers or lift boxes of merchandise or do any of the other hard work you have been doing." So, I told him, "All right, Nathan, I will do as you say." . . .

On my way back to Butler from Atlanta, I had thoroughly made up my mind to go out of business until after the war and things became normal again. Then I would see what I could do. I realized that I was a sick man and not physically able to run around searching for merchandise. At that time, it required a man with a lot of strength to hustle and do business, and I knew that would kill me if I undertook to do it.

When I came home, I told my wife, "Becky, you know what I have decided? I am going to sell out and quit. I am tired of the store, anyway." She said, "Do as you like." So, the next morning, I sat down and wrote out a circular and announced in the paper to the trade that I was going out of business and was offering my stock of merchandise at cost. My stock then was invoiced at a little over $40,000.

In the meantime, I wrote to the family in Sandersville, and Talbotton, Georgia, and elsewhere, that I had decided to sell out and for them to come

Dreizin store liquidation notice, 1945.
(Regina Satlof Block Family Papers, 014-010
V/F B. Courtesy of the Breman Museum, Atlanta.)

and pick out any kind of merchandise and I would sell it at invoice price. I had a very nice, selected stock of merchandise at a cheap price.

In ten days of the sale, I took in over $19,000. People came from Macon, Ellaville, Talbotton, and surrounding territories, to do their trading with me. They were buying good merchandise at a very low price. As I was retiring from business, I did not care much to make any profit, being satisfied to get cost out of it. . . .

After selling the store, I decided to move from Butler. I knew that I could not stand living there and seeing the boys who used to play with Aaron and who were always so close to him, coming back from the service and Aaron not coming. In August 1945, I bought a house in Macon and sold our home in Butler to Doc Brinkley for $5,250. I bought a nice home in Macon and paid $12,500 for it.

Unless you have had an experience of having worked hard for a long period of years and then found yourself suddenly without anything to do, or any goal, you can have no idea how heavily time hung on my hands. I arose in the morning with nothing to do, no plans for the day, nothing to think of but my troubles, and no particular reason for making the day. This is enough to break the mind of the strongest.

I became very nervous and restless. I tried to take up working in the yard, planting flowers, and trying to find a hobby to keep me busy, but it seemed nothing I tried would fill my need. I could not work in the hot sun in the yard. My doctor had advised against that. I became melancholy and almost despondent. I could not eat nor sleep, and I was becoming more run down.

My daughter, Miriam Chanin, suggested that I go to the doctor for a checkup. I called on Doctor Ross, my doctor in Macon, and he asked me why I looked so troubled. I told him I was not particularly troubled, and I was only worried because I was about to go crazy for the lack of something to do. He asked me why I did not find me a hobby that would keep me busy. He suggested raising flowers in the yard so long as I would not be out in the hot sun. He said that would take up enough of my time to keep me from worrying. He thought that I could find it interesting to learn flower culture. "I think it is a worthy hobby," he said. I had tried it, though, and didn't like it. I asked about my going to school. He looked at me as if he thought I had already lost my mind and it was too late to do anything for me. He asked if I wanted to go to Hebrew school to become a Rabbi. I told him it didn't matter to me what school I went to so long as I found something to take my time and occupy my mind. I had always felt the need of more education and had always wanted to get more learning, and it didn't matter too much just what I learned. He told me,

evidently just to satisfy me, to go ahead and try it, but not to take it too seriously. . . .

Time rocked along and I was a pretty steady scholar. I started liking my work very much. I went to school from October 7, 1946, until February 21, 1947, when I took sick and had to go to the hospital. I stayed there about a couple weeks. There I went through a minor operation, and it took me a long time to recuperate. On October 1, 1947, I started back to school with Mr. Rustin. I worked pretty hard, but I give a great deal of credit to my teacher, Miss Mildred Freeman, who took a special interest in my work and who helped me a great deal. I picked up my spelling and typing pretty well. I was able to compose my own letters and keep up with my correspondence to my children.

One day Mr. Rustin noticed the improvement I had made in my typing and spelling. He was very much enthused over the good work I had done in such a short length of time. He said, "Mr. Dreizin, do you know what I would suggest? I would like for you to write your memoirs. Your life has been rather eventful, and it would be interesting for your friends and family to read." I said, "Well, I don't know that my life history would be so interesting, and then my spelling and typing is not so good." He said, "Never mind. I think you could spell and type pretty fair for the length of time you have been studying, and it will help you to learn both by doing this, and then it will keep your mind occupied and time will not drag so for you."

I took his advice, and I started this book. Of course, I was writing it for the pastime, and it never occurred to me that I was writing something to be read by the public. But my friends learned about my efforts and many began inquiring about this book, and many, including my very good friend Mr. John D. Spencer, to whom I owe great gratitude, suggested that I have it published, and that it would be a real inspiration to many struggling young people to know just how the poor immigrant boy won success after many trials and disappointments and, when it seemed much of the time, that all odds were against him.

THE END

* * * * * * *

* * * * *

* * *

* *

*

From "The Memoirs of Oscar Dreizin of Butler and Macon, Georgia."
(Courtesy of the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Breman Museum, Atlanta.)

NOTES

[1] A complete unedited typescript copy of "The Memoirs of Oscar Dreizin of Butler and Macon, Georgia" (n.d.) can be found at the Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Breman Museum, Atlanta.

[2] The Vitebsk Region is currently located in the northeast corner of Belarus. It had a large, thriving Jewish population before World War II. The capital city, also Vitebsk, was the hometown of Marc Chagall and several other leading Jewish artists.

[3] Vilna (or Vilnius), the current capital of Lithuania, served as a major center of Jewish culture and learning when it was part of czarist Russia. Best known for its Mitnagdic or anti-Hasidic yeshivot, it had scores of synagogues and served as the home of numerous Hebrew and Yiddish scholars. More broadly, see Masha Greenbaum, *The Jews of Lithuania: A History of a Remarkable Community, 1316–1945* (New York, 1995).

[4] A possible variant spelling of Coolik is Kulik. The exact familial relationship between Oscar and Rebecca is unclear.

[5] Hazlehurst is the county seat of Jeff Davis County in the southeastern part of Georgia. Its 2010 population was 4,226.

[6] Reynolds, in Taylor County, Georgia, had a population of 1,086 in 2010.

[7] Butler serves as the county seat of Taylor County. Its 2010 population was 1,972. Taylor County has a long history of racism including the 1946 lynching of Black army veteran Maceo Snipes, the first Black man to vote in the county. The incident inspired the seventeen-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr., to write a letter of protest to the *Atlanta Constitution*. The lynching remains a controversial cold case. See Dan Barry, "Killing and Segregated Plaque Divide Town," *New York Times*, March 18, 2007.

[8] Approximately 550,000 American Jews served in the United States military during World War II out of a total Jewish population of 4,770,000. The total number of awards, citations and medals came to 49,315. Of the total number of 38,338 casualties, 11,000 were killed, of which 7,000 occurred in combat. Some 320,000 people from Georgia served. According to the National Archives, seventeen servicemen from Taylor County were killed in action or from combat wounds. "WWII Army and Army Air Force Casualties," National Archives, accessed June 21, 2023, https://www.archives.gov/research/military/ww2/army-casualties.

[9] Historians and other writers have produced an extensive literature on the history of the Ku Klux Klan. For a history of the KKK in Georgia, see Edward Proxamus Akin IV, "The KKK in Georgia: Social Change and Conflict, 1915–1930 (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1994). More broadly, see David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham, NC, 1987) and Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York, 1998).