

The Immigrant Who Was Blessed With Miracles

The Memoir of Nessim Levy

It all started in Shubrah, a district of Cairo, Egypt. The day of my birth was December 28, 1929. My father's name was Elie Levy and he was born in Izmir, Turkey and my mother, Esther Fuchs was born in Cairo, Egypt. My mother's mother was born in Italy, maybe Livorno. I don't know if my mother had any brothers or sisters. So, she met my father in Cairo and I don't know how they met, but they had six children. My father was a tailor and barely making a living. We were six children and we had a hard time making a living. At the age of four my mother decided to send us to a school, a residential school because they couldn't afford to feed and clothe six children. There was a French orphanage in a district of Cairo called Abbassieh, it was a French boy's orphanage and you had to be Catholic to be admitted. At the time, they never asked for proof so they just accepted what my mother's word that we were Catholic. My older brother Maurice and I went to the school and my mother told them we were French, and we couldn't afford all the kids, with hard times and they accepted both of us. Our fake names were Jules Narbonne and Maurice Narbonne. I was one of six children. The oldest was Felix, followed by Sami, then Jeannette, Maurice, myself and Rosa.

One day I was very sick, with a double pneumonia and anemia. It may have been due to poor nourishment. We ate lots of food like starches and bread, and couldn't afford good food. My mother took me to a doctor and he told her we can't do anything. I was three years old, and the doctor said to just make him comfortable, feed him hot soup and he may live two or three weeks. So, my mother went to Church at St. Theresa and prayed for a miracle, and they lit candles and oils and prayed to heal people. I remember my mother taking me there and coming home. The next day I was playing in the street. I felt so much better the next day and felt I was healed. I was around three years old at the time.

One day my mother took me to visit one of her friends in Shubrah, we cooked with a kerosene/propane burner and I was playing with her daughter who was my age in the kitchen. We played and by accident, the burner fell on us. Our clothes caught on fire and they immediately took us into the shower. My chin and ear was burned. We also went to the hospital and were treated—it hurt. I stayed home the next few days, with bandages. We used to ride cable cars to the hospital. At home, all of us were there except Rosa who wasn't born yet.

At the French, Catholic school, if you didn't have good grades during the week, they wouldn't let your parents visit. But, I always got good grades and my parents came to visit

me. Maurice and I were there. I had a Greek friend at the school and his mother would bring him good food like chicken and he shared some of the food with me. Every year they celebrated the day of the dead and we went to the cemetery to sing. The Priest chose me to go with him. The Priest liked me and we said prayers on the grave, and I sang the Requiem in Latin. It was a prayer for the dead, so they would rest in peace. During Christmas, the French consulate used to have a big party for the French kids in the orphanage. The French kids and I went to the French consulate for the party which was in Cairo and we had lots of food, got toys and it was a nice party. My parents didn't come.

We used to go home for two days during Christmas, and the rest of the time we stayed in the orphanage. In the summertime, they used to take us to Alexandria for a few months where they had a villa and we slept there. Every morning we went to the beach, all the boys in the school. We had lunch, sandwiches and cheese at the beach. When we returned to the villa round 1:00 we took a nap then got up and studied history, math, composition. For two and a half months we stayed in the villa. Alexandria was four hours by train to Cairo.

Before the building was a school it used to be a cemetery, and when I was in bed at night, on occasion, I would hear a noise and it would scare me. I was told that to get rid of the noise, I had to cross myself and it would stop. So—I did and I didn't hear the voices very often after that. It was less frequent. I thought it was ghosts from when the place was a cemetery. All night I couldn't sleep, and there was a woman in charge of the night shift, a mean woman that no one talked to. So, we had a big hall in the dorm where we slept and with beds of rows. At the end of the hall was a bucket that we urinated in at night. We teased the old woman because no one liked her. We used to tell her there was a kid at the bucket for an hour.

For entertainment on Sundays, a man used to come with a projector and he showed us movies, silent films of Charlie Chaplin. Sometimes he didn't show up and we were disappointed. Every Sunday our parents came to visit us for one hour. When they came we sat together and talked, they brought me a banana and orange. They didn't want to come empty handed, it was the thought that counted. In the school we woke up 5:00 am in the morning, washed up and we attended service in the morning. Maurice and I did communion, we sang in Latin in the choir, learned Catholicism. I used to help the Priest by being an altar boy. After church we had breakfast in the dining hall, then into the classroom until 12:00 noon and after lunch we returned to classes until 4:00, then we played in the yard. We played soccer and basketball and around 6:00 we went to bed.

At the end of every year we took a test, a comprehensive test on all of the subjects. At the age of 11 I had to do a final test for my elementary school certificate and I passed with one of the highest scores in the school. I was first in French and English, and second in Arabic. But when they made my certificate it was in the name of Jules Narbonne and I had to leave the school at age 11. My brother, Maurice left one year ahead of me because he was older. Before I left they asked me if I wanted to become a Jesuit Priest and my parents said no. At the time, I didn't know what I was, I never even knew I was Jewish and I thought my real name was Narbonne. So, my parents took me from there and I enrolled in a French high school called the French Brothers. In French, it's spelled Frere, less than a Priest. The school was close to my house, a few blocks and I used to walk there.

My father, at the time had a small tailor shop and he wanted me to help him in the store. I was 12 years old and I didn't want to become a tailor. My mother said I couldn't say no to my father, he'd get very upset. My father was very strict. World War II was starting at the time and he used to work with the British Army. In the store he would sew the soldier's uniforms. The soldiers were the British, New Zealand, Australian and American soldiers. There was a military camp in Cairo for all the soldiers from around the world. The German army was approaching Egypt in El Alamein with General Rommel from Germany so all the coalition forces were stationed in Cairo to fight this general and push him out of Egypt. I went to work in my dad's store because I was scared, I sewed buttons on uniforms and small alterations and I hated it. One of those days I told my mother I didn't want to go to the store and she told me she wasn't sure what my dad would do. I refused to go to the store.

After I left the school and began to live at home, I was 11 years old. My parents told me that my real name was Nessim Levy and that we were Jews. They told me they enrolled me in the Catholic orphanage because they couldn't afford to have me at home, and they had to change my name to be accepted in the school. It was a big shock to me and they had a hard time convincing me I was Jewish. I was mixed up, but when I started to work most of the workers were Jews my age in the office and I felt more comfortable with my Jewish identity. I didn't know anything about the Jewish faith. I saw my birth certificate and my real name was Nessim Levy. It also indicated my religion was Jewish. So, I accepted it, went back to my original name.

I used to wear my dad's long, baggy pants. Also, in Cairo, there was a large French, department store named Orosdiback. One day I went to the office, the last floor and applied for a job. I was around 12-13 years old. The manager of the office looks at me, with the baggy pants and says "Young man what do you want?" I said I'm looking for a job, and he says what? I told him that I looked young, but I'm older than I look. He didn't know what

to do with me. He told me listen, I'm going to give you a chance. I'm going to give you an exam and you have to finish it in 15 minutes. So he thought I wouldn't make it and he wouldn't have to tell me to get out of here. I took the exam on a few subjects, math and composition. It was a big office with a lot of workers. He gave it to me and instead of 15 minutes I finished it in 10 minutes. I lifted my hand to tell him I'm done. He said are you sure you finished, you did it all? He said did anybody help you? I said no I don't know anybody here. He took the sheet of paper, graded it and said it was excellent. I got everything correct.

He couldn't believe it and he took the test and went to the manager, his name was Beresi, the highest manager in the office and he showed it to him and I could see through a window, they were talking. The manager was looking at me through the window. The office manager said when he returned, because you did so good on the test and because of your age, I'm going to give you a chance. Come back tomorrow morning at 8:00 to begin working. I was happy I was going to make some money. I was broke all the time. My dad was mad, my mom knew I was going to apply for a job.

I came to the job the next morning, and they gave me some easy job of filing. It was boring and I didn't like it. I don't remember what it paid. Maybe two pounds a month. After a few months I met a fellow in the office, an older man. He was an Italian, named Budini and he was in charge of the import and export department. I told him I was Italian and we started talking and he liked me. He said Levy I'm not going to let you continue filing, I'll transfer you to my department and I'll make you a big shot here. I spoke Italian with him, I told him my mom was Italian. He was very influential in the company. He transferred me to this department and he started to teach me everything about import and export. So, little by little I learned everything, and he ordered me a special desk with a typewriter, and I got one raise after another. I did very good there.

However, little by little, the political situation changed. They said 75% of the workers had to be Egyptians. The government allowed only 25% to be foreigners. I wasn't a foreigner, but I was considered a foreigner because I was Jewish. They knew my name was Levy. The government put a guy in charge to make sure everybody was following the rules. His name was Mustafa Abd Salam. This guy was one of the Muslim brotherhood, a fanatic. So I went to him and said, listen Mustafa how come I am on the foreigner's list? I was born here, and never left the country. I thought he'd be nice, but instead said "Levy you better shut up and get the hell out of here" So I just left him and ran. You cannot say anything, talk too much you'd get into trouble.

At about age 16, I used to go in groups with Jewish and non Jewish boys and girls to Mena House, a hotel in Cairo close to the pyramids where there was a swimming pool and we stayed and played the whole day. Sometimes we rode bicycles into the suburbs, kids from many different cultures. One time we went on an excursion to Aswan, where there's a dam with big parks. We had a picnic and one time the Egyptian policeman came and saw us taking pictures. He accused us of being spies because we were taking pictures. He said we were Jewish spies and wanted to take us to the police station. We pleaded with him to not arrest us, but he refused. We decided to bribe him, and we collected some money to give him. He looked at the amount of money, took it, and said this time I'll let you go but next time I won't. We got sunburned and went to the drive in movies without a car. With the ticket they gave you ice cream and a snack. It was an open air theatre and we sat on chairs to watch movies. We went with the girls.

Everything began to change, and they started to lay off people. I quit because there was no future for me there. In the meantime I wanted to go to Israel and I was 18 years old. I was a Zionist, and belonged to Aliyot Noar a youth organization. I wanted to go to Israel. So I told my mom and dad that I wanted to go to Israel, and they approved.

In Cairo, they had an officer they used to call Sheikh El Hara who he was in charge of the district I used to live in, and he came to my dad and told him because you are a good friend of mine I'm going to tell you something but don't say it to anybody. You're youngest son Nessim is on the black list. At that time they started to have camps for the Jews and they used to stab Jews in the street and throw rocks on them.

One time, I went to the movies with my girlfriend and on the way out of the movie, I walked down the stairs from the movies, walking down from the third floor where there was a bunch of young, Muslim boys. One of the boys kicked me with his foot and threw me over the rail. I was lucky that halfway down I grabbed the rail and didn't continue falling down the stairs to the main street. I didn't say anything to them because I didn't want to be hurt anymore. But they weren't done with me, they ran after me and one of them held my two arms behind my back and the rest of them were hitting me. The girl was an Italian girl named Magdalena. She started to cry, so I told her, why don't you go home before they beat you up. So, she left and they continued to beat me up in the middle of the street. I was lucky, at the office I was working, there was a rich Egyptian man from a high class, the Pasha working with me. So, I was lucky, he was passing by and he saw me, asked what's going on. Usually when they catch a thief they beat him up. He saw me and yelled my name Levy. I couldn't talk, he always carried a gun in his pocket. He took out the gun and said he was going to kill them if he knew who they were.

So, I was badly beaten, bruises on my body and I couldn't get up. He called a taxi cab and took me to the doctor and the doctor said there's nothing I can do for him, take him home and let him rest. All my body ached. There was nothing my parents could do. They knew I got beat up.

On one occasion, in the middle of the night when I was living at home, the police came and knocked on the door with the rifle, saying "Open up right away, it's the police." We opened the door and we let them in. One officer and three policemen said "Where is the radio communication you have here, with the Jews in Palestine?" We said we don't have any radios here, what are you talking about. They went into our bedrooms and broke the dressers looking for wires. They said someone reported that we had radio equipment. They didn't find anything and eventually left. Sadly enough, they made a mess by destroying the bedroom furniture. All of the kids were living at home, except Sammy, Felix and Jeanette.

Another time, on the way out of a drive in movie, a bunch of Fundamentalist Muslims attacked me. We fought in the streets and the police came and called me, a Jew and troublemaker. He took off his belt and began hitting me, calling me a dirty Jew and a troublemaker. He took me to the police station, it was night time and they told me to wait in the corner, on the floor and we'll tell you when to go home. So, I stayed there all night long until the morning and every time a policeman came into the station he slapped or kicked me with his foot, and cussed at me. Finally, they said we'll let you go this time but next time you won't leave alive.

My father panicked, and said to the officer what can I do? So the officer said I'll come back the next day and I'll tell you what to do. He came back the next day and said he found somebody in the passport department that would do phony papers so I could get out. They called it Laissez Passer, it means let go in French. It was going to cost 25 Egyptian pounds. At that time, workers used to make three pounds a month. My dad said from where were we going to get the money? The officer said that's it. My dad went to all of his friends to borrow money and when he got all the amount we called the officer and we told him we had the money. The officer called me and wanted to talk to me, telling me, meet me at the sidewalk café in the center of Cairo, it was called Radwan at 3:00 in the afternoon and bring the money in the envelope. He said he'd bring papers in an envelope and you'll have to leave on the spot.

He said these papers are not guaranteed because they are fake, but you have a chance to make it. I had to go to Alexandria, the port to board a ship to Europe. I took one shirt and one pair of shorts, and I got on a train to Alexandria and I slept on the deck of the ship. Anyway, I presented my papers to the officers in Alexandria. The officer looked at my

papers and they said I was going to Naples, Italy. He said he know where all the Jews end up, it's Palestine not Naples. He was suspicious.

Anyway, after 20 minutes, the officer tells me, Okay you Jew, he started to cuss, take your small package, a shirt and pair of shorts, and go to hell before I change my mind. So I said, this is not the time for him to change his mind. I went on the ship, an Italian ship called Hesperia. I got on board and I had a ticket to sleep on the deck, and I was still shaking from the experience with the officer. I knew they could still catch me even if I was on the ship. I said to myself, please G-d let the ship sail. As the ship moved, I was happy, still alive and that was the main thing. Now I'm going to Naples and I don't know anybody there and without a penny in my pocket. I don't care as long as I'm still alive, I'll manage to stay alive. The ship arrived in Naples, I got off the ship and decided to just sit there on the deck and relax. I closed my eyes to relax, and after a half hour I opened my eyes and looked all over, and didn't know where to go. So, I saw somebody holding a sign from far away and I couldn't read the sign, it was too far and I decided to get closer to him and the sign said Jewish Agency for refugees. So, I said that's the guy I need, G-d sent me to the right person. I talked to him, told him listen, this is so and so, and he said its our job to meet refugees from all over the world, to help the refugees. From Naples they took me to a refugee camp in the suburb of Rome and the name of the suburb was Conegliano Del Lazio. They kept me there for two to three weeks. They used to give me pocket money to eat a sandwich or something. I was then transferred to Marseilles, France in another camp called Camp D' Arenas.

After a few weeks they put me on a ship with hundreds of other Jewish refugees to Israel. We arrived in a refugee camp in Haifa called Shaar Alia. I was 19 years old at the time. I had in Israel, my uncle from Turkey, on my father's side. My father's side were all from Turkey, and I never met them in my life. I went to visit them for a few days, in their own refugee camp and the Sohknut Ha Yehudit, a Jewish Agency wanted to start an agricultural settlement with a group of Egyptian refugees, girls and boys. So they sent us to a Moshav, like a kibbutz near Tel Mond to learn agriculture. After this, we needed to start one of our own settlements. I went there and started to work in the orange groves and the vegetable gardens and many other duties to learn how to plant and harvest everything. After a while I didn't like it. It was very hard work and without good pay. We were on the borders and we had to guard the settlement, it was dangerous work. So, I quit and knowing I had to enlist in the Israeli Army, I went to Haifa. They told me there was a special unit called Heil Hasfar, the border patrol, and it was the most dangerous work, and it paid a little better. I went and it was very hard and dangerous work. Every evening at sunset we used to lay down on the border of Kalkilia, they used to call it the triangle Hameshulash. Our job was to protect the

borders from sunset to sunrise, laying down with the old fashioned rifle from Czechoslovakia. A lot of things were happening, we were outnumbered.

We were in groups of three soldiers and the Arabs were crossing the borders at nighttime from all over. I had a very hard time until I finished and I was lucky I got out alive because many of my friends didn't make it. After a year, I was discharged and they dissolved the border patrol. I left the army and my parents came from Egypt and were in a refugee camp near Haifa called Maarava, Tirat Ha Carmel which is 20 minutes from Haifa. I stayed with my parents, Rosa and Maurice. By this time, Jeanette, my older was in America. One day, I saw an ad in the paper for mail carriers in the post office in Haifa. I applied and they needed around 20 mail men, so I took the physical and I passed it. I didn't want to be a mailman. I wanted to be a clerk but they told me that to be a clerk I needed to be a mailman for 2 years, to learn the streets of Haifa before I could become a clerk. I couldn't say no. I took the job and worked in the Arab neighborhood called Wadi Lelnesnas. It was a big Arab neighborhood with all kinds of stores. After a couple of years I took a written test to become a clerk. I took the test, became a clerk and was promoted several times. At the post office my future wife had many cousins working there. At the time I wasn't married, so one of her cousins told me he knew a good girl for me to marry. He didn't mention she was his cousin and I didn't want to get married at the time. I wanted to come to America single. So, he forced me to meet her at his house. The girl's name was Esther Yarhi. I said Ok and finished with him. He insisted that I meet her. I went to Mahane David, a section for refugees. We saw each other and I told him I'd let him know, but he wouldn't take this for an answer and said I needed to take her to the movies. I said, I just came to meet her and not go anywhere. But that guy, his name was Sou Sou Costica. His mother and Esther's mother were sisters. So, we went to the movies, and from one thing to another, after six months we were married.

The wedding was in the evening at the Rabbinate of Haifa. It was raining very, very hard that night. Everyone got wet and we didn't have a reception or party. We had a small home made cake and some drinks. The drinks were called gazoz. After the reception, the Rabbis blessed everyone and they went home soaked. We borrowed Esther's wedding dress from my father's cousin who used to loan wedding dresses to people. We didn't pay for it. It was a present for her. It wasn't ruined, but in bad shape and we couldn't do anything. I had a one bedroom condominium in Tirat Ha Carmel and my mother was living with me. My father passed away when he was 56, he had all kinds of problems, diabetes, high blood pressure and he used to smoke a lot and drink.

One time we went dancing and Esther was pregnant. After coming home, she started bleeding and I took her to the doctor and he said it was a miscarriage. We had to wait for

six months before trying again. After six months, she was pregnant again and we had our first child Eliahu Levy. Eliahu was two months old, when in the middle of the night there was an army truck that came by the house and they started to yell, Nessim come down fast, there's no time to talk. I said I finished the army and they said, we're at war. I asked where we were going and they didn't know. My wife started to cry, you're going to leave me with a two month old baby. I told her don't be afraid my mother is with you and I'll be back. The year was 1956, and they called it the Midbar Sinai, the Sinai Campaign and we also had the British, French and Israel fighting against Egypt.

The British and French attacked Egypt for the Suez Canal and Israel fought in the Sinai dessert to reach the Suez from the other side. The war lasted about one and a half months and then I came home and returned to my job at the post office as a clerk. At the time, I used to work a lot of overtime and once in a while I went to the port in Haifa to clean up the ships. Sometimes, they changed the oil in a ship and there were holes a human being can barely go in to clean the holes containing grain with rags. There was a grain silo in the Haifa port called Dagon. After they unloaded the grain we had to clean up all the dust and everything, but I needed the money so I did it.

One day I read in the paper that two Egyptian Jews who were Israeli spies were arrested in Alexandria. I knew Dr. Marzouk and Azar, who were spying for Israel. Eventually they were hanged for spying. Azar used to be my best friend, and I was sorry to hear that he was executed. Azar's father and my father Lieto came from Izmir to Egypt. They ran away from the Turkish Army because they didn't want to serve in the Turkish Army.

Back home, we had our second son Ezra, followed by Batia and Yossi. So, from the time I arrived in Israel in early 1949 I went to the American embassy in Tel Aviv and applied to immigrate to the United States. The embassy told me it would take 20 years for my turn with the quota to immigrate. So, I said 20 years, no way. But I kept the application there anyway. You never know.

After 12 years I received a letter from the embassy that my turn came and I had to go to the embassy and present my papers. I thought, when I applied I was single and now I have a wife and four children. So I called the embassy and explained this to them. They said no problem, bring the whole gang, with the birth certificates, an Israeli passport and come to the embassy. I did all the necessary steps and went there with the four children. At the embassy, the kids were so noisy, fighting and running around, screaming. Elie was seven,, Ezra was five, Batia was three and Yossi was six months old. The secretary came out from her room, and said what's all that noise? I told her I was sorry. She said where are all the kids and I said right here. She said bring everybody here, and come in right now. We went

in and showed them the papers, they stamped the passport, gave me the visa and I was ready to go. I asked my sister Jeanette who was living in Odessa, Texas at the time to send me an affidavit of support. She sent me that paper and I sent it to the embassy. I then had to go to the health department in Haifa for all of us to get a physical. We did all the formalities and sold my one bedroom condo to buy the tickets for the trip. The value of the condo brought me only half the amount I needed for the tickets. I had to borrow money from friends at work who trusted me because they knew I was honest.

We boarded a ship called Zion, which stopped in Naples and Marseilles, then to New York. In Naples, Italy we got off the ship for a few hours and walked around a little bit. We also took a horse carriage ride through the city. After Naples, we sailed to Marseilles, France and Raoul, Esther's brother came from Paris to visit us. After this we completed our trip to the U.S. and landed in New York during the evening. We were supposed to take a plane from New York to Odessa, Texas where my older sister Jeanette was living with her husband and two sons.

However, we needed to stay overnight in New York. One of my friends at the post office in Haifa had an aunt in Brooklyn who told him we could sleep at her house for one night only. So, we went to her house, knocked on the door and told her who we were, that her relatives in Israel told us you'd let us stay with you one night. She said no, I'm very sorry, I can't do it. So, we had no where to go and the kids were tired, hungry and crying. It was terrible. Joey had a rash. I asked her again to let us stay with her, it was evening, and we had no money, I pleaded with her and she said no. You have to leave. I left, and thought, what can we do? I remembered buying two bottles of whiskey while on the ship that I was going to give my sister Jeanette as a present. Now I only had \$10.00 in my pocket. I thought I'd sell the two bottles of whiskey and get a room in the hotel. I left the family in the lobby and took the two bottles, walking from one store to another asking them to do me a favor, to buy the whiskey. Nobody wanted to buy the whiskey.

Eventually, I found a kosher butcher shop, I thought, maybe this guy will buy the whiskey. I went in and explained to him my situation, thinking I'd sell it to him for half price. He bought them from me for very cheap and we found a hotel. I went in to the receptionist and asked him how much for a night, any room, not fancy and just for one night. He told me \$16.00 and all I had was exactly \$16.00. However, I needed to buy food and medicine for Joey's rash. He said I can't take less than that. I asked to speak with the manager, and I told him the whole story, and I asked him for just any room for us to sleep; I couldn't afford to give him the whole amount. I offered \$10.00 so I could buy some bread and cheese to feed the kids. He agreed and gave us a small room. I took everybody to the room, and left for the market to buy a loaf of bread and cheese, and to the drug store and bought ointment for

Joey's rash. I came back to the room, and everyone jumped for the food, saying Abba, Abba we're hungry. We put the ointment on Joey's rash and he felt better.

We slept and the next morning we had to go to the airport to catch a plane to Odessa, Texas, where Jeanette lived. We didn't have money for the taxi. I had a few souvenirs from Israel, so I pulled them out, stopped a taxi driver and asked him how much to take us to the airport. The taxi driver wasn't interested in the souvenirs from Israel, and said what do you think this is, a swap meet? So, I kept asking different taxi drivers, and one accepted my offer. We went to the airport, showed them the tickets and they said we were in the wrong airport. I said, you know what, I'm not going to move from here, you'll have to take me there. They said we can't do that, you're on your own. I said I'm not moving with my kids until you give us transportation. In the end, they agreed to give us bus tickets to the other airport.

We got to the other airport, took a small plane with a dozen people and arrived at Odessa, Texas. At Odessa, my sister rented us a two bedroom house until I found a job and got settled. So, the following day I went to the unemployment office to ask for a job and they had a very long line. I didn't want to waste my time, it looked like it would take hours to be seen. I asked to talk with the manager, they let me and he after asking him how likely I could get work, he said unlikely. There's hundreds of people, less than half will get a job. And there's no jobs, the only jobs are physical ones with shovels on the road. I said no, I can't do that. I went back home and one of the neighbors told me to go to El Paso and look for something there because it was a bigger city.

The next early morning, I took a bus to El Paso, to the Jewish Family Service, thinking maybe they could help me find a job. They told me, we're sorry, go back to Israel. They asked me why I came here. By the time I finished there, it was dark and I didn't want to go back to Odessa in the dark. I told them I didn't have money to stay in a hotel in El Paso, so they gave me a ticket to buy some food and a ticket to sleep overnight at the YMCA. I went to the YMCA where they had a big dormitory with a hundred beds, with strange, weird people, and I remember worrying I wouldn't get out of there alive. There were Indians and people in drug rehabilitation there. So I couldn't sleep all night, I was scared of those people. No one harmed me. The next morning I took the bus home to Odessa and said to myself I'm wasting my time here, I have to find another way.

So, I had a good friend of mine in Chicago, his wife was our neighbor in Cairo. Esther Midler was a friend of ours from Cairo. I called them and asked them if they could let me stay with them in Chicago until I could find a job, and bring the family. Ben and Esther agreed to let me come. They were good friends. I took a bus by myself to Chicago and

they took me to a commercial district in the south side of Chicago to look for a job. I saw a kosher sausage company, and thought maybe they'll give me a job. I went in and met the owner, his name was Harry Osherwitz and the name of the company was Best Kosher Sausage Company. I explained to him my situation, asking for any kind of job, just so I could feed my family. He said Ok, come tomorrow morning and start working. I came back the next morning and he took me to the basement where they had all the butchers, where they made all the meat kosher by salting it. I started to work as a laborer washing the meat and salting it. I transferred big barrels of meat to the cooler and it was very hard for me because I wasn't used to doing physical work. After about four months, the owner's son, Jerry asked me to come to the office. I thought he was going to fire me or lay me off, because I was having a hard time doing that job. I told him Jerry please don't fire me, I'll do better, it'll take time. He told me, let me talk. He said would you like to become a meat cutter? I said sure, it's better than what I'm doing now and I knew it paid better.

So, he called the foreman, Isaac who was a Polish Jew but with a very mean look. He told him to take this young man, I was 34 at the time, and teach him to be a meat cutter. He said Ok. He gave me a white apron and a small knife, and showed me how to cut and trim a small piece of meat. After a few days Isaac, the foreman, calls me to his office. I went to his office and he tells me you think I'm going to teach you for nothing? I told him the owner didn't say I had to pay you anything. Plus I'm an immigrant, I don't have any money. He said he didn't want to hear anything. Tomorrow morning, bring with you \$300.00 and if not, I don't know what's going to happen to you. I told him I didn't have a penny. He said, if you don't bring the money we'll see what's going to happen. So, there was an Israeli woman that worked in the same plant and I went to her and told her what happened. She told me Ok, Levy I'll loan you the money and you'll pay me little by little. If you don't pay him he'll find a reason to fire you. She gave me the money, I came to work the next morning, gave him the money and he was happy. He told me to return to work. Anita Rosen was the Israeli lady. After a week the foreman calls me again to his office and I asked him if I did anything wrong. He tells me, are you crazy? He says do you think \$300.00 is enough? Do you call this money? So, I told him the first \$300.00 I gave him was money I had to pay back. I'm not going to give you my work checks. I'm not going to bring anything tomorrow. He said, we'll see what's going to happen to you.

The next morning, I came to work as usual at 6:00 and I saw something wasn't right in the atmosphere. He made a plan with other Polish workers to start with me so he can have an reason to fire me. While I was working one of his polish friends came to me and slapped me in the face. It was all planned and I looked at the guy, wondering why he slapped me? What did I do to him? I knew he wanted to slap me again and I held his arm and I slapped him back. Right away, Isaac came to me and said it's not enough you don't do anything,

and you're a trouble maker, you come in the morning and throw knives. I didn't throw knives. He wanted to have a reason to fire me. He told me I was fired. I knew I was going to get fired, but I wanted to give it to him before I left. I told him he didn't own this place and that he couldn't fire me. Only the owner could fire me. He told me I had a big mouth and I told him he had a big mouth. I'm not going home, only when the owner tells me to go home. You won't get paid, so go home. He went to the phone and called Jerry at home early in the morning. He told Jerry, you know that Arab Levy, he came here this morning throwing knives at everybody and acting crazy, and I told him to go home and he refuses to go home. I think Jerry told him not to do anything until he came to see what's going on. Jerry came to the basement and took me to his office. We talked in his office and he asked me what was going on. I told him the truth, everything that happened, and if you want to believe me fine, or you can fire me.

I asked him if he saw me as the kind of guy that throws knives, or hits people? And I told him about the money Isaac took from me the first time, and the second time. So he said Levy, I know you aren't that kind of person. But that Isaac has been here 15 years and you just started working, so I have your word against his. We can do something about it. Are you willing to go to the police and take a lie detector test? I said sure, anything you want. I went to the police station, they put all the wires on my arms, asked me questions and I answered all the questions. The results indicated everything was truthful.

They gave me the report to take back to Jerry. He said that's fine, now I can do something about it. He told me to go back to work in the basement. I went to work and Isaac came to me, started to holler, asking me who told me to come back. What are you doing here, go home. In the meantime, Jerry came to the basement and asked what's going on? Isaac says, it's either me or him, not both of us. Jerry told Isaac, you are right, we can't have both of you here. You can go to hell Isaac, I don't want to see your face again. I thought Isaac was going to get a heart attack. He took his belongings, left and they replaced him with a guy named Elmer. Jerry joked with Elmer saying to keep an eye on me. After a few weeks, Jerry came back to the basement and he asked Elmer how is that young troublemaker doing? Is he still making trouble here? Jerry was joking with Elmer. Elmer said you know Jerry, if all the workers here were like this young man Jules, you wouldn't need a foremen here. He's a very nice young man, polite, good worker, always on time. He's the best.

I had to be an apprentice for two years to get my union scale wages. Jerry thanked me for having the courage to tell him the truth about Isaac because after Isaac left everybody reported giving him money every week. Some gave him \$10.00 and he scared everybody, to the point that no one disclosed anything to Jerry. They all worried about losing their jobs. Jerry said I was the first to report what Isaac was doing. I want to thank you very much for

what you did, and instead of waiting two years to get your union scale, I'm going to give it to you right away. From that time, everything was quiet and Anita was moving to a new condo in Lincolnwood. She sold all her furniture to us and we rented the apartment she was living in on Central Avenue. The children were going to Emmet school, a public school just down the street. We had the temple down the same direction on Central, and the Rabbi's name was Chaimowitz. I then started Elie at Rambam School before transferring to Arie Crown. I stayed in the job, and I took extra jobs after work. I went to Vienna sausage company after work and sometimes a Jewish couple, their last name was Rose who owned many warehouses had work for me. I used to work in their warehouses, making reports on the damaged merchandise, mostly food and wine. The foreman liked me very much, he was Italian and the owner said his wife didn't have time to shop, so I used to shop for them.

On weekends, in their big house, I cleared the yard of leaves and she marked it down on my time card how many hours it took me to do it. Sometimes, I used to go to Halsted Street, South street and sell pants with the Rabbi's son-in-law. We had a table on the street and we sold pants. I yelled in Spanish pantalones. On the weekends, I sold pants and clothes.

Our doctor was Dr. Schechter, a Russian doctor, tall and a very kind man. He was located on the second floor on top of a general store. One time all the kids had the flu and I took them to him, after he checked them he gave us some samples of syrup so we didn't pay for them. After he finished, I asked him how much I owed him. He said you want me to charge by piece or bunch. I told him I'd pay. He put his hand in his pocket and pulls out a bunch of bills, hundred dollars and twenty dollar bills. He said I don't need your money. I told him I wanted to pay something. He told me not now.

The kids went to Emmet Elementary School when we lived on Central and Madison Ave. Elie attended Emmet for one year because Rabbi Chamowitz asked us to transfer to a Hebrew Day School called Rambam. Elie attended Rambam for at least three years with Ezra. Betty and Joey stayed at home with Esther. I went to take car driver's lessons after working for three years. I saved enough money to put a down payment on a car. So, I had a friend of mine at work who knew about cars and he took me to look at cars. One day after work we went to a Chevrolet dealer and we found a red Chevy Chevelle. I wanted to surprise everyone so I didn't tell anyone about it. I came with the car one night and the kids and Esther were all surprised to see me in the car. I parked the car in front of the apartment on Central Ave. I chose the color red because in Egypt, King Farouk had red cars.

Elie attended Arie Crown Hebrew Day School for one year (5th grade) with Ezra. The reason we couldn't continue to send the kids to Arie Crown was because we couldn't afford it. So,

we sent the kids to public school at Jamison Elementary School. Elie attended 6th grade and Ezra 5th grade at Jamieson.

Around 1967 we moved to the North side of Chicago and our address was 5408 B. North Artesian. We moved because I had saved enough money and I wanted to buy a condominium. It was a two story condominium and we paid \$16,000.00 dollars for it. I ended up selling it for \$18,000.00 We also joined a new Temple on Foster street that was called Mikro Kodesh Anshe Tiktin. The Rabbi's name was Ellison and it was a conservative synagogue. Elie had his Bar Mitzvah at this temple the summer we moved to Long Beach in 1969. In 1968, we became citizens and went downtown Chicago be sworn in as citizens. I brought everyone to a large auditorium, where there were lots of people being sworn in.

The reason we moved to Long Beach was because my older sister Jeanette was living there. She rented a house for us at 835 Freeman Street that we moved into around August of 1969. Jeanette lived down the street from us on Freeman near 7th Street. I found a job in downtown Long Beach for about one year. I worked as a butcher near Anaheim and Magnolia. I didn't like the work because the foreman was a German who hated me. All day long he'd tell me I wasn't a good worker and yell at me "Move your butt."

I felt I was discriminated against by this German supervisor. I didn't do anything about it because I needed a job. So, one day when the union man came I told him I didn't like working here and I asked the union representative if he could help me find another job. Right away he said yes and told me about Lucky Stores who built a new plant in Buena Park, and they needed butchers. I applied and they hired me. I worked at Lucky for nine years, until 1978 when I bought the bakery.

We moved to a house on 15th Street and Obispo. It was a house we bought and it was a duplex. We rented the back house to a married couple. I believe we lived in this house about two years before buying another house on Wilton St. which was also a duplex. We lived at the Wilton house about three years. While living in the Wilton house I bought an apartment building that had five units which I took care of. After a few years I bought another apartment building on Coronado which had eight units. I also bought another 12 unit apartment on Coronado and PCH which had two bedroom units and a swimming pool.

Around 1978 a bakery was for sale. I had to sell the 12 unit apartments and the five unit apartment to purchase the bakery. However, I also bought a four plex on 5th Street and Ximeno around 1979-1980. We lived in one of the apartments in the front which was a three bedroom and we rented the three two bedroom units. We lived here for about three years before moving into the house connected to the bakery on Vista Street.

We bought the bakery with two partners. They were real estate agents who worked together in an office. They had 25% each and I had 50% of the business. We didn't get along because they were always complaining, being critical of me, telling me I was a lousy worker and didn't know how to run a business. I was working like a slave from the morning until midnight to learn the business and manage it. The business was bankrupt when I took it over. We had 15 employees and it was a big responsibility for me and I knew I was doing a good job. I used to buy the merchandise and do everything. The partners continued to complain that we didn't have enough income because I was a lousy manager. We made it a corporation and I was the president of the corporation and they couldn't do anything to me because I had a larger share of the business and I was the president. They threatened to fire me but they knew they couldn't fire me.

So, one day it got to me, especially after a sheriff came to the bakery and gave me some papers to go to court. He said they complained that I broke into their office and stole the books. I saw that they wrote checks in their husbands and son's names and I knew they couldn't be trusted. Every time I asked them about the checks they said to shut up and don't talk too much. They said I didn't know anything. I then went to my lawyer named Tincher on Ocean Blvd and explained what was happening. I was scared about going to jail. Tincher said don't worry about anything, I'll take care of everything. So, I said OK. Keller told my lawyer that she wanted to buy me out. I refused, saying no way. I went through a lot to get this business and now that it's better I'm not unloading it. She insisted about buying me out. I told Tincher I'll never sell it. She's wasting her time. After one day Tincher called me and says how much do you want to buy them out. They wanted double what they put in for one year. They put in \$25,000.00 each and they wanted \$50,000.00 each. So, my lawyer told me this is the only option or you give it to the government and they sell it. I went and got enough money to give them \$50,000.00 each just to get rid of them. So, I bought them out.

After I had the business for myself I relaxed and didn't have to worry and have headaches. My business improved every day and I had a wholesale business too, and we made a very good living.

In 1989 I got tired of the bakery. I used to get up at three in the morning and work until 7:00 in the evening, standing on my feet and running around. I'd have to go home and do the bookkeeping. I decided to sell it—just the business and the building was mine. It was around 1987 when I sold it to a woman who ran it to the ground. I carried a loan with her and she didn't last one year. She didn't know how to run a business and she was mean to the employees. She kept the same employees but she mistreated them. Finally, all the employees quit. After they quit she got in trouble and had to close the bakery. She was

also behind in her payments and didn't pay me for three months. She closed the bakery and never told me anything. I was passing by one day and saw the store was closed. I asked the neighbors and they said it was closed for two weeks. But she didn't tell me anything. She also had the keys to the bakery. I had to go back to the lawyer and tell him what happened. I went to my lawyer Gyler and he said we'll take her to court. I went to court and she didn't show up and she lost the case.

The judge told me Mr. Levy go break the door and start working again. I didn't want to take it back because I was sure she killed the business and I wasn't sure the customers would come back. But anyway, I had no choice and I went back and I was lucky because I knew where my former employees were working and I called them back. The employees said it would be a pleasure to come back and work for you Levy because you were the best boss we ever had. They all came back to work for me. I tried to revive the business but it was too late and I lost all my wholesale business customers and most of the customers never came back. So I barely made the expenses and there wasn't enough work. I used to work 16 hours a day for nothing—I didn't get paid. That's when I decided to sell it again. However, no one wanted to buy it and operate it as a bakery when they saw the books. I then had no choice but to close it down. I tried to sell it but couldn't find a buyer for one year. I then decided to sell the building and not the business. I emptied everything—had an auction and sold all the equipment for hardly anything just to get rid of it. We were still living in the back of the bakery and I sold the building. The same person that bought the building then wanted to expand and asked me if I was interested in also selling the house. I told him sure, this was around 1998. We sold him the house and moved into the current townhouse The Fountains.

Since I have been retired, Esther and I have enjoyed traveling to all of Europe, including France, Switzerland, Italy, Turkey, Greece, Alsaka, Hawaii, Jamaica, Ausralia, Panama Canal. Canada, Germany and Austria. I have been to Israel six times since moving to America. I currently enjoy going to the gym to do water aerobics. I have many female friends I socialize with from the gym. We meet for lunch on Wednesdays, and on Tuesdays

Monday, Wednesday and Friday I go to the gym.

On Tuesdays I do errands.

I speak Hebrew, Arabic, French, Spanish, Italian, English and some Yiddish. I enjoy meeting people form different nationalities and speaking to them in their language. I enjoy reading news magazines, and used to have international satellite and watched all the middle east news, movies and I have a big collection of foreign movies. I also speak at high schools and

senior citizen centers, synagogues about my adventures and life experiences in Egypt, Israel and America.

My father passed away at age 56 from prostate cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure. I was in my 30's when he passed away. My father came to Israel in 1954 and he dies that same year. My mother died in 1965 from an infection in her leg, she was 66 years old. My brother Felix died around ___ from smoking and alcohol, and the same with Sami.

Jeannette passed away in 2009, while living in Oklahoma at the age of 84. Maurice is 83 and living in Los Angeles with his wife Clarice and two sons Elie and Schlomo. Rosa is 77 years old, living in Long Beach with her husband Caesar and they have six children all Israeli born.

Stories to add--

AT about age 16—I used to go in groups with boys and girls Jews and non Jews go to Mena House, hotel in Cairo close to the pyramids and there was a swimming pool and we stayed and played the whole day with friends. Sometimes we rode bicycles outside, into the suburbs, all cultures of kids. One time we went on an excursion in to Aswan, there's a dam there and with big parks. We had a picnic and one time the Egyptian policeman came and saw us taking pictures. He accused us of being spies because we were taking pictures. He said we were Jewish spies and wanted to take us to the police station. We pleaded to him to not arrest us—but he refused to listen. We decided to bribe him—and we collected some money and gave it to him. He looked at the amount of money and he took it—and said this time I'll let you go but next time I won't.

That day we got sunburned and we went to the drive in movies—outdoors without a car. With the ticket they gave you ice cream and a snack with the ticket. It was open air theatre and we sat on chairs to watch movies. We went with the girls.

During WW II we had all the armies Jewish, Polish Australian, Americans, New Zealand. The German reached El Alamein which is in the Egyptian border with Romel and Montgomery with the Bri tish. I was 11 years old at the time and they were expecting the Germans to cross the border overnight and all the MP's gathered all the soldiers to stop the Germans. By this time I was out of the school. I did 7 years at the Catholic school—from age 4 to 11. We stopped the Germans from entering Egypt. We knew if they came in they would kill all the Jews. Thousands of soldiers died—bodies were everywhere.