

Memories of My Parents

Mom was the rock of our home, seemingly always there, even though she got a job at the synagogue when I was about 10, and she got a car, which liberated her from needing to be driven anywhere. We ate dinner at 6 each evening, lock it in! She was raised in a Reform Jewish home by a single mother. Her dad had left the home too soon. She was not even 16 when he left. And that's shocking for Jewish homes in Kansas City in the 1930s.

Grandma Bessie was a short woman with bravery and capacity that never ended. Mom loved nice things, which must have been hard for Dad since he didn't care at all about such matters. He wanted to provide essentials, and as a result, he worked a lot, at least one job at a time, and I remember once he had three jobs (the other two were part-time) to bring in enough cash to care for our growing family.

She was the 2nd of two kids, her older sister Pauline married Louis Shaw and they had two daughters (Janet and Nancy). They lived just a few blocks from us in Meadowlake also.

Dad was a manufacturer's representative for any number of companies, and he was a good salesman. His dream was to represent himself, or rather to be the boss of a sales force that represented others. For years, he sold cigars for Niles and Moser or stuffed toys for Columbia Toys.
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He even had a designated vehicle for those. The Ford Econoline white panel van was filled with an inventory of all kinds of imported cigars, and when Dad would return from his weekly trip around the four states (Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska) of his territory, I would be asked (assigned obviously) to climb inside the van and help with the inventory counting. I had to be quick with the data as Dad recorded it on his tablet. How many Roi Tans? How many Panatellas? When he left Niles and Moser, he joined the force of Columbia Toys. They supplied him with a 40-foot trailer, which he parked in front of our house, no doubt to the dismay of the Finks across the street or the Kelnes next door. It filled so much room, but inside the trailer was a showroom that featured all kinds of animals in a beautiful display.

Dad was the second of four boys (Ruben, Dad, Archie, Harold) born to immigrant parents Louis and Mary (Weinstein). It's likely both of them were from Ukraine, but the stories of Poland and Russia were intermingled in their broken English conversations. Mary definitely lived in Zitomer (Ukraine) before she migrated to the US in about 1910. For a good long time, he sold LePage's glues and mucilage. And he had regular customers, both small and larger companies, who knew when

Elic was coming to set aside time and to ensure that they got their orders in time. When Lepage's was bought out by Papercraft of Pittsburgh, Dad's territory was taken over by the Papercraft man, and Dad was on the outs. I guess that's why he wanted to have his own business.

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Dad loved the Kansas City baseball team. I'm not sure of his identification with the Monarchs of the old Negro League, featuring Satchel Paige. The Philadelphia Athletics moved to KC in 1955 and became the Kansas City Athletics (shortened to the A's). Somehow, he negotiated his way into the favor of the players and management, probably by bringing cigars and such to the dugout door. He regularly went into the locker room, and at times, I was able to join him. (That is now long-gone in professional sports, but then it was ok, for some reason. I was mesmerised by the powerful men and the friendliness of the players and others in the locker room.

In 1964, at my Bar Mitzvah, I invited Ed Charles, then the 3rd basemen of the A's, and he attended. What a mensch! He even gave me his glove, likely as a gift for my coming of age. I still have that glove to this day. It's so not like the gloves the players use today. His name, "Charles" is written on the webbing.

I used to have many souvenirs like autographed balls. In 2024, I donated many of those to the Kansas City Royals museum at Kaufman stadium. The museum director was very happy to receive them.

Later, Dad went into business along with an Italian fellow whose name I don't remember, but it started with a "V." That is what I remember because they created a cigar company named "V and M." And I don't know any of the particulars because, well, I was only a kid. What I do remember is that one day Dad came home and announced that he was selling his half of the company. That was a surprise to us all. His reason? Seems that Mr V had sold his half the day before, and the people to whom he sold it were syndicate people from the River Quay area. For more on this area, see this website:

kcyesterday.com/articles/river-quay-kansas-city-mafia.

Dad didn't want to be in partnership with the mafia, so he dropped the company straightaway.

It wasn't long before he started "Mendelsohn Sales" and continued his representational work, even employing my brother for a couple of years until that didn't end too well.



May 2003 in Kansas City on Mother's Day. (Photo by my cousin Joyce)

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Elic in his Lancer shirt and the identity he treasured

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US Navy man 1943

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At Jeff and Anita's wedding August 1972. Back row from left: Elic, Harold, Nancy, Ruben, Marjie, Steven, Archie, Ruth, Bob, Joyce. Front from left: Helen, Sarah, Pat, Anita, Jeff, Bubbe Mary



Earliest days for Elic and Helen.



1946. Back Row: Elic, Helen, Pat, Ruben. Front Row: Harold, Bubbe (holding Michael), Zayde (holding Ruth) Archie