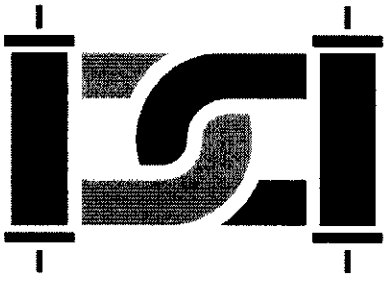

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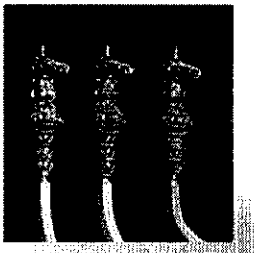
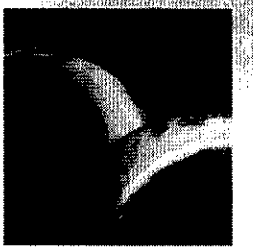
OPPORTUNITIES FOR LIFE-LONG LEARNING



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Shidduchim, Shandas, and Shaping the Future: Family and Social Life in Modern Jewish History

Life on the Homestead

Dr. Leslie Ginsparg Klein

February 26th, 2013

THIS COURSE IS DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF:

אסתר חנה ז"ל בת צבי ופרומה עלקא פייגא בת מאיר ופשא לאה ז"ל נח בן אברהם ופייגא ז"ל

MAY THEIR SOULS BE BOUND IN THE EVERLASTING BOND OF LIFE תהא נשמתם צרורות בצרור החיים

Shidduchim, Shandas, and Shaping the Future
Family & Social Life in Modern Jewish History
Leslie Ginsparg Klein

East European Migration to America: Urban

I. Who Came & Why They Came?
   A. Pogroms
   B. Economics
   C. Reasons to stay
   D. Why America?

II. The Process of Emigration
   A. Obstacles
   B. The trip
   C. Ellis Island
   D. White slavery
   E. Immigrant aid

III. Life in Urban Areas
   A. Poor neighborhoods (like Lower East Side)
   B. Poverty & housing conditions
   C. Job opportunities
      i. Garment industry
      ii. Factory vs. sweatshop
      iii. Poor working conditions
   D. Differences between Jews and other immigrant groups

IV. Building a Social Life
   A. Settlement houses
   B. Landsmanshaft
   C. Community culture & labor movement
   D. Marriage and intermarriage
   E. Family conflicts
   F. Desertion & despair

V. Relationships Between the Old and the New (Conflict with "German" Jews)
   A. Established Jews' fears
   B. Anti-immigration legislation
   C. Speeding Americanization
   D. Labor disputes

VI. Becoming American
   A. Education
   B. Consumer culture
   C. Financial success

A Bintel Brief: Primary Source Analysis

1. Who is the author of the letter?

2. In what year was the letter written?

3. List three things you can learn about Jewish life in America from this letter. (Not specifics of this individual person's plight, but general issues and themes)

a.

b.

c.

4. Cite/underline two important quotations from this letter.

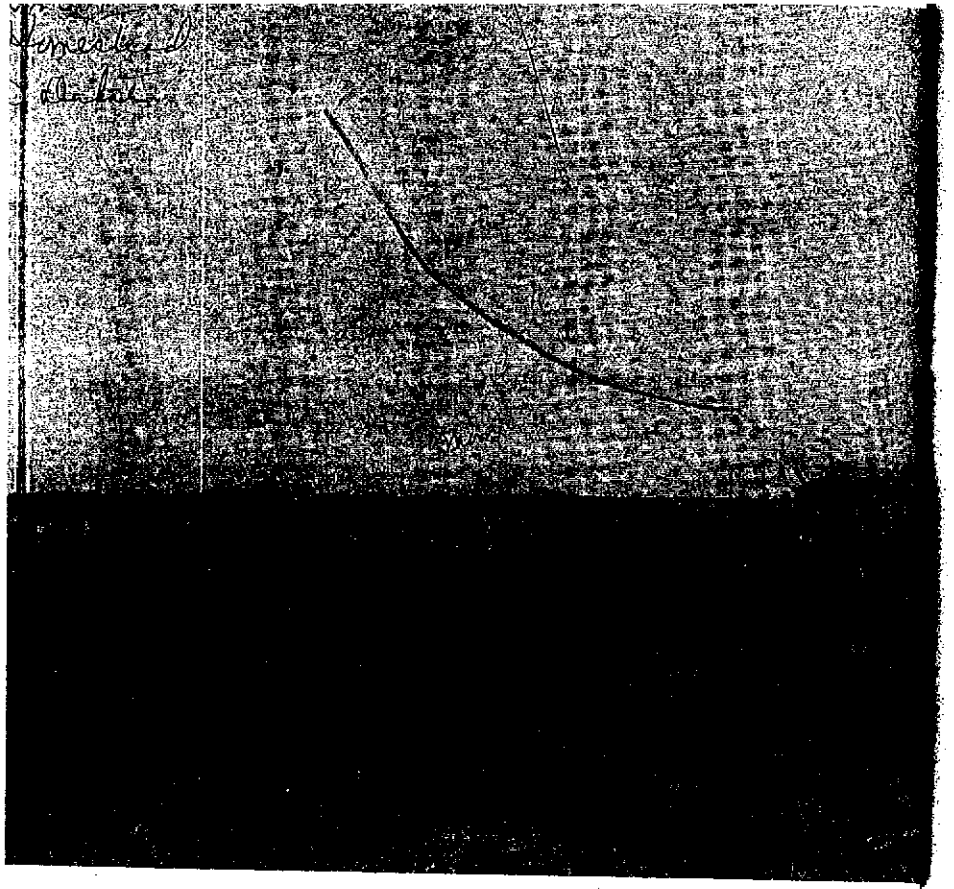
a.

b.

5. Write a question that you might now have on American Jewish history--based on this letter--that is left unanswered.

Rachel Calof's Story

JEWISH HOMESTEADER ON THE NORTHERN PLAINS



The North Dakota homestead of Rachel Bella and Abraham Calof. Rachel Bella appears in the center, below the handwritten "Mom." Circa 1905.

MY STORY

Rachel Bella Calof

I was born in Russia in the year 1876, and when I was four years old my dear mother died, leaving me a half orphan in company with an older brother, a younger sister, and a baby brother of only eighteen months. My father did not marry again for some time because he wanted to be sure, he said, to select a wife who would be a good stepmother to us children. In the meantime he brought a Jewish servant girl into our home to care for us. This event proved to be a disastrous development for us youngsters; from that day onward, unyielding misfortune became our lot.

The first initiative of our new supervisor was to reduce the children's food supply, and other requirements for the care of small children were simply ignored. How well I recall the pangs of hunger which attended all my waking hours. Hunger and dirt dominated our young lives. Our overseer gave our food away regularly, but although I knew this I never learned who the lucky recipient was. This sad state of affairs continued for four long years.

When I reached the age of eight, I had already fully assumed the role of protector of my brothers and sister. Now I decided that our lives could no longer continue in this way and I

determined to take action. I spoke to my father about the intolerable conditions under which we lived. The servant girl, learning of the trouble I was causing her, beat me mercilessly, but I persisted and continued to appeal to our father upon his return from work as a farmer at that time.

Because of the terrible life that his children were enduring, father made the decision to remarry quickly to provide us all with a better home life, he said. Unfortunately the event of his second marriage marked an even further deterioration of our childhood existence.

My father married a woman with two children, a boy and a girl, both older than us. Our stepmother proved to be a nasty, cruel person with no love or accord for her new husband's children. As the saying goes, "When a father chooses a stepmother for his children, he himself becomes a stepfather." Another old belief is that a husband is more in love with his second wife than his first. In any event our father gave all of his devotion to his new love, to the exclusion of all else.

The new lady of the house quickly took full control of everything and everyone. She assumed absolute power and did with us children as she wished. She punished us continually, without reason and without mercy, beating us daily.

As soon as my father left for his work she would lock the bread away in the cupboard. The best that the household afforded she gave to her own children, and she dealt with us as did Pharaoh with the ancient Jewish slaves. She ordered us to do the heaviest kind of work which required effort beyond the capacity of small children. My eldest brother, then eleven years old, once was forced to lift a heavy load far beyond his physical ability. I recall the incident so vividly. He cried out and fell to the ground in pain so great that he fainted, and when he recovered his senses he complained of stomach pains. I realize now that he probably suffered a hernia. My poor little brother

had always been sickly and weak, and unable to further cope with our long-standing pitiful life now spent all his days in bed. And I, now nine years old, sat many hours each day with him, both of us crying forlornly.

My father was always greeted upon his return from his work with complaints about our behavior. My stepmother stated once that my little brother, who was always in pain and pale as death, was getting on her nerves and that consequently her health was affected. My father, I am saddened to say, sympathized with his new love. I went into the bedroom where my little brother lay and I and the other two children sat on his bed and cried inconsolably. My father, goaded by his wife, entered the room and without ado seized my little brother from his bed of pain and beat him without mercy. He bloodied the child who then fainted. My screams reached the heavens. My father declared that he would deal similarly with all of us. We children shook and shivered in shock, and when I saw my brother's blood on the floor, my childish heart turned to stone and I cursed my father with deadly curses.

That evening, huddled around our little brother's bed, we were afraid to cry though our hearts were breaking, fearful that we would invite more abuse if we made any sound. Later my sister and older brother and I were forced to sit at the dinner table while my little brother, also commanded to come to the table, was not able to leave his bed and consequently went without food.

We four orphans occupied one room which contained two beds, one for my brothers and the other for my sister and me. But this night I did not go to bed. I put the two older children in one bed and my sick and beaten brother in the other. I sat beside him and wept bitterly, but silently.

The poor child slept restlessly and when I touched him I realized he was feverish. I dipped a rag in water and applied it

to his head. I continued this treatment throughout the night while I silently cursed my stepmother and her children. But most of all I cursed my father from the bottom of my heart.

My little brother was in bed for a week following this incident and then was only able to totter on his feet. From that time he showed no interest in anything. He remained silent and weak and pale. He had no energy and no longer joined his brother and sisters in any activity. My heart broke and tears would come to my eyes just to look at him.

In about a year after their marriage my father and stepmother began to quarrel. One time I overheard her tell my father that she no longer wished to stay with him. Soon after she left with her children, even while my father begged her not to leave him.

Following this happening, our father decided to break up his home and give up his children. His plan was to go to America as soon as he could get rid of us. He proceeded with his plans to dispose of us. I was sent to my paternal grandfather. My older brother was given to my mother's brother who had a sack store and he was immediately put to hard work to earn his keep. My young sister was sent to my mother's sister and was immediately set to work fit for a grown person rather than a little girl. She had developed a stomach ailment and was unable to keep much food down.

My youngest brother, unable to work, found no welcome with any of our relatives and was disposed of to a Talmud Torah, a religious school. He was kept there until his health improved and after a time he was taught there to be a locksmith. The three children were all in the city of Belaya Tserkov. My new home was in a village called Chvedkifka.[1]

How I longed for my brothers and sister. Occasionally my grandfather would permit me to visit them. It was a long trip, requiring two days for the round-trip, but to see my brothers

and sister was worth any hardship. Indeed, it was the most important event in my life. However, at the same time these visits disclosing the hard lot of each of the children, especially that of my little brother dirty and sweaty from his work and always so sad, brought me tears and blood, as the saying goes. His bed was covered with rags for a quilt and the food was bad. This was a charity institution and these were the conditions found in such a place. I would start my visits with such happy anticipation of seeing my poor orphans but would return heartbroken at what was revealed to me.

And so my childhood years passed in tears and suffering. My life was shattered and wasted and I never knew love since I was four years old, except from my little orphans.

I was in my grandfather's house for six years and it wasn't very good for me there. My grandfather was very strict and a religious fanatic. He saw me as a sinful person who required constant watching. I couldn't raise my head up without reproof. He thought I had it too good, and he constantly reminded me of my lowly position while he tried to make life harder for me in the belief, I guess, that it would improve my character.

My grandmother, actually my stepgrandmother, on the other hand was more tolerant and kinder to me than my own grandfather.

At age seventeen I petitioned my grandfather to allow me to seek permission to go to my aunt, my father's sister, who I had heard was rich and, more importantly, lived in the same city as my brothers and sister. I learned that this aunt wanted a maid and I decided that I would ask for the maid's job. If my plan succeeded, I would be independent with my own money while living in the same city as my brothers and sister. With money I would be able to improve their lot.

I arrived at my aunt's house and was given the maid's job. The work was hard. This was truly a palace. It contained eight

rooms and a number of hallways, all of which I was required to wash and wax each day. But the best meals I ever ate were cooked in that house.

I was green at my job. I had never been in a house before that required this kind of care. I tried hard to please my aunt, who was very particular, but within a few months I was doing my work satisfactorily. During this time I was able to see my dear sister and brothers more often than before. Their situations had not improved at all and it was heartbreaking to see how hard their lives were. I was able to help them somewhat but still their condition was bitter. My sister was ill and being treated at a free dispensary, but they were unable to improve her health. My little brother's suffering was heartrending to see. At least, though, I could see them all quite often and help them.

One of my new duties was to buy the meat at the butcher shop. The butcher with whom my aunt traded had a fine, good-looking son. As to myself, at this time, I had heard it said that I was pretty and no fool. The butcher's son often waited on me. He was very gentle and friendly. I used to get a funny feeling inside of me when he was filling the order, but of course I didn't know how he might feel about me. I liked him, I must say, and soon I sensed that he liked me too. I was painfully aware, though, of the danger of developing a friendship with this fine boy. In Russia, at that time, the occupations of butcher, tailor, shoemaker, or musician were considered inferior trades and those engaged in such work were socially unacceptable. Certainly I felt no such distinction as I was of low status myself.

Although I was nothing in the world myself, I was the granddaughter of Eda Velvel Cohen and because of this fact a friendship with this boy was out of the question.[2] It appears that although I was no joy to my relatives, I was capable of

bringing them disgrace. A butcher was considered hardly better than a convict, and especially so to my grandfather. Still, we, a boy and a girl, in spite of the disapproval and contempt which others felt for us, were drawn to each other.

The young man was a few years older than I. One day he approached me and asked me to go for a walk with him. I was shocked at such boldness. Yes, I loved him, but I looked at him in bewilderment. I could only believe that he did not know that because of my family I could not associate with him. I thought it best to discourage him as quickly as possible and to not demean him in doing so. I told him that my grandfather lived here and that I was only a visitor in the city. It was a badly conceived lie, for he saw how poorly I was dressed and belatedly I realized that he knew I worked for the wealthy Beolicks. He appeared to take me at my word though, listening politely to my lie, and I returned to my quarters.

As I discovered later, however, the boy fully realized my helplessness and immediately took the initiative. He found out my grandfather's address and wrote him a letter in which he proposed that my grandfather make the necessary inquiries about him. He asked permission to call on me. He said that I was a fine girl and that he was very fond of me and felt that he could bring me happiness. He offered to marry me as I was without a dowry or wardrobe.

I was unaware of my friend's action, but I did know that I loved him and longed for him. Still I knew that I couldn't go walking with him under any circumstances as this would endanger my job and blacken the family name, which in turn would bring terrible consequences down on my head. I was made rudely aware of what was transpiring when my aunt received a letter from my grandfather. Of course he wouldn't even consider writing directly to me. The letter instructed my aunt to take any measures necessary to prevent me from

disgracing the family name. He stated that my marriage to a butcher would defame the family name forever.

My aunt summoned me and handed me the letter. This woman was more modern than most people of that time. She did not wear the traditional wig and her children drank milk with meat meals. She would light the samovar on the Sabbath and her children attended public school.[3]

She really looked at many things differently than most women of that age. But although she may have felt some sympathy for me, her main concern was her father and she would do nothing to hurt him. She asked me if I understood everything about this boy. I did not know the meaning of this question but I knew I was blushing for shame and hurt.

My grandfather was still not content with the damage he had done to two young lives. He dispatched a letter to the boy's father telling him not to have hope that he could ever be associated with our family.

I longed for the boy and I know that he yearned for me, but I avoided seeing him again and this episode in my life ended. The butcher boy was my dream and now the dream was over.

So time passed. I reached my eighteenth birthday and my prospects for the future were now very poor. Most girls of eighteen were married in those days,[4] and here I was a servant girl in my aunt's home without resources. I was ashamed of my status as a menial. I had no dowry to enable me to marry anyone of status. My future seemed hopeless.

I secretly hoped that my father had reached America and would send for us children. But this hope was crushed when news was received that the ship in which he had sailed had sunk. I never learned whether he had been saved and I never heard from him again.

Meanwhile God sits above and sees all that happens below,

and God finally understood that He had to do something in my behalf. His plan for me was quite complicated.

Another relative of mine, a great-uncle, lived and owned several houses in a distant city. One of his tenants was a girl named Chaya who through a series of amazing events was destined to become my sister-in-law.[5] Chaya had parents and brothers in still another city.[6] Many guests, mostly family members, came to Chaya's house.

She and all of her family were very close to my great-uncle. One of her brothers [Abraham] was in America and had no wife. He had written to Chaya, commissioning her to pick a wife for him and prepare the prospective bride for the passage to America.

Chaya had already decided upon the daughter of the local *shochet* (an authorized slaughterer of animals according to kosher law). The daughter's name was Rachel, as is mine. The arrangement had already been made with Rachel's father, but after further consideration she decided that she didn't want to go to America after all.

My great-uncle was quick to recognize the opportunity of disposing of my embarrassing presence to my relatives and volunteered me as a substitute for the other Rachel. In all justice, he probably felt that this move might also be favorable for my future as well. My great-uncle described to Chaya all my good characteristics and, I am sure, was careful to omit anything detrimental. In short order the decision was made to send me if I was able to pass personal inspection.

I was dispatched to my great-uncle's house where Chaya waited to look me over. What an inspection. She checked me out as one does a horse. Apparently I passed muster because it was decided that my picture should be sent to the boy in America. His name was Abraham [b. July 16, 1872]. He was requested to send his picture in return. After this was accom-

plished my great-uncle and Chaya would decide if anything would come of it.

I hoped that I would be accepted. I realized that I had to take the chance of going to a stranger in a strange land. No other avenue was open to me. I was already eighteen years old and time was against me.

Finally the exchange of pictures was made. I liked his looks and he wrote that he was pleased with my appearance as well. I then corresponded with him, and although he eventually became my husband, the way was neither quick nor easy.

Chaya now decided to examine me in greater detail. She said she wanted to know me better and to visit her for the next Sabbath. I didn't have a proper dress for such an invitation, but I was anxious to make good and was finally able to borrow a dress for the occasion. I spent three days under close observation and undergoing various kinds of testing. As an example, I was handed a ball of tangled yarn to unravel. I didn't understand the purpose for this, but I succeeded in unraveling all the yarn. My future sister-in-law was quite pleased. She explained that this was a way of testing my patience and good nature. She said that had I become angry or frustrated in attempting to unravel the thread I would have lost the opportunity of marrying the boy in America. Thank God I passed all the tests. God was watching over me and I won Chaya's approval.

Chaya wrote to Abraham that I was a treasure of a girl and recommended me to be his wife. In return, my unknown and unseen fiancé sent me what passed as a passport in those days of open immigration. It was actually a passage fare and it cost him twenty-one dollars. This was for steerage passage, which was the best he could do. He had no money for better accommodations.[7]

The time involved from when I became a servant girl in my aunt's house through loving and losing my butcher boy and preparing for my journey to America was nine months. As the time for my departure approached, my sorrow at leaving my dear brothers and my sick little sister grew. What can one say? We knew that we would probably never see one another again. Words cannot express my anguish at the prospect of leaving them.

My American boyfriend had arranged with an agent in Brescatovaski to plan my journey to the Russian-Polish border. No money had been provided me for the long trip across Russia, Poland, and Germany to Hamburg where I would board the ship to America. I had to raise money for food and other essentials, at least until I reached the ship. This proved to be a tough job. Even though the relatives could well afford it, they showed me no generosity.

Yet it was in their own interests to provide the means to dispose of this troublesome girl who was an embarrassment to them all; a girl, unmarried, already eighteen years old, without a dowry and who might even marry a butcher, thereby soiling the family honor beyond redemption. The reward of getting rid of me permanently won out over their avarice, and they got together fifty dollars which was presented to me with great reluctance.

Many obstacles awaited me during the course of my trip to America, not the least of which was the fact that the passport which I carried was in the name of Rachel Chavetz, the *shochet's* daughter. Prior to my selection as second choice, and when it appeared certain that the Chavetz girl would be the traveler, the husband-to-be had applied to the American immigration authorities and steamship company for passage and admission into the United States for Rachel Chavetz. This was the passport sent to Chaya, and this was the document which I was

bread. I took no water and fled back to the dining room. I lay on the couch, fully clothed you may be sure, and tried to put my situation into some sort of perspective. The fear that I had fallen into the very situation against which I had so guarded again plagued me. My suspicions were heightened by the action of the landlord who had left me with a strange boy while he retired to another part of the house. These thoughts pursued me through the long sleepless night. What had become of the bright and wonderful future which I had anticipated the morning of this very day? How terrible things had turned out on my first day in America. What would tomorrow bring?

In the morning, the landlord and his wife, finding me in the boy's bed, greeted me with great hilarity, suspecting the worst. I spoke to them coldly, telling them that I was pleased neither by their implications nor the conditions in their house.

Before leaving for work that morning the boy spoke to the landlord for some time of what I knew not. I began my second day in that alien world with many misgivings but I could not afford the luxury of tears. I felt ill but I forced myself to assess my situation calmly. Even though everything and everyone seemed so strange, including my boyfriend, I felt that the boy was more of a friend to me than any of the other people I had met. I thought about this for some time and decided that probably my future still lay with him. So I rededicated myself to our common cause, and by the time Abraham returned from his work I was indeed glad to see him.

After supper he suggested that we go for a walk. I instinctively resisted this proposal. Although I was determined to try to build a future with Abraham, I meant to do so only if I could be assured that he proved to be a man of acceptable character. As of the moment I was not prepared to trust him fully. Although my great-uncle had spoken favorably about the boy, he had already been in America three years and I suspected

that a person's character could change considerably in less time than that in America. Well, I decided to do my share in developing trust between us and so I consented to go for a walk in New York with an almost stranger. Maybe I was changing too.

We walked to a park and sat on a bench. Abraham began to speak to me in a friendly but earnest tone of voice. He said that although he had provided the passport and passage money, I was not to consider myself obligated to him. He said that he could understand my distrust of him, and that if I was unable to believe in him and didn't want him, he would still remain my friend and would help me find employment and thereby be independent of him.

I was so relieved to hear him speak so, and believing now that he was a man of good character I responded that I was satisfied to marry him. We were both happy at the way things turned out. Our affection for each other grew in the following days. When he went off to work I was lonesome for him and I was given to understand that he missed me too. By the time, two weeks later, when we left New York for a great venture, our engagement seemed to have gotten off to a good start.

Abraham's family had come to America three months before my arrival. The family consisted of his father and mother and a younger brother, Moses, who lived with his parents, and an elder brother, Charlie, and his wife, Faga, and their two young children. Two nieces, Doba and Sarah, had also come to the new land to be with their husbands.[10]

All these people had gone on to North Dakota which had become a state five years earlier. They had come to claim homestead land which was now being offered to induce people to settle there. The year was 1894. Abraham was convinced that our best chance to make something of ourselves was to avail ourselves of the offer of the free land. With our mutual

effort we would build and prosper. I had to agree. It seemed a godsend to penniless people who could not hope to buy land.

I had no idea where North Dakota was or what the country was like, but I was prepared for the challenge. Of course I had no intimation of the incredible hardships which awaited us there. And so, two weeks after setting foot on the golden *medina* (land) of America, I was on my way to become a pioneer woman and to help build my new country. My life in Russia already seemed remote.

We left the train in the town of Devils Lake, North Dakota. We were met there by Abraham's brother, Charlie, who was to escort us to the area where the family had already filed homestead claims and where we also were to stake our claims. This region was approximately twenty-five miles distant across the trackless prairie.

I felt a sinking feeling when I saw this man. He was quite dirty and badly dressed with rags on his feet in place of shoes. He looked like a subnormal person to me, a suspicion which was confirmed the moment he began to talk. I disliked him instantly and instinctively. I could hardly believe that this man was Abraham's brother. Was he typical of the kind of people I would be associating with in my new life? I must say, upon meeting the other members of the family who had accompanied Charlie, my apprehension appeared to be well-founded.

Included in the group were Abraham's father, younger brother, Moses, and the two nieces, Doba and Sarah. The appearance of these girls was truly shocking. They wore men's shoes and a rough looking garment. Only common peasants wore such clothes in Russia. I was dismayed to see such attire worn by Jewish women. It was indecent. Poor as I had been all my life, I had always worn a dress like any self-respecting Jewish woman. I was highly indignant at the time, but I want

to say now that one of these nieces before long would prove to be a real friend to me.

Charlie had borrowed two horses for the trip across the prairie. None of these people owned a horse. Their livestock consisted of three oxen and three cows which they all shared. We all climbed aboard the wagon and headed for home, not my home but that of one of the nieces. After a long ride across the limitless prairie we arrived there, where I met the remaining adult family member, my future mother-in-law.

As we climbed down from the wagon I looked again at this assembled group and my heart sank still lower. The two brothers were so dirty and unkempt. They had wild unshaven faces. Their skin was broken out in big pimples and they wore rags wrapped around their feet in place of shoes. I learned that the women had no shoes at all but were wearing the men's shoes this day in my honor.

Even this dismal spectacle was inadequate to prepare me for the scene inside the miserable shack which was this woman's home. As we entered my heart turned to ice at what greeted my eyes. This was my first sight of what awaited me as a pioneer woman. The furniture consisted of a bed, a rough table made of wood slats, and two benches. The place was divided up into two sections, the other being the kitchen which held a stove and beside it a heap of dried cow dung. When I inquired about this, I was told that this was the only fuel this household had. They had no firewood at all. What a terrible way to live. I silently vowed that my home would be heated by firewood and that no animal waste would litter my floor. How little I knew. How innocent I was. Shock and deprivation were no strangers in my young life, but seeing what faced us in this new and hostile environment I could hardly choke back my tears of grief. Two children were inside, a girl and a baby boy. The little girl's feet were wrapped in rags. She had never owned a pair of shoes.

The women prepared the welcoming supper. Even now, forty-three years later, I well remember that meal which consisted of flat pieces of boiled dough and cheese, with water or milk to drink.

Abraham and I had sat up for three nights on the train and had a jolting ride across twenty-five miles of prairie. I am sure that he also was shocked at what we had experienced this day and was as weary as I. I turned to him and said, "Let's go home." However, our hostess quickly suggested that we sleep there that night. I was puzzled by her suggestion. How could she accommodate so many people in so small a space, holding only one bed? The woman, sensing my unspoken question, explained that she and I would occupy the bed, her husband and Abraham would sleep on straw in one corner, and the children would occupy another corner also piled with straw. I may have only sensed it at the moment, but what I was seeing was probably the greatest hardship of the pioneer life, the terrible crowding of many people into a small space. Lack of money and building material and inadequate fuel supply were the primary causes which forced people to huddle together for warmth and a place inside four walls. Of all the privations I knew as a homesteader, the lack of privacy was the hardest to bear.

After supper the other niece and her husband left for their shanty which I understood was about a mile away.

Before Charlie left he took Abraham aside to bring him up to date on the general condition of the various households. I learned that three shacks even smaller than the one I found myself in had been erected for each of the Calof homesteading families. Abraham's father and mother occupied one. Charlie and his family, including his brother Moses, lived in the second, and the third palace was reserved for Abraham and me. What great news. My rosy future as a pioneer was getting

grayer by the minute. Even then I had no idea what dreary prospects would be revealed to me in the following days.

Each of the three shanties was twelve-by-fourteen feet, I was told, with dirt floors. They could be moved from place to place if needed, and in times to come such mobility became necessary. Each shack was located on the land which each family intended to file on as a homestead. The government offered a quarter section of land to any adult who would cultivate the ground. Each quarter consisted of one hundred and sixty acres. The land had to be satisfactorily cultivated within fourteen months; if not, the homesteader, if he wished to remain on the land, had to buy it at one dollar and twenty-five cents per acre. If the government was satisfied with the development of the quarter section, the homesteader would receive title to one hundred and sixty acres at the end of five years. At the end of the five-year period, if it was found that the homesteader had farmed more than the original quarter section, he would have to wait an additional six weeks for title to his one hundred and sixty acres and pay a twenty dollar penalty. Single women were permitted the same homestead rights as men but married women did not have such entitlement. Of course all engaged girls in this territory filed claims before marriage. I will tell you about my own experience in this regard later in my story, but now let us return to the present.

Another piece of information which Charlie had told my husband was as follows. The day before, a heavy wind which was not unusual on these great open plains had first torn the roof off Charlie's shack and then had turned the structure upside down. Although no one was injured they ended up sitting on the roof. Now he and his family were lodged with his parents until the damage could be repaired.

The following morning, leaving the niece's place, Abraham

and I headed out across the prairie to our shack. I anxiously looked forward to seeing our own home, however humble. My excitement mounted as we pushed through the shoulder-high prairie grass, but Abraham remained strangely quiet and I was soon to learn the reason for his sober mood. There was no road and after a time I asked if we were close. He did not answer, but in a few moments we broke out of the tall grass into a cleared space, and I beheld the building, twelve-by-fourteen feet as had been earlier described, not only lacking a floor but roofless as well. Just four board walls, sitting in the middle of the trackless prairie. I was unable to speak. Wordlessly, my man led me to his parents' shack. Before we reached there, Abraham broke his silence. He told me that we had no choice but to live with his parents until a roof could be put on our place. He said that a special place had been reserved in his parents' home which would be our own space. I could not understand how this could be so, but I was soon to know. The shocks were coming so quickly that I was becoming numb.

As we approached, my future mother-in-law came out to greet us and ushered us into our separate apartment. I could not believe my eyes. A pit had been scooped out in the center of the dirt floor. This was the private space which we had been promised. Looking about at the people and the space provided for our living, I knew that I was very close to the living level of an animal. As the realization of what I faced grew, my heart turned to stone. There sat Charlie, muddy, tattered and filthy, an appearance shared by his wife and children. His four-year-old boy, cross-eyed with an ever-running nose, wore only a shirt but no pants, while his elderly grandfather was clad only in drawers but also no pants. The shack's furnishings offered no happier view. The single bed was made of rough boards. It had two legs on one side. The other side was hammered to the wall. The table was similarly attached to a wall. The bed had

neither spring nor mattress, only a spread of straw covered with a sheet. The floor was earthen.

I was urged to make myself at home. To think that this was to be my home for even a short time brought bitter tears to my eyes. My fiancé, knowing the dread which gripped me, proposed that we go for another walk. Our footsteps brought us back to our roofless future residence. How forlorn and desolate it looked against the limitless prairie. He explained that there was no money to even buy the nails for a roof. With no roof, he pointed out, we had no choice but to stay with his parents for the time being. I was too depressed to respond, and after a bit we continued our tour of the Calof empire to examine Charlie's overturned shack. We then returned to an early supper of groats and milk at the parents' place after which the men would attempt to right Charlie's shack so that he and his family would have a place to bed down that night.

As I looked at the assembled company at the table, the groats stuck in my throat. I began to cough violently while the tears streamed from my eyes. Everyone thought my tears were caused by my choking spell. How wrong they were.

After setting the overturned shack upright, Charlie and family departed. So passed the daylight hours of my second day in the land of opportunity. The coming night was about to add its share of unpleasant events.

At dusk the preparations got under way for going to bed. Although there was a lamp in the shanty, there was no kerosene to fuel it and so the household had been retiring at dusk each day. The arrangements called for me and the mother to occupy the bed while the father, Abe, and his brother, Moses, were to sleep on the earthen floor. Charlie and Faga's youngest, a boy of two and a half years, had remained with his grandmother when the others left. The old woman stated that the boy would also occupy the bed. She declared that conditions at Charlie's

place were so foul the child might not long survive there and she intended to keep the boy with her for the time being.

In the fading light I surveyed my dreary surroundings. How could these people, unwashed, with little to eat, dressed in tatters, coarse and illiterate, escape the doom which already held them by the throat? The holes in the walls and roof of the place were stuffed with bits of paper in hopes of keeping some of the flies out. How could they expect to last out the coming winter in this structure, I wondered. Dear friend, had there been revealed to me at that moment my involvement in the solution of this particular problem, I would have run screaming into the night.

The sleeping places prepared, everyone went outside to relieve himself. There was no outhouse or latrine. Each one simply picked a place in the prairie grass.

Returning, everyone went immediately to bed. I hoped to delay joining them but six people in a twelve-by-fourteen foot space leaves little room to walk about or even stand. Quickly, the darkness became total and I had no choice but to retire. The boards of the bed, without mattress or spring, were covered with straw which pricked my skin at the least movement but did little to ease the hardness of the bare boards. Still what bothered me the most was occupying the same bed with the old lady, a person whom I had never even known until a few hours ago. I lay as stiff and unmoving as I could while the sound of snoring rose to an ever higher crescendo until it seemed that the very walls shook.

Suddenly I began to feel quite warm. The little boy had emptied his bladder and quickly followed with a healthy bowel movement. I removed myself as far as possible from these immediate surroundings and gave myself up to utter despair. As the tears ran down my cheeks I reflected upon the course of my miserable life.

My early childhood passed through my mind, the time of the servant girl and then my cruel stepmother, followed by the seven years with my religiously fanatic grandfather. Within memory I could not recall having lived in a house which I could call home. Little tenderness had ever been shown me. I had tried so hard to raise myself to a decent life but my way seemed ever downward until now my existence was hardly above the level of an animal.

Dear God, I thought, whatever your reason, haven't I suffered enough in my nineteen years to pay for the rest of my life? The home I had always so desperately sought still eluded me. The people, the overwhelming prairie, America itself, seemed strange and terrible. I had no place to turn. There were no other homes to be seen on the vast expanse of the great plain. Except for one family, the only people who lived within miles were the Calofs. Where could I turn for friendship? Even my intended could not openly champion me. He was in his parents' home and tradition denied him an independent voice in the home of his parents. In just two brutal days the pioneer life had brought me to the brink of desperation. Yet as always, a spark of resistance to my lot and a core of determination remained within me, and by morning I was prepared to continue toward my goal. Despair gave birth to courage. Thank God. I would have great need of it before long. Time and again my resolve was to be tested to the limit.

Abraham and Charlie were the first of the family in America and had brought their parents and brother, Moses, to North Dakota only three months earlier. Even though Abraham had not actually seen his family for three years, they had been in touch and involved and were not strangers to one another. I was the only alien there and I realized that my welfare would in many ways be entirely my concern.

I began the following morning by protesting that I could not

again sleep with the child. The grandmother answered briefly and decisively. This was the way it must be, and the sleeping arrangement would continue. I understood then I was not to speak of this again, but I knew I was stronger for having expressed myself and would better face up to the tests which I knew were ahead.

The very next day brought a new blow. The men held a meeting to make plans for getting through the winter. They decided that Abraham was to work three months at the homestead of the one settler in the area who was not a Calof. His place was five miles or so distant. He was better off than most and had offered seventy-five dollars for three months' work on his homestead which was already under cultivation. This money could provide the necessities which would enable the three Calof families to survive the winter. I raised my voice against the arbitrary selection of Abraham. Why not one of the other two brothers, I demanded to know? The answer was swift and certain. Women, I was informed, had no judgment or voice in matters of importance. Unmistakably the subject was closed, but at least all concerned had learned that I had a voice and the will to use it where my welfare was concerned.

I accompanied Abraham to his place of work and after a few parting words began my return. That walk back across the lonely prairie proved to be a momentous testing for me. A veritable torrent of emotions flowed through my mind. Except for Abraham's return for a few hours on weekends, I would be alone in the terrible new world in which I now lived and I would have to fight my battle without my only ally. Looking across the great plain, I knew a loneliness which seared my very soul. Who belongs to me and to whom do I belong, I questioned? I was young and healthy and had always had a zest for life despite my meager past. Still these qualities seemed inadequate to lead me out of the nightmare existence into

which I had fallen. I sat on a stone in the high grass and gave myself up to utter despair. So great was my anguish that sense of time and place faded from my consciousness. There remained only a void of misery and I prayed with a terrible intensity to God to show me mercy and the way to a better life.

After a time the storm of my emotions passed and I arose from the ground. My mind was clear and calm. The resentment and rebellion born in the last two days had solidified into a new strength which was to serve me well from that time forward. I had no illusions about the events which surely awaited me, but I knew now I would never surrender to the overwhelming conditions facing me. I would not become like the others. My desire for a better life would not desert me.

Upon my return, Abraham's mother noted my tear-stained face and admonished me that to cry for personal reasons was a sin before God. With my new *chutzpa* (nerve) I responded that her disapproval of me was of little importance. I told her that I had nothing further to lose and that her acceptance of me mattered little. Again she reprimanded me, this time for my unseemly speech, but I didn't care. I looked at the people there and I felt rebellion boiling within me. When my eyes lit on the little *pisher* (bed wetter), I knew strong and satisfying emotion. I felt I was his enemy.

As night approached I told the old lady that I was not content to go to bed at sundown. I informed her that I would try to bring light into the shack. I went outside to see what materials nature might provide for my project, and soon found some partly dried mud which I molded into a narrow container. I shaped a wick out of a scrap of rag, smeared it with butter, placed it in the mud cup, and lit it and, lo and behold, there was light. Everyone was delighted with my invention. Now we could retire at a more reasonable hour. Now we were able to undress and prepare for bed in a civilized way. This

accomplishment stands out in my mind as the first result of my effort to climb out of the mire which surrounded me.

Having now gained status in the household even though I was both young and only a woman, I sought to further improve the household conditions. Seeing that the old woman had not even a bit of candle with which to greet and bless the Sabbath, I made a number of my mud lamps which not only solved the ritual problem but also added to the light in the room.

I saw Abraham only on the weekends in the ensuing weeks. When he would leave to return to his work, my spirits would fall to a low ebb. One time, in the middle of a week which was proving to be a particularly difficult one, my resolve came to the fore again and I decided to visit my boyfriend at the farm where he worked. I only had a general idea of the way and there was no road to follow, but I set out regardless in the late afternoon.

I was thrilled at the idea that for once we could see one another and talk all by ourselves without the prying eyes and ears of the others. I walked through the tall prairie grass, through wild underbrush, over stony places, and through swampy areas as well. I was lucky to find the way. Finally I came to a cultivated field and saw someone in the distance. I cried out and ran forward. Yes, it was Abraham. We were overjoyed to see one another. Poor Abraham, he looked so weary, so worn out. Sweat poured from him. He had been shocking grain. His job was to pick up the bundles from the binder and put them into shocks. He was working with two binders, which was very hard work.[11]

After a few minutes, following our joy at seeing one another I sensed that he was becoming troubled and nervous. "Go back," he said, "before Anderson, the boss, sees you." Anderson was due on his rounds momentarily, Abraham said, and he would not put up with visiting on the job for which he was

paying twenty-five dollars per month. Still, it was a very satisfying experience for both of us. Abraham said that he intended to start for home the following Saturday after the day's work was done, and I decided then and there that I would meet him on his way home.

Late Saturday afternoon I informed Abraham's mother that I was leaving to meet him. To my credit, she raised no objection. The afternoons were becoming chilly but unfortunately I had no warm clothing. I wasn't concerned however, as I felt that I knew the way and could easily detect Abraham coming from the opposite direction.

Something went wrong though and soon I become completely lost, and in the fading light I stumbled into a swampy area where the grass grew taller than my head. The swamp frogs began their night serenade and the cries of the birds overhead were lonely and mournful. My imagination began to play tricks on me and I began to believe that I heard the sounds of wild animals. I was thoroughly frightened and tried frantically to work my way out of the swamp, but whichever way I turned my feet seemed to sink deeper into the mud. The old country superstitions came to my mind that devils took advantage in these conditions to lead a lost traveler deeper into the swamp. Such thoughts could bring one to panic and I tried to put them from my mind. It had now grown totally dark. I wanted to call out but I was fearful of attracting wild animals. I continued to flounder in the dark, seemingly getting further into the swamp.

Realizing at last that I was badly in need of help, I began to call Abraham's name at the top of my voice. But all I heard in return was a faint sound which sounded to me like the echo of my own voice. I stumbled into a large rock on to which I climbed, meanwhile crying and praying to God and shouting Abraham's name in a continuous uproar while my despair

like rain. We had only an old quilt and a smaller cloth to cover us, and only a little food to eat. We had taken no more than was thought essential since supplies were very scant at best and it was necessary to preserve as much as possible for the coming winter.

We were happy to greet the new day. Hitching up the oxen, we continued at a better pace and soon were in Devils Lake. We filed our claims without difficulty and we felt a sense of accomplishment. It was already about two o'clock in the afternoon and time to start our return trip across the grass desert. We were already exhausted though. We had had little food since we started and nothing hot to drink. When Abraham suggested that we go into a place for a cup of coffee, he didn't have to beg me very long, believe me. We still had a little bread left and I remember with pleasure sitting in that little place drinking coffee and eating our bread. It was a very nice experience.

That night again camped on the open prairie on our way back, I felt encouraged to confide in Abraham how the experiences of North Dakota had affected me. I told him that this trip to Devils Lake had heightened my resentment and discouragement at the prospect of returning to the depressing conditions which we had left just two days ago. Abraham sighed regretfully. He was very sympathetic and vowed that some day our lives would be better. I did not take much comfort in the phrase "some day," but I was pleased by his concern and sensitivity. I told him in return that he need not worry about me anymore, that I stood by his side and together we would attain a decent life. Of course I knew that the problems ahead were as deep as an ocean, but our talk under the stars fortified me and by the time we reached our destination I felt a pride of ownership in the land which we had claimed.

Our way was without end, beset with problems big and

small, and soon we were faced with one of serious proportions. Again it was found that Abraham and I had settled on state land.[12] We were permitted to finish the winter out in this location, but in the spring we would have to move to new claims which we were assured were a valid exchange for the land we were giving up.[13] We were notified that we would have to cover the well which we had so laboriously dug, and in the spring we knew we would endure the hell of beginning all over again. We had already done much work on these acres, but of course all of this labor would be lost to us. Despite this setback, our spirits were on the rise. We were striking out on our own. That was the important thing. So we believed, not knowing that our home regularly would be shared with others for many years to come. But now we labored from dawn to dusk preparing the new land which was to finally be our home. These days passed swiftly, though, for we believed we were at last creating our own future and we were inspired with a new stimulation and purpose. We were also excited about our approaching wedding day.

Finally the day came. The wedding, my friends, was a knockout. Since Abraham's niece, Doba, had the largest home with two rooms, she offered her palace for the occasion.

My soon to be in-laws, spreading their usual cheer and good will, insisted that the bride and groom had to fast until the ceremony was completed. I was instructed to say my prayers with tears and to implore my dead parents, or at least my departed mother, to attend my wedding.[14] This whole business brought me much distress and, even more, the realization of the family's influence over every aspect of my life, my wedding ceremony included.

My bridal gown, which I had made myself, was of yellow, blue, and white stripes. Abraham's suit hung so low in the back that it might have passed for what is today called "tails."

Those in attendance were Abraham's family, his nieces, Doba and Sarah, and their husbands and their two children. Also present were two families who were about ten miles distant from us. Our wedding gifts were a red felt tablecloth with green flowers, two chickens, and from Charlie and Faga two short women's undershirts. A delayed gift of some little chicks was also promised for next spring by one of the nieces.

The wedding feast was cooking in the kitchen and as the day was coming to a close the wedding was close at hand.[15] The Jewish man certified to perform the ceremony was a member of one of the Jewish families in North Dakota.[16] My fiancé had to work for him for two days hauling hay in payment of his fee.

All brides remember their wedding ceremony and mine was truly memorable. I was seated in a chair. Abraham was given a flour sack which he was instructed to place over my face.[17] Well, at least one could cry in private under the cover.

Being effectively blinded, I was now led to the *huppah* (the wedding canopy) by Doba and her husband. The *huppah* was built of a shawl tied to four sticks.[18] The music was provided by the singing of the women while the men beat time on tin pans.

Following the ceremony the table was set and we sat down to a truly magnificent banquet which consisted of beans, rice with raisins, chicken soup, and roast chicken. The flour sack had been replaced by a handkerchief bound over my eyes. I wanted to remove it to at least be present at my own marriage, but my mother-in-law was quick to forbid it. I did not want to create a scene at my own wedding and so I submitted to these primitive customs. Later, I was to learn that the women present considered me impudent to have made such a suggestion.

The festivities over, bride and groom started home, and in short order, even before my wedding day was over, I was cruelly thrust back into the reality of my life. I learned that the

Calof men had decided prior to my marriage that Abe and I must share our home with others for the entire coming winter. What horror. Had any bride every been more grossly betrayed on her wedding day? This decision resulted from the belief, I was told, that the fuel supply would not be adequate to heat all three shacks through the coming winter and, therefore, Abe's father, mother, and brother Moses would double up with us for the coming months.

In an instant the happiness of my marriage turned to bitterness. The knowledge that I was to spend my honeymoon in a tiny space shared with three strangers was more than I could bear. I hoped that death would take me now, that I would not reach home alive. But my fervent wish was not granted, and it was life, not death, with which I had to cope.

The furniture and arrangement in Abe's and my home was the usual. Two beds, one belonging to my father and mother-in-law and the other for Abe and me, were hammered to the walls. Between the beds stood a table also hammered to a wall. The remaining pieces of furniture were a short bench and the stove. The seating arrangement for meals called for one person on each of the beds while the other three would sit on the bench. Moses would sleep on the ground on a pile of straw.

We five people, however, were not to have such spacious quarters all to ourselves. At this time the in-laws had a flock of twelve chickens and Abe and I also had twelve. There was no outside coop for the poultry, but if there had been we would have lost the flock in short order because the temperature would soon be going to forty or more degrees below zero and the chickens would have frozen to death. We needed to keep them alive in hopes of having their eggs as well as their meat later on. Each family was to keep its chickens under its bed and the ends and sides were closed off to form a cage. Also there was a calf which had to be accommodated inside.

It occupied the remaining corner opposite Moses's sleeping space.

This is how five human beings and twenty-five animals faced the beginning of the savage winter of the plains in a twelve-by-fourteen-foot shack. This is how we lived and suffered. The chickens were generous with their perfumes and we withstood this, but the stench of the calf tethered in the corner was well-nigh intolerable.

The fuel supply for the three families was one ton of soft coal which would be split between the two shacks. When this was exhausted we faced the prospect of simply freezing to death. For staples we would depend on the chickens, three one-hundred-pound sacks of flour, and one sack of barley. The main part of our diet was bread and anything else which could be made from flour.

A minimum of fuel was used during the waking hours but none at all at night, and in the mornings icicles hung everywhere, which melted and ran down the walls from the heat of the morning fire.

The winter was not far advanced before I found myself pregnant and so ill that I could hardly tolerate such a diet.

Words are useless to describe the nightmare of those months. I can only say that when March arrived we still lived.

At this time the men formulated a new plan. Our guests were to leave us and to begin with Charlie the repair of the shacks which had been damaged by the winter storms. However we were not permitted to be totally free. Faga, Charlie's wife, was sent to stay with us since she would be of no help in the repair work and would only be in the way.

As I continued into my pregnancy, my illness worsened. I developed a severe cough and began to spit up blood. I became very frightened at seeing this and Faga suggested that I build up my health by drinking milk. This should have posed no

problem since each of the families owned one cow, all of which had lived through the winter. However when my in-laws left they took Abe's cow and left Charlie's cow with Faga. Even though she had encouraged me to drink milk and was supposed to share the milk with us, she showed such selfishness when the milk was divided that I did pretty much without, and I recovered from my illness, also without anyone's help.

My spirits rose with the promise of spring and the improvement in my health. I began casting about for something to do which would improve our lot. One of our big problems was our water supply. We had dug three wells, each to a depth of seventy-five feet with poor results. Now our water supply was so scant that I decided to find some usable water in some low place on the prairie where the snow melt might run together. I did discover such a place about a mile away. I carried two pailfuls from that place, but when I got back to the shack I saw that the water was full of worms and grass. The water would have to be boiled to be usable. The solution to the problem was not so easy as we had just run out of fuel. There was nothing with which to start a fire. I was determined though, and again went out into the prairie which held many provisions if one only knew where to look. I took with me only a rope and my huge belly.

About two miles distant I came across a place where new grass was growing through a bed of dried-out grass. The dried grass was plentiful and looked dry enough to burn. I was delighted with my find. My pleasure, though, was tempered with a certain dread. I knew little of the wildlife of this country, and I became fearful that I would encounter a snake in the beds of dried grass. I hesitated, but soon my stomach informed me how hungry I was, and the child within me needed food too. My husband labored in the field removing rocks and I knew that he too must be hungry. I needed that boiled water to

prepare some kind of a meal and I said to myself, "Don't be a spoiled person. You must risk it. Even if there is a snake there, you must try." I stepped into the area. No snake bit me and soon I was enthusiastically gathering the dried grass. Quickly I gathered a great bundle and tied it into a compact bundle with my rope.

According to the sun it was already midmorning and Abe would be coming in from the field not long after noon. I had to get home quickly but the food left in the shacks was only a little flour, some barley, some soured milk, and a little butter. A really daring idea came to me. I decided to spend a little more time looking around the place to see what else it might offer. Promptly, my further exploration brought results. I found what appeared to be wild garlic. I was delighted and ate a kernel. It tasted wonderful and didn't seem to harm me, so I gathered quite a number of bunches. My ambition by now was really on the rise. Bread and garlic alone make a poor meal. I enlarged my search area and before long I came across plants which unquestionably were wild mushrooms. Now I knew that some mushrooms were deadly poisonous. Still I thought that this was a good time to take a chance. I bit into one and held it in my mouth. It didn't burn or taste bad, so I swallowed it. I waited a while for something to happen. Nothing did, and I gathered an apronful of the mushrooms, and with my garlic and the bundle of dried grass on my shoulder, I started for home happy with my accomplishments and eager to see how I could put them to use.

Arriving at the shack, I immediately began my preparations. First I sieved the water through the fabric of a flour sack. I kneaded the dough and put it in the oven. I cleaned the mushrooms and steeped them in hot water. I then chopped up the garlic, put butter (we had our cow back) in the pan, and fried everything together. This meal made in large mea-

sure with food gathered from the wild prairie was simply delicious.

I should have mentioned that Abe had begun to dig a cellar in the dirt floor of the shack. It was as yet not completed and boards had been laid on the edges of the hole. When the project was completed we would at last have a wood floor with a cellar beneath.

I was so excited in preparing this special meal that I nearly fell into the pit as I flew about the place, setting the table and making other preparations. We had no tea or coffee, but I ground up some barley, boiled it in water and so had, at least, a substitute coffee.

My husband would soon be coming through the door. I was so happy, truly in seventh heaven, and very proud. I had used my brains and my nerve and as a result my husband would soon sit down to a fine dinner, just the two of us alone.

Soon Abe arrived. It was evident that we liked one another, because when he came inside where I was, it was easy to see that he was glad to see me and we were happy to be together.

Never was there a more delightful dinner than that one. The food was delectable and our shanty was filled with happiness. After we finished our meal, Abe insisted on knowing all the details of my accomplishment. As he listened, his gladness became tinged with a sadness that our condition was such that I was reduced to searching the prairie for food. But nothing could destroy the magic of that hour. He kissed me and called me his good angel, and my contentment was complete knowing that he appreciated my devotion to him. I served the barley coffee in the cool outdoors and we spent another pleasant hour together before Abe returned to the field. So ended a charming interlude in the harshness of our lives. It was a great moment for us and its memory has been a sustaining treasure to me over the years.

As the time for the birth of my child drew closer, I began to weigh the uncertainties which faced me. If there were to be any serious problems in the birth, either for the infant or myself, one or both of us could die since there would be no skilled help available to us. I knew that if difficulty arose, the people around me could offer little or nothing in the way of meaningful help. I didn't even have a suitable cloth in which to wrap the little child upon its arrival. I must say that each day my doubts and fears increased as my time moved ever nearer.

My mood became sad and doubtful and I began to suffer fits of bitter crying. But before long my disposition changed and I faced the coming event with a better attitude. I was determined to do the best I could to improve our living conditions before the arrival of the child. In the following weeks I continued to gather and store the dried grass. I hauled water a long ways for use not only for cooking, but to make the shack as clean as I could. I felt the effects of hauling these heavy loads but I persisted. At this time our main food was cheese which we made from the milk which soured in one day in the hot weather.

Abe's thoughts ran parallel to mine. We got along so well when we were left alone. Soon the cellar was finished and a wooden floor laid. This was a significant step in our struggle to improve our lives. I cried again, but this time with happiness.

Now I turned my attention to the walls and ceiling. The dirt which was removed in digging the cellar was mainly clay and I thought to use it to fill the cracks in the walls and to make them smoother. The clay would harden quickly in the hot weather, I reasoned, and with God's help we might then be able to get some whitewash with which to paint the walls. My ambition soared. I could already visualize how clean and pretty my home would be.

I told Abe of my plans. He was as enthusiastic as I but was

concerned that the work would be too hard for me in my condition. We both understood that he could not help me very much. He was working in the field from dawn to dark with his father and brother, Moses. I assured him that I was capable of doing the work.

Early the next morning I prepared a pile of clay and began to knead it with my feet. I had refined it to a suitable mixture by the time Abe returned from his work in the evening. Although he had labored all day, he helped me haul water to add to the clay and then he worked far into the night hammering slats to the walls. I worked the moistened clay onto the walls, between the slabs, making a smooth inner finish over the rough boards. Finishing, I surveyed the result. A miracle had taken place. Our rude shanty had become a palace. The walls were not white but I was confident they would become lighter as the clay dried.

Abe's family came to view my handiwork and they praised me generously. They could not take their eyes from my handsome walls and clean floor. My mother-in-law alternately smiled and sighed. I believed she felt her old age and knew that such an accomplishment was beyond her. Thus the second summer saw some improvements in our fortunes. We had brought in a small crop of hay and now had improved our home. Still, in general, our circumstances remained desperate.

Already the men were planning for the coming second winter [1895–96]. The prospects appeared even more grim than for the first winter. Again the two great concerns were food and fuel sufficient to carry us through the terrible months.

The men hitched the oxen to the wagon and made a tedious three-day trip to Devils Lake to sell the combined hay crop. They received a disappointingly low price for it with which they were only able to buy one-half ton of coal, one hundred

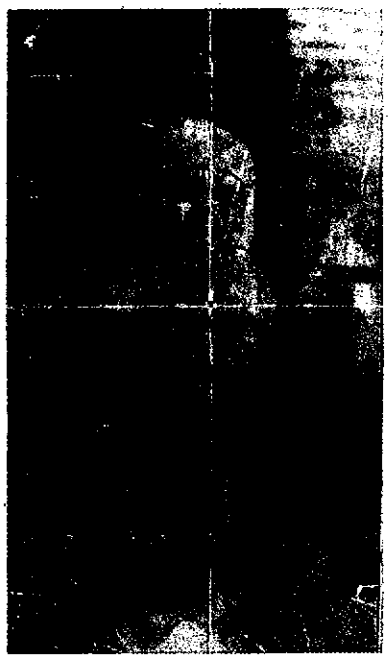
pounds of flour, twenty-five pounds of sugar, some yeast, and a little coffee. Nine people would have to depend on these meager supplies, augmented by the always scant store of food on hand to live through to the spring.

Abe was offered fifty dollars for two months' work at a distant farm to help with the threshing and do other work. He assured me, though, that he would not leave me until the baby was born. He didn't want to forsake me at all, but circumstances ruled otherwise.

As my time drew near I asked Abe to invite his mother to attend me at the time of delivery. I, personally, was totally ignorant about the entire subject matter. It may be hard to believe, but I was soon to learn that she, a mother of four, knew as little about a confinement as did I.

Ten days later, at four o'clock on a Saturday morning, I brought forth my first child, Minnie. I had a hard time and literally tried to crawl up the walls with the pain of it. Abe assisted me as best he could and it was he who cut the umbilical cord. He was delighted that I had given him a daughter. As for myself, I was more preoccupied with the serious problems which I knew faced both the little girl and me.

By eleven o'clock, seven hours after the birth, the child and I were alone, left to our own resources. My mother-in-law had returned to her shack and my husband was back in the field. But what of the mother who had just borne her first child? There was no one to help us. I looked at my first born, unwashed as yet, wrapped in a scrap of my old skirt, and knew that I had to get back on my feet quickly. I arose and cleaned myself up as best I could. I prayed that my mother-in-law would soon return to help me care for the child. I felt deserted and frightened and was conscious of a terrible weight on my shoulders. I was overwhelmed suddenly by the dreadful prospects facing my little infant born into such a hostile world. My



Charadh Kalov, Rachel Bella Calof's mother-in-law, at the age of 91.

mood of despondency was unhealthy and, as you will soon know, was the onset of a fearful illness of the mind, a sickness which was fed by the fanaticism and superstition to which I now found myself subjected.

My mother-in-law was a religious fanatic and superstitious beyond imagination, and the force of her dark beliefs and suggestions found me terribly vulnerable in my already-distressed state of mind. When she left me alone that morning she placed a prayer book in my bed. She explained that this was to prevent devils from harming me and taking the baby. This suggestion was the seed from which grew the central theme of my coming ordeal.[19]

The old lady returned. She brought bread and milk but refused to warm the milk for the baby because it was the Sabbath and lighting a fire was considered a prohibited labor. My husband was not allowed to visit us and ate his meals that day with his brothers away from me. On these notes the Sabbath drew to a close.

When night fell I begged for a little heated water to wash the baby and again for warm milk to feed her. The warm water request was refused because there were no stars in the sky which, I guess, was a bad omen for the washing of babies.[20] However, the old woman after again checking the sky finally consented to warm some water. She chose to use an old rusted pan from which she attempted to remove the rust by scouring with ashes from the stove. I was afraid that the infant would get blood poisoning from this water but I washed her upper body anyway.

The mother-in-law now prepared food for us. She made *taiglach* (noodles) and milk and cooked a piece of chicken in the same rust-streaked pan in which she had just heated the water.[21] I was quite hungry and looked forward to having something with which to feed the baby as well. My anticipation was short-lived. The cooked chicken was streaked and besides smelled very strange. I wouldn't eat this food, and I certainly would not put any of the liquid from it in the child's mouth. Even the old woman admitted the food smelled rotten, but she attributed this to the belief that the chicken had probably not been killed in the prescribed kosher manner.

Unfed and dirty, the child and I lay on the straw bed which was covered with a sheet. As the night deepened and became colder, my mother-in-law refused us the luxury of a fire in order to save fuel and instead covered us with an old coat and a gunny sack.

The child remained quiet the next day. As yet I had not

heard her cry, and as the day progressed I became more and more alarmed that she was sick. I was afraid to really examine her but I finally got the nerve to unwrap her entirely. I became ill when I saw that her little body was stuck to the wrapper. When I saw her navel I screamed in terror. I thought that her intestines were falling out, but it proved to be the cord which was about twelve inches long. The old lady said that Abe had been afraid to cut the cord shorter for fear of harming the child. Overcoming my fear, I washed the child thoroughly and rewrapped her in a clean piece of the old skirt.

On Monday, two days after the birth, Abe left for his distant job. I was forlorn to see him go. The consequences of his absence were compounded by the fact that the wells had again gone dry. The closest water supply was five miles distant and the cattle would have to be led there once each day. We had a little well water left in the house for which I was really thankful because it was clean and contained no worms. For the first three days of her life, the only nourishment little Minnie received was sweetened water.

On the third day my milk came, but at the same time I became feverish and suffered considerable pain. My mother-in-law had me stoop over a heated stove to ease the pain. This was another of her old world cures and it didn't help at all. She departed soon to attend to her menfolks and again I was left to shift for myself. Before she went, though, she instructed me with great sincerity regarding the precautions which I must follow to protect the baby and myself from the contrivings of the devil. I must be certain to leave the prayer book in the bed with the child if I had to get out of bed. This was to prevent the devil from taking the child in my absence. For my personal protection from the fiend, I was to carry a knife at all times in a belt around my waist.[22]

You can imagine what fertile ground these whisperings

found in my mind already in disorder from the despondency which came to me following the birth. And so on the fourth day, when out of milk and with no food left in the house except flour and yeast, I went outside to milk the cow. The prayer book was in the bed and the knife was securely in my belt. The next day my mother-in-law gave me credit for my heroism. She seemed somewhat surprised that we were still present.

On Friday I baked bread knowing that my husband would be home on Saturday and stay until Sunday evening. I cleaned the house and milked the cow. Suddenly a great weakness came over me and I felt as though I was being drawn into the very depth of the earth. I crawled into bed with my little girl, both of us crying loudly.

That evening, after blessing the Sabbath candles at her place, my mother-in-law came to see how I was getting along. She was surprised to see my newly cleaned floor and freshly baked bread. She told me that I was a good person and offered me food but I was unable to eat. I felt so queer and frightened and the knife in my belt was a constant reminder of the devil's intentions for my child and me.

The old lady decided to return to spend the night with me after giving her men their supper. No sooner had she left than I seemed to develop a high fever. All the superstitious preaching of the last few days, as well as those of my own grandmother when I was just a tiny child, flooded my mind. My own fevered imagination added to the fantasies. I knew that there were demons who looked like little people and whose specialty was the stealing of newborn babies.

My hallucinations intensified and I became totally involved with the problems of guarding my baby from the demons who were intent on carrying her away.

When the old lady returned she prepared to sleep with me in the bed. She wanted to place the baby on the bench near the

bed, with the prayer book of course. I refused to do this, carefully explaining to her that I would hold the child in my arms while wearing the knife in my belt, with the prayer book in the bed, all to provide the necessary defenses. She was as sincerely advising that the prayer book alone was sufficient for the protection of the baby. What a mad scenario. Two crazy people calmly discussing the best way to defeat the devil in his attempt to steal my baby. I was not convinced by her argument and held the baby tightly in my arms.

Shortly the grandmother was snoring deeply. The sound of it was frightening, particularly so when it began to sound less like snoring and more like devils whistling outside the cabin walls. My worst fears were realized. The demons had arrived. I must clasp the baby ever more closely to me, my knife at hand, prepared to defend my little daughter. So I remained, sleepless and on guard throughout the long night.

In the morning, the old lady refused to permit a fire to warm a little milk for me.[23] I drank the cold milk and prepared to care for Minnie. The child's grandmother left to care for her unfeeling men who had not even asked about us so far as I knew.

I returned to the bed and slept fitfully, the child in my tight embrace. The baby's crying awoke me. I felt an immediate thankfulness that she had not been stolen away while I was asleep.

I attended to the child and then warmed some milk for myself and ate some bread. Soon I had an urgent need to respond to nature's call. In the past days I had been able to attend to this matter while the old woman was with us. Now we were alone and the enormity of the problem almost overwhelmed me. I had to go outside into the deep grass. I was not prepared to accept that the prayer book would be sufficient protection to defend the child from the now ever-present demons. In the end I took the baby with me, laying her in the

I think that the children of pioneers came into the world with a certain hardiness of nature in preparation for the harsh conditions awaiting them.

As the weather moderated, Abe took additional loads of hay to town and we improved our food supply. Less fuel was needed as the days became warmer. He realized how close we had come to catastrophe and he was determined not to let it happen again if he could help it. He even insisted that his older brother Charlie carry a load into town. Abe tried hard to make the other men understand that he could not carry such a large measure of responsibility in providing for the three families. He warned the others that they must begin to contribute more to their own welfare.

The result of this was that Charlie did carry a load of hay to market, but he shared his purchases only with his parents and younger brother. I was not surprised.

The wilderness is always unpredictable, often unpleasantly so. The coming of spring weather found the prairie still covered by a great depth of snow. The rains came heavily one night and, with added snow melt, in a few hours the water was as deep inside the house as it was outside. I put both children on my lap, covered them with our usual stock of rags, and waited for the waters to subside. An umbrella would have been nice, but we did our best without.

Developments during the following summer again gave us added reason to hope that our chances of surviving on the land were improved. Abraham's share of the farmed land now was ten acres, a large part of which he had planted in wheat, and we estimated that our yield would be about two hundred bushels. We built a barn this summer and we had quite a lot of potatoes, which was my personal project, working in the potato patch with my children by my side. The cow had calved. Now we were getting milk and butter and these were especially wel-

come. Our new chicken flock rose to about fifty. This was our best summer by far. Considering that the weather was as extremely hot as the winter had been cold and that there were many hailstorms, we did very well.

In the fall the inevitable planning began for the following winter. The winters dominated our lives. It seemed that all our accomplishments during the warm seasons had to be directed to lasting through this one season. Even though this summer justified optimism in our view of the future, we were still in a weak position for the coming ordeal of winter.

Wheat was selling for thirty cents per bushel in town, but we had to retain some for our own use and, in addition, a certain amount had to be saved for seed.

I was able to send some of the eggs and all the butter to town for sale but butter was selling for seven cents per pound and eggs for seven cents per dozen. Although the sale of these dairy products would add to our financial position, you know that the produce from one cow at these prices didn't bring in much money. I would like to have preserved two or three pounds of butter for our later use but I had no way of keeping it fresh.

As the weather became colder, the chickens stopped laying and the cow gave less milk. The shadow of the coming experience was already spreading its pall over all of us, humans and animals alike.

Abraham now took most of our best wheat to market. The planning was to buy mainly coal and wood with this wheat money. Less needed to be spent for food, we reasoned, because we were now growing some of the staples which we had formerly had to buy. Abe returned with a good load of wood and some coal as well. The wood was green, though, and would require some drying. Close by our homestead was an Indian reservation.[31] There were trees on their land and the

Indians now brought us some green wood also. Probably they decided that we were going to persevere and now considered us as neighbors. I began a program of dividing my oven space between cooking and drying wood.

About now we had a bad setback. We had noticed that some of our wheat was growing poorly. As the summer season progressed this wheat began to actually grow smaller. Examination revealed that the roots seemed to be torn in two. We couldn't understand the reason for this. Finally Abe took the last of this remaining crop to town and there he learned that the wheat was no good. He was told that apparently the gophers were feeding on the roots and the wheat was unfit for seed. It was to prove unsuitable for baking as well, and we were left with only some oats for baking.

Well, as you probably have guessed, the talk once again was about the two families spending the winter together in our home. It made no difference that I was again pregnant. My in-laws were soon in their familiar winter quarters. Just imagine how hard it was for my two little girls. The baby, Hannah, was already beginning to walk and Minnie was an active, busy child.

This winter was also particularly vicious and long-lasting, and before it passed, despite our greater supplies, we had used all the wood and were again burning straw toward the end.

This pregnancy was a hard one for me. I was unable to rest or eat adequately all winter with seven people in a small room. Each time the crowding and dirt brought me to the brink of desperation, I focused my thoughts on the coming spring when I would again be queen of my castle.

I felt sure that my coming child was going to be a boy. So strong was the feeling that I began to make ready for the anticipated *bris* (the ceremony of circumcision). I prepared a garment for him for this singular ceremony and also a few

diapers in honor of his coming. I also intended to make dresses for the two girls to wear at their brother's *bris*.

As soon as I was again the mistress of my own home I did my usual double spring housecleaning. After I had whitewashed the walls, I planned out my tailoring project. Shirts for the girls were cut from a flour sack and I fashioned dresses for them from an old black dress and from Abe's fancy shirt which he had worn in New York. It was in green and white stripes and added a gay tone to the dresses. Now the girls would be properly dressed for the ceremony.

My expectation proved right, and I gave birth to my first son, Mac, may he live and be well. Bringing a son into the world proved to be an expensive affair. The cost for the *mohel* (a religious technician who circumcises a male child eight days after birth) alone came to ten dollars, of which half was for his train fare to Devils Lake. The other five dollars represented his fee.

We had no money at all, but we were granted credit for the fee which was to be paid at a future, unspecified date. The train fare, however, would have to be paid immediately. After some difficulty, Abe was able to borrow this amount.

We now turned our attention to planning the festivities following this wonderful ceremony of the Covenant.[32] Of the most important consideration was the menu for the celebration dinner. It began on a moderate note. We had some cheese and butter and decided to roast two of our chickens as well. Compared to our usual fare, this was a real banquet.

But now suddenly a wonderful and spontaneous excitement seized us all, old and young alike. For years there had been little cause for celebration for any of us, and now it was as though a great yearning to be joyous, to reaffirm that life was worthwhile, was expressed through this festival. All the families joined in the planning and with the growing excitement came a certain recklessness.

It was decided that one of the jointly owned oxen should be slaughtered for the celebration. During the three years we had all been in North Dakota, none of us had tasted meat and everyone agreed that this would be a fine time to butcher an ox.

The forequarters would be shared by the three families and the hindquarters, considered not kosher,[33] would sell for three cents per pound in town. It was agreed that this money was to cover the cost of the event.

What a happy time this was. Abe left to bring back not only the *mohel*, but the *shochet* (the authorized slaughterer of animals according to kosher requirements) as well. We awaited the coming of these two functionaries with impatience.

The morning after their arrival, the *shochet* proceeded to slaughter the ox. Imagine our intense disappointment to learn that the animal was found to be *traif* (not kosher).[34] It was a terrible blow and in some measure affected the spirit of the occasion.

I had not fully recovered from the rigors of the birth, and after the excitement of the day was over I suddenly felt sick and weak. The *shochet* had been observing me closely, and now he approached and in strong terms ordered me to cook and eat the meat of the ox even though he, himself, had declared it to be *traif*. I was simply astounded. I could not believe my ears, but he carefully explained that according to his interpretation of the Jewish law I was obligated to eat the meat because I was sick and needed the nourishment not only for my own sake, but as a mother of small children I was morally bound to keep myself as healthy as possible so that I could better discharge my maternal duties.[35]

The *shochet* instructed me to salt the meat well before cooking it.[36] To tell you the truth I was absolutely delighted to hear his decision, but my joy was not shared by all. Even

though only I was given the right to eat the meat, it was owned by all the families and each of the other two families was invited to take its share. My mother-in-law threw up her hands in despair and refused her portion. She believed that the *shochet* had taken leave of his senses. Her beliefs were so rigid she could not afford to compromise. Charlie, my brother-in-law, was not one to question my advantage and gladly took his share, but for the first time, at least in my memory, his wife, Faga, showed some spirit and informed him that she would not allow the meat in her shack. He had to assure her that he would cook the meat for himself away from the house.

My mother-in-law became increasingly agitated. She insisted that the *shochet* had betrayed his office. As for me, she promised that she would not even drink water in my house which would now be considered polluted. What a wonderful bonus. Everything worked out for the best, I thought. I had a delicious thought that maybe now she would refuse to move in with us next winter, and this proved to be the case. It would be an understatement to say that I was pleased.

I must say that personally the most dependable state of affairs I knew during the many years I lived on the prairie was pregnancy, and soon I was again carrying my usual load. I was determined that this pregnancy and birth would be better than the preceding ones. I was determined to carry on cheerfully with my work, but such was not to be. As my pregnancy progressed, the weather turned rainy and gray and I became vaguely fearful and despondent. As my time approached my depression grew. I prepared my delivery table as usual, spread with straw, but this time with a clean cloth on top, while at the same time crying uncontrollably. I felt certain that this time I would not come out of it alive.

I went outside to milk the cow and my tears mingled with the falling rain. I was overcome with a sense of hopelessness

Abraham and Rachel Bella sit in the sulky; Hannah, Minnie, and a woman identified as "Monee" stand to the side.

at our home for these occasions, some traveling for days by horse and buggy and by horseback. These were wonderful and festive events. Everyone stayed for as long as the holiday lasted. We put up tents for the visiting children's sleeping quarters, and in the house sleepers occupied all the chairs and covered the floors.

Our house lights now were kerosene powered. The fuel was forced into a tank with a bicycle pump and then to light fixtures which were made with cloth mantles. The mantles gave off an intense white light, and travelers on the prairie oriented themselves by this beacon, while to approaching guests it signaled that their haven was near. Another benefit of our distinctive lights was to keep bothersome wild animals from our door and the chicken coop.

We had plenty of food now. Each late fall now, the *shochet* paid us a visit for the coming winter. The dressed animals were

stored in the barn which served as our winter freezer. What a contrast to the slow starvation of the early winters.

Our family was now so large, and guests so numerous and frequent, that Abe was inspired to devise an apparatus to ease the distribution of food at meal times. He drove an iron shaft into the center of the table which acted as an axle upon which revolved a huge wagon wheel covered with a board face. This enormous lazy susan, loaded with food, was helpful in reducing the confusion and delay caused by many hungry people passing and reaching for the various dishes. During meals the wheel was always in motion, and one needed only to wait a moment or two to find the desired food before him.

Now Abe, deprived of educational opportunity during his younger years, was more able to satisfy his hunger for knowledge. Despite his intolerably long hours of labor he became an avid reader of everything in print he could get his hands on.[39] He became qualified to speak with authority on many subjects and he put his learning to work, helping in the development of the area in many respects. He introduced a number of improvements in agricultural practices and marketing.

The first school board in the area was organized largely through his efforts and he served on it with distinction. He was blessed with vision and could visualize a school system far beyond the first, one-room, one-teacher school which my older children attended.

His accomplishments were widely recognized, and he received personal letters of commendation from two presidents of the United States, William Taft and Woodrow Wilson.

Our first schoolhouse was a simple one-room building much like the prairie shacks of the early days.[40] It served four families. In the winter the teacher slept in the schoolhouse, and often the children arriving there in the morning would

Students of the Victoria School, circa 1912. Rachel Bella and Abraham Calof's children are Alec (first row, fourth from the left); Elizabeth (first row, far right); Isaac (Jack) (second row, far left); Minnie (second row, fourth from the left); and Moses (Mac) (third row, far right, with face partially obscured). Charlie and Faga's children are Max (second row, third from the left); Oscar (third row, far left); and Lilly (third row, third from the left). The teacher, Katie Kabker, is at the right end of the second row.

find her still asleep. Under these circumstances the school day began with a recess while the teacher dressed and cooked her breakfast. When a student finished his current "reader" book, he was promoted to the next grade.

Although, in general, the conditions of our lives now bore little semblance to the circumstances we endured in the early days on the land, for me there was to be one further experience reminiscent of those hard times.

Despite my aversion to bearing more children, I gave birth to my final child, a son, Jacob, in March 1912. Because of the complications of my last pregnancies, I thought it best to

deliver the child in town, where hopefully I would have medical help available to me. I was accompanied by my eldest and youngest daughters, Minnie and Ceil.

The conditions of the confinement in some ways were even worse than the past ones on the farm. The only lodging we could find to rent was an empty store located under a roller skating rink. The furniture consisted of a bed and a stove, and the noise and dust from above were terrible. What an awful place to bring a child into the world.

Jake weighed almost thirteen pounds at birth and my agony in giving him life was great. The doctor who was to attend me was named Cox. He wasn't exactly a friendly type, but he was all that was available. He was almost completely drunk most of the time and totally drunk the rest of the time. When my labor started he was too intoxicated to come to me, but instead sent a boy with some big pills which made me deathly ill. This terrible man was well-known in the area. It was rumored that because of his drunkenness and ignorance he caused the deaths of many a pioneer mother.

I never fully recovered from the abuses of this and my previous deliveries, and years later when I lived in St. Paul, Minnesota, I underwent surgery to repair my torn insides, but without favorable result.

Though we continued to improve the farm and its yield, there were many painful setbacks and we were never completely free of fear. The weather was largely unpredictable. Hailstorms could destroy most or all of a crop in a few minutes. Excessive rain rusted the wheat and made it useless, while lack of rain turned crops to dust.

The other two families eventually failed in their efforts to permanently establish themselves on the land. Charlie and his family left North Dakota, and Abe's father and mother continued to spend the winters with us, each time supposedly the last. It was always referred to as a temporary arrangement, but

it persisted for eighteen years. In the later years Abe's mother became our permanent guest, my father-in-law having died. Their son, Moe [Moses], married and left for other adventures.

Now at age sixty, and thinking back through this history, I feel a satisfying pride in myself. I stood shoulder-to-shoulder with my husband and proved capable in meeting the challenges which so many of the settlers failed to survive. I took life as it was presented to me and then did my best to improve it.

Although I withstood privation well, having been introduced to it at a very early age, I must confess that the one hardship which was always unacceptable to me through the formative years was the lack of privacy. For many months of each of those years Abe and I had to find our privacy on the open prairie, and even in later years we had to hold our personal conversations in the barn.

In those precarious winters of the first years when so many people, and animals as well, huddled together in a tiny space, my yearning was not for a larger shack but rather for the dignity of privacy.

My resentment of this imposition grew with each succeeding year and finally it became a serious issue between Abe and me. In all other risks and discomforts our cause was a common one, but in this one matter I became more unwilling to compromise with each passing year.

The year 1917 was one of sober reflection and decision for Abe and me. In many ways we were comfortable and satisfied. We could look back with pride on our accomplishments. We had come as raw immigrants without resources or training to a stark wilderness in a strange country, and we tamed the land and made it fit for humans. We had earned the respect and friendship of many.

Laughter came easier now, and the memories of past bitter experiences had softened with age, but time and privation had

taken their toll. Abe now suffered greatly with rheumatism and my own health was impaired. We realized that the rigors of the farming life were too much for us to endure longer, that it was time to move on to another kind of life.

I had traveled a long and often torturous way from the little *shtetl* [town or Jewish community] in Russia where I was born. It wasn't an easy road by any means, but if you love the living of life you must know the journey was well worth it.

Notes

1. Belaya Tserkov is located on the Res River about fifty kilometers south of Kiev in Ukraine. The location of "Chvedkifka" cannot be established and no additional relevant family history exists. There is a small town south of Belaya Tserkov, now called Charaievka, which might be the place mentioned in the narrative.

2. Eda Velvel Cohen was a religious leader of the local Orthodox community. Marrying beneath the family's caste would violate norms related to their social status and, in particular, the family's linkage to the *Kohanim* (religious leaders). Rachel Bella Calof's son, Jacob, recalls her proudly referring to herself as a *Bas Kohena*, a title from biblical times meaning "daughter of a priest."

3. Each of these practices is of course taboo for religious Orthodox Jews. Ashkenazic (eastern and central European) Orthodox women were expected to cut their hair and wear a *sheitel* (wig) after marriage, to keep kosher dietary laws that include strict prohibitions against mixing meat or meat-containing foods with milk or milk-containing foods, to respect prohibitions against all forms of work (including cooking and lighting fires) on the Sabbath, and to send their children to religious schools.

4. Eighteen years is an important watershed age; the Mishnah (the first division of the Talmud, which contains rabbinic interpretations of biblical laws) suggests it as the most appropriate age for marriage.