Isadore (left) and Harry Ashkin (right) in Kiev, Russia



Chapter 1



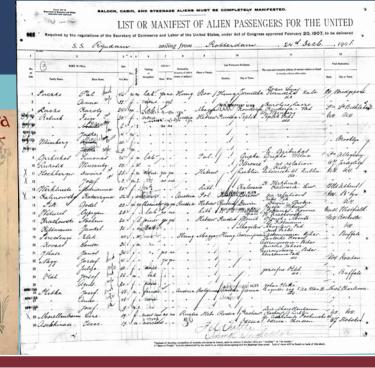
THE ORPHANS FROM ODESSA: HOW THE ASHKIN FAMILY CAME TO AMERICA

n the morning of January 5, 1909, Harry Ashkin was on board the Ryndam sailing from Rotterdam, Holland, when he and his brother Isadore first caught sight of the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. "Slowly the ship glides into the harbor," one frequent traveler wrote in 1906, "and when it passes under the shadow of the Statue of Liberty, the silence is broken, and a thousand hands are outstretched in greeting to this new divinity into whose keeping they now entrust themselves." This sentiment was no doubt echoed thousands upon thousands of times during the Great Migration.

Harry Ashkin was born Isaac Aschkinase in 1887 in the port city of Odessa, then the fourth largest city in Imperial Russia, now part of the Ukraine. Located on the terraced hills overlooking the Black Sea, Odessa had become home to a very large Jewish community during the 19th century that formed more than a third of the city's 403,000 inhabitants. It was a relatively new and enlightened city that encouraged all of its citizens to contribute to its growth, and lacked

Isaac Ashkinase is entered on line 30 of the Ryndam's 1908 passenger manifest.







Left: Physicians examining a group of Jewish immigrants at Ellis Island, c. 1907.

Below: New arrivals at Ellis Island, n.d.



most of the restrictions against Jews that existed in other parts of the Pale of Settlement. But after Tsar Nicholas II issued the October Manifesto in 1905, a violent anti-Jewish pogrom led to the brutal murder of hundreds of Odessa Jews — their homes, apartments and stores damaged or destroyed. Many survivors fled after the pogrom and uprising of 1905, made famous in Sergei Eisenstein's epic motion picture, The Battleship Potemkin. This was not the first wave of anti-Semitism to bloody the streets of Odessa, nor would it be the last. During World War II some 80% of the 210,000 Jews who remained were massacred

Harry Ashkin's parents came from Odessa, and may have been killed during this revolutionary year in 1905. No doubt it was during this period that Isaac and Isadore Aschkinase were sent to an orphanage in Kiev, perhaps by the aid of a relative who wanted to keep them safe. The passenger manifest of their 1908-09 voyage records Harry's nearest relative as "Gr Aschkinase" of Poskinski Street in the Kherson district of Odessa, who may have been the boys' grandfather. The Jewish community of Odessa was famous for its philanthropic institutions, and a well-known philanthropist named Mrs. L.G. Askenasi who donated a considerable sum to the hospital of Odessa may have also been a relative. Business directories for this era list 9 people with the last name of "Askenazi," all working in the Kherson district and variously employed in the garment, tobacco, grain and banking industries. Perhaps some were also related to the two boys.

Obtaining official permission to emigrate from Czarist Russia in search of the American Dream was a costly and circuitous undertaking. Many therefore bypassed this route and made their way to friendlier ports where they could buy their way onto a steamship heading for America. Twenty-one year old Isaac and his 17-year old brother Isadore, left the orphanage in Kiev, escaped from Russia and made their way to Rotterdam, Amsterdam. They left that port on Christmas Eve, 1908, on the Holland-Amer-

ica line. Isaac paid for his ticket himself, journeyed in steerage class, and carried \$42 with him. Like other travelers, the brothers were pushed into a cramped, dark hold in the bottom of the ship, without clean air, in unsanitary conditions, filled with hundreds of other people who ate and slept together for two to three weeks.

Immigrants arriving at Ellis Island in steerage class were welcomed to America by quarantine and custom-house officials who came on board their vessel. One witness claimed this process caused everyone from steerage class to sink into "awe-struck and confused silence." After this process, they were then herded with their baggage onto barges and taken to Ellis Island for their final medical examinations. "With tickets fastened to our caps and to the dresses of the women, and with our own bills of lading in our trembling hands, we pass between rows of uniformed attendants, and under the huge portal of the vast hall where the final judgment awaits us." Agents of various National Immigrant Societies greeted the new

arrivals with much needed assistance. The vast majority spoke no English, and had the address of a family member or friend who was to meet them pinned to their clothing. Like all other immigrants, the two brothers were examined for general physical defects and for the dreaded infectious eye disease, trachoma. Records indicate Harry was 5 feet $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches tall with black hair and brown eyes. He listed his occupation as "merchant." Officials then locked the new arrivals in a gated holding area not unlike cattle pens in the great hall where they anxiously waited to find out whether they were admitted or had to return back to the Old World. Families were often tragically split apart due to medical reasons, with little or no explanation to these immigrants who spoke no English.

"Will they let me in?" Isaac and Isadore must have thought with deep uncertainty as they spent their first restless night in America on the clean but uncomfortable cots in the locked holding area of Ellis Island. The next day, once they were admitted, they needed a family mem-

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1911

Harry and Pauline Ashkin on their wedding day in Brooklyn, 1911.

Right: Holland-America line piers in Hoboken with Manhattan skyline across the Hudson River, c. 1905.



ber or friend to sponsor, meet and escort them to their homes. Harry and his brother were sponsored by his aunt "D. Hockman" who lived at 228 Adams Street in Hoboken, New Jersey.

Harry quickly set out to find a job in New York City and found one in the garment industry as a "jobber," serving as the middleman between the start and finish of making clothing. He then started his own business making the elasticity around the waistline of women's clothing



at the Newton Waist Company at 498 Broome Street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. In 1911 at the age of 24 he married 19-year old Beckie Albert in Brooklyn. She had immigrated from Zatesch, Russia in 1900, and changed her name to Pauline after she was married. Living at 187 Blake Avenue in Brownsville, Brooklyn, they had their first child, David, in 1912, followed by Joseph in 1918 and Elsie (Della) in 1920. Joseph would grow up to marry Anna Jablonski Speckman, whose parents also sought a new beginning in the promised land of America.

Sweat shop workers in Mr. Silberman's shop on Suffolk Street, New York City, 1908.



Chapter 2



Above: "Emmigrants coming to the 'Land of Promise,'" c. 1902.

Opposite: Mary Jablonski and Joseph Speckman on their wedding day in Berlin, c. 1920.



THE GOLDENE MEDINA [THE PROMISED LAND]: HOW THE JABLONSKI / SPECKMAN FAMILY CAME TO AMERICA

Soon after immigrating to America in 1921 with his young wife Mary and new baby girl, Joseph Speckman found his family a small apartment in a crowded tenement on Goerick Street in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Like millions of other Jewish immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe fleeing rampant anti-Semitism, political turmoil, crushing poverty and hunger, their journey was not an easy one. It took extraordinary courage to face the unknown on the long ocean voyage across the Atlantic in the cramped, claustrophobic conditions of steerage class. Speaking Yiddish and perhaps a few words of English, they left with little more than the clothes on their backs to begin a new life.

Mary Jablonski and Joseph Speckman had been neighbors in a village outside of Warsaw, Poland – the capital and home to the largest Jewish community in Europe. During World War I, Poland was caught in a deadly tug-of-war between its three occupying powers: Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary. Poles were forced into the Russian, German and Austrian armies to fight against one another. The Russians had drafted Joseph into their army when he reached 18, but he had other plans.



ARMIA POLSKA WE FRANCYI POLISH ARMY IN FRANCE

CENTRUM REKRUTACYJNE NO.

Opposite: Poster of the Polish army in France by W.T. Benda, 1917.

Below: Jewish school children in a Polish village, 1917.





The Russian army had fallen into chaos following the Revolution of 1917, and mutiny was spreading like wildfire. During this tremendous period of upheaval, Joseph decided to escape to Berlin, and asked beautiful, headstrong, 16-year old Mary Jablonski to meet him there where they planned to elope. While Joseph went on ahead, Mary joined a traveling band of gypsies and left her family, thinking that she would never see them again. She could not swim, so whenever the gypsies had to forge a deep river, one of them would put Mary on their back and carry her across. With Berlin nearly 350 miles away, it was a considerable journey that took over a month. "She was very, very resolute," says her daughter Pearl Rosenberg. "She did what had to be done." Uneducated, Mary came from extreme poverty. Now she had a chance for a new beginning. She met Joseph in Berlin, and the two were

When the war drew to a close in 1918, Joseph and Mary could not return to Poland. Although that nation had regained its independence, Poland lay in ruins. Nearly a million Poles were killed during World War I, and all of Poland's institutions had to be rebuilt. But when Russia again invaded the war-torn nation and a deadly famine struck in 1920, Joseph and Mary decided it was time to leave for the "Goldene Medina," the "promised land" in America.

Although some of Mary Jablonski's family had already resettled in Paris around 1925, Mary's sister Sarah Jablonski had immigrated to New York City during World War I. Sarah had written to the family in Poland and her sister in Berlin telling them about the land of freedom, opportunity and promise that had drawn 2.5 million Jews from Eastern Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "My father and mother felt they would be free in America," explained Ann Ashkin, Mary and Joseph Speckman's middle child who celebrated her 90th birthday on August 18, 2012. "This was the land of hope, and they could accomplish anything they wanted to here. That's





Above: In the heart of the Lower East Side ghetto on bustling Hester Street, Manhattan, c. 1902. The streets served as community center, marketplace and playground for the immigrant Jewish community.

why they came." Not long after the Speckmans arrived in New York, Joseph opened his own cleaning and tailoring shop on bustling Delancey Street. While he and his young family had undoubtedly arrived in a land of unprecedented opportunity, the streets of Manhattan's Lower East Side were also crowded, dirty and dangerous. There was grinding poverty here as well, long days of hard work in dangerous conditions, widespread illness and exploitation by unscrupulous bosses and merciless landlords. And then there was the crime.

Joseph had a very colorful clientele, some from the mafia. "He would get things to clean with guns in them," Ann recalled, "and he would take them out and...put them back in the pockets." Not uncommonly, the honest tailor found diamonds, cash and other valuables in his clients' clothing and always carefully put them into manila envelopes and replaced them exactly where he found them. "The East Side was loaded with gangsters," said Ann, born in America in 1922. On the way to synagogue one

holiday with her father and older sister Sylvia, two men in hats and suits were just casually walking in front of them. "They were machine-gunned to death right in front of us," says Ann. "My father was very casual about it. I have never forgotten that. He took our hands, walked around the two bodies, and continued to the synagogue. I could never ever, ever forget that — those two dead men."

Left: Mary Speckman with her first-born child, Sylvia, 1921.

> Anna and Sylvia Speckman, 1926.

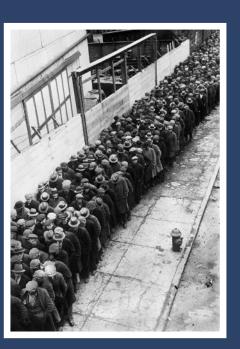




Above: Bankruptcy sale on Delancey Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.

Opposite: The homeless and unemployed wait in line seeking shelter in Manhattan during the Great Depression.

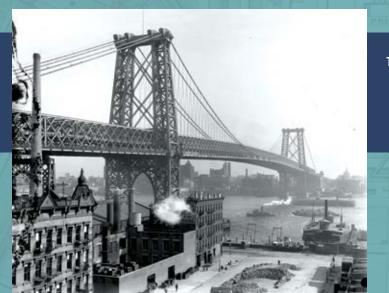
Chapter 3



ON THE MOVE

Thile the crash of Wall Street in 1929 sent shockwaves throughout the world, the Jewish community of New York was perhaps more devastated by the failure of the Bank of the United States the following year. Founded in 1913, this Jewish-owned institution had become symbolic of their economic hopes and aspirations. Some ambitious immigrants like Joseph Speckman had opened small shops with modest loans from banks like this one, only to watch their businesses falter and then fail entirely as the prosperity of the Roaring '20s came crashing to a halt. Depositors across the nation gathered frantically in front of their banks trying desperately to withdraw their savings – to no avail.

Joseph could not keep his small shop afloat during these tumultuous times. He took a job making women's shirts on Sixth Avenue in the garment district of Manhattan. He used his own Singer sewing machine, worked extremely long hours earning between \$7 and \$14 per week, and became a loyal union man. Abe Sobel was the manager in charge of the factory where Joseph worked.



The Williamsburg Bridge.

Opposite: Pearl Speckman, 1931.



Left to right:
Anna Speckman
(left) with her sister
(left to right) Pearl
and mother Mary in
Coney Island, 1928.



Jews praying on the Williamsburg Bridge, New York, on New Year's Day, 1909.

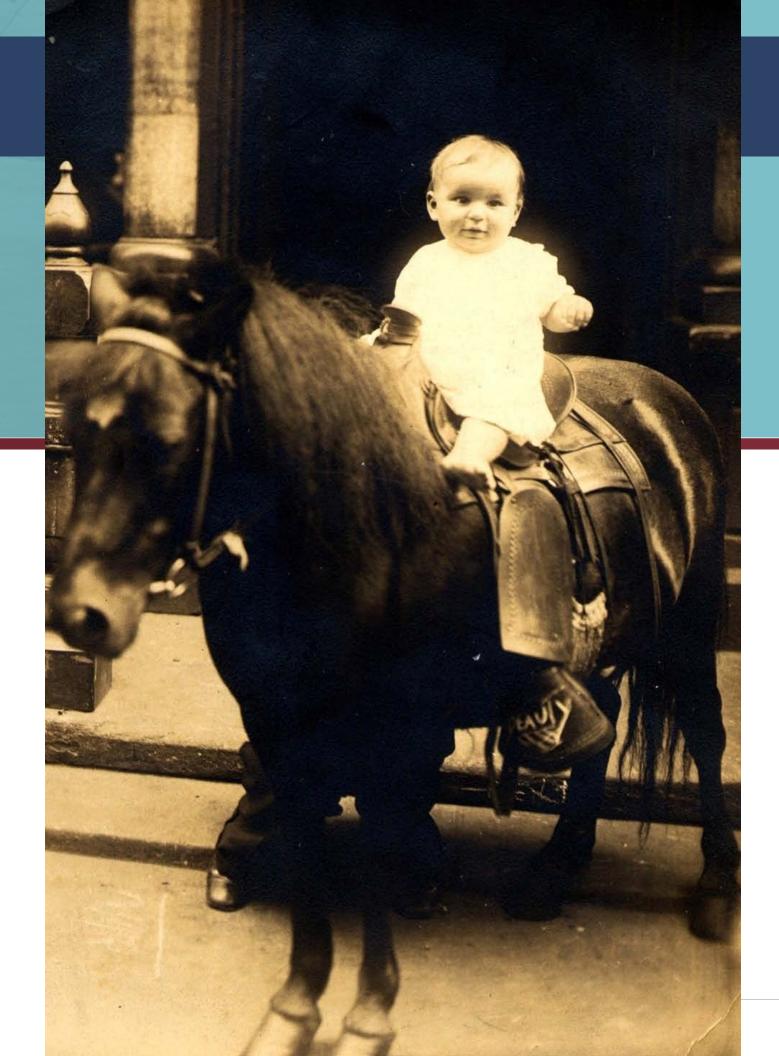
But work was unsteady. Already a cyclical business plagued by seasonal unemployment, the garment industry began to collapse during the Depression. One third of New

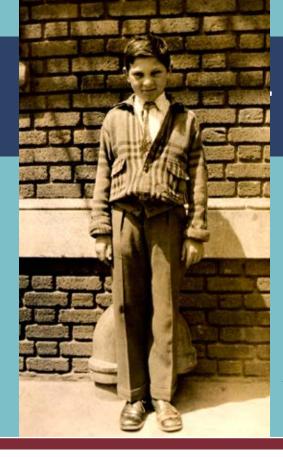
York's Jewish population worked in the needle trades at this time, and they were particularly hard hit during the 1930s. Many were growing desperate to find a way to survive. It seemed the American Dream, a term coined in 1931, was slipping from their grasp.

In 1933 Joseph Speckman moved his family to an apartment in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, situ-

ated directly at the other end of the Williamsburg Bridge. Opened in 1903 twenty years after the Brooklyn Bridge, The Williamsburg Bridge became the second steel suspension bridge over the East River. This new structure rapidly facilitated the spread of Jewish settlement to new neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Joseph's Goerck Street apartment was just a few short blocks away from the new bridge and Delancey Street, the major artery that connected the Lower East Side to Brooklyn by way of the Williamsburg Bridge. No doubt he and his wife traveled over that bridge by foot with a horse-drawn cart carrying their belongings and their three daughters.

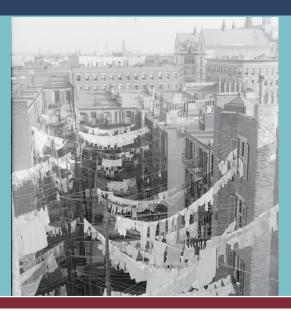
But they didn't stay long. One day a giant rat as large as a cat ran into the living room and into their baby Pearl's playpen. Mary started screaming and ran out of the apartment, leaving her daughter Pearl in the playpen with the rat. Instinctively, ten-year-old Anna grabbed Pearl from her playpen and carried her out of the building. That weekend they moved and never came back. And from then





1933

Dolor sit amet, duis molestie vel illum ismod tincidun



Left: A boy on the Lower East Side during the Great Depression.



Above: Dolor sit amet, duis molestie vel illmod tincidunt ut te feugulla facillisi. It consectuer sed am eting.

Aliquam erat volutpat nostrumu.

on, Anna felt that her little sister was her responsibility.

To save money, many of New York's poorest changed living quarters regularly during this period because many landlords were offering "concessions" — two to three months' free rent to attract new tenants. It had grown increasingly difficult for landlords to fill their empty apartments, and vacancy rates had climbed to over 15 percent in the poorest areas of the city. Mary and Joseph Speckman's story was typical of so many other New York City families during this era: frequently on the move, staying in rent-free apartments until the third month, relocating again before that period was up.

Deteriorating economic conditions were bound to take a toll in other ways as well. In fact, authorities recorded a steep and unprecedented increase in family conflict within Depression-era Jewish immigrant families during the 1930s. "They never spoke to us as children," Anna recalled. "I don't remember them speaking to us, ever. They lived their lives, and we were just there." A sense

of distance and tension between Eastern European immigrants and their American-born children is commonplace in the memoirs of Jewish writers from the Depression era. The Speckman family was mired in poverty, which no doubt fueled feelings of helplessness, anxiety, resentment and disappointment. Joseph may also have felt humiliated at losing his business.

Although Anna was quite fond of her quiet and loving father, she had a tense relationship with her mother. Mary favored her oldest daughter Sylvia, who was quiet and introverted, "the family beauty." Anna, on the other hand, was "the ugly child" in her mother's eyes. Feeling disapproval from her mother made Anna feel both insecure and strong at the same time. "It made me more determined," said Ann. "I would show them!" Anna was given considerable responsibility for both her older and younger sister that, in turn, made her older than her years. "I could handle it, and my mother knew I could handle it," said Ann. That inner strength would serve her well in the

years to come.

The American-born children of Jewish immigrants were growing up, getting educated, and becoming more independent from their parents. When new legislation in 1923 curtailed the influx of immigrants to New York, these new Americans soon began to outnumber those born in Europe. And Old World and American values often clashed head-on within these families.

Mary spoke Yiddish with her children at home, but once Anna went to school and had to learn English, she refused to speak Yiddish with her mother. Her sister Pearl also felt embarrassed by her mother's heavy Yiddish accent. Like many other immigrants, Mary began to attend a free school to learn English. While both Pearl and Ann were "A" students, Mary "didn't treasure education much," says Pearl. "It was very important to her that I never reach beyond where she was." Perhaps Mary felt threatened that her American-born children would surpass her in intelligence. After all, she had no education in

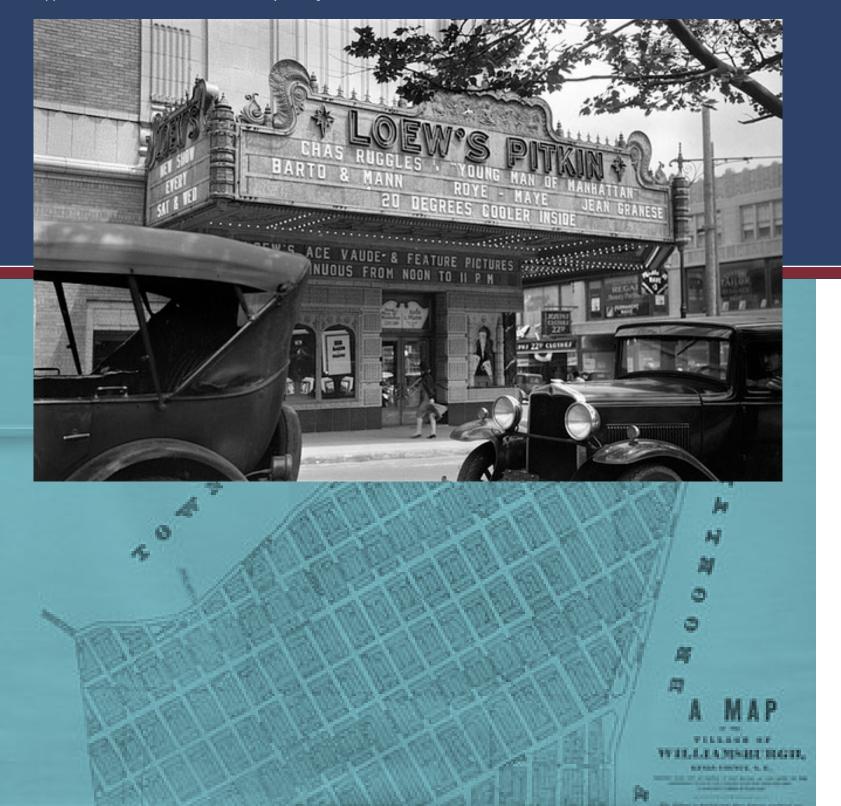
Poland before coming to America.

As the Great Depression settled in, grim and intractable, many adolescents found themselves vacillating between hope and despair. The tensions of the times, and those within her own family no doubt helped strengthen Anna Speckman's resolve to shape her own options, make her own plans, set her priorities and develop a strategy to get where she wanted to go.

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Below: The Loew's Pitkin Theatre, Brooklyn, New York, opened in 1929. Pitkin Avenue was called the "Fifth Avenue of Brooklyn" by Brownsville's residents. This theatre was the crown jewel of this bustling commercial center.

Opposite: Ebbets Field, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers, 1937.



Chapter 4



WHEN BROOKLYN WAS THE WORLD

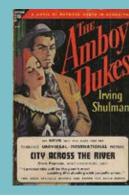
In 1935 the Speckmans finally settled down in Brownsville in Brooklyn. Densely populated Brownsville had replaced the Lower East Side as the new ghetto for Eastern European immigrants and their American-born children who were coming of age in America. By 1923, 95% of the residents of Brownsville were Jewish, creating a level of concentration never attained in the Lower East Side. Most everyone knew or spoke a kind of Yiddish as well as English with a distinct Brooklyn accent. Some lived in crowded airless tenements with broken down stoops, others in dilapidated two-family houses, a lucky few in more affluent apartment buildings. Brownsville formed the center of a number of social movements during this era, electing socialists to the New York State Assembly from 1915 to 1921. In 1916 Margaret Sanger opened the first birth control clinic in the United States on Amboy Street in Brownsville.

Ann was 13 when she and her family moved to 187 Blake Avenue in Brownsville. She lived on the second floor, and the kitchen faced her new school across the street. There was even a park. On the first floor was a candy store – every kid's



Ann Speckman in front of the drug store on the first floor of her parents' apartment building in Brownsville, 1939.

1939



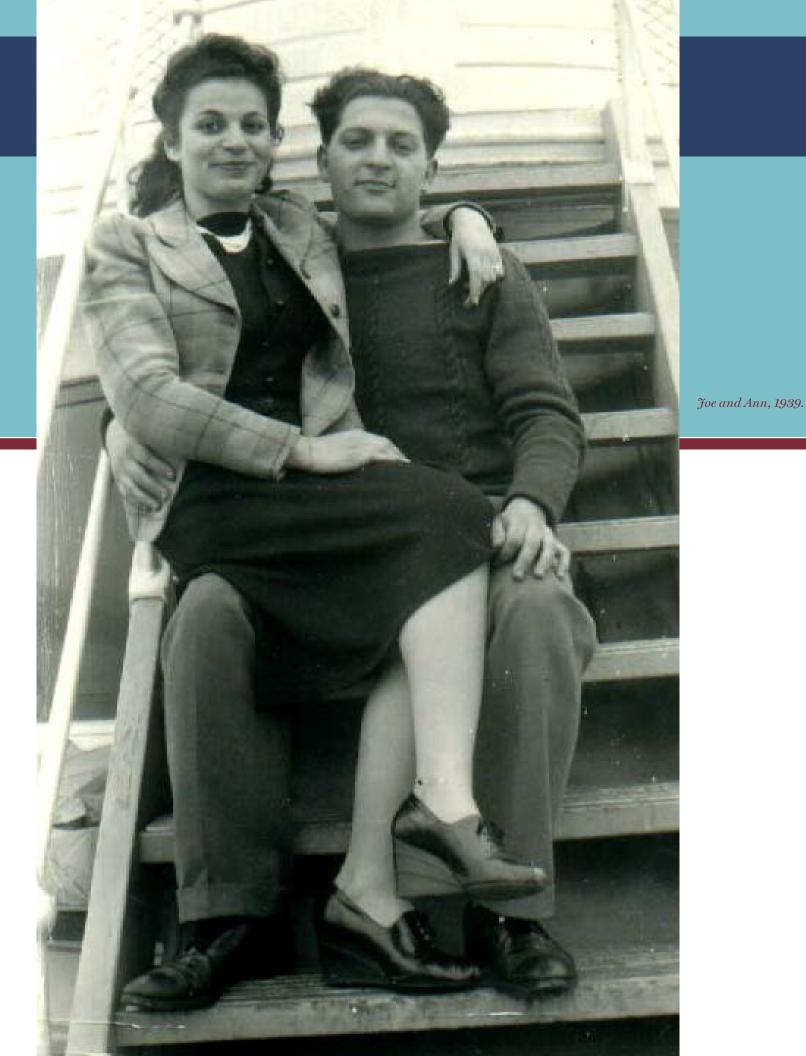
The Amboy Dukes was a novel by Irving Shulman about a tough teen gang in Brownsville, first published in 1947.

dream. The young boys from the neighborhood would often sit outside that store and talk. Ann would sit upstairs on her windowsill and listen to them.

Much as in the Lower East Side, candy stores formed the true social centers of the neighborhood. They typically had a long counter filled with inexpensive candies, perhaps cigars as well, and, of course, a soda-water fountain. These stores served as meeting places for local, informal clubs of boys and young men. And some, as starkly portrayed in Irving Shulman's 1947 novel about a gang in Brownsville, *The Amboy Dukes*, even formed brutal, tough, notorious criminal gangs like Murder Inc. William Poster grew up there in the 1920s and remembered Brownsville as "one huge cesspool of illiteracy and hoodlumism."

On the day she moved in, Ann met a 17 year-old boy named Joseph Ashkin in the hallway. He had just come downstairs from a rooftop poker game with his close gang of friends. Joe looked at Ann and said to his friends, "I'm going to marry her." Joe "was *gorgeous*," Ann recalled, "six feet tall...with dark wavy hair." But he had a tough edge that was unsettling. One day soon after Ann and Joe met, his friend Manny made a comment about Ann's attractive figure. Joseph picked up a Pepsi bottle and threatened to hit him if he didn't back off. "I had mixed emotions because none of the others dated me after that," Ann recalled. "They were afraid of him...He was tough and sweet, good and bad. He was the best and the worst...He had a very tough personality, and he was very outspoken."

Joseph Ashkin had come up the hard way. All the kids in Brownsville had. He and his family had moved there in 1925 and lived around the corner from Ann at 624 Hopkinson Avenue. His sister Edella was two years younger than he, and his brother Dave was six years his senior and studying to become a pharmaceutical chemist at St. John's University in Queens.





Coney Island

Joe had to be tough to grow up on the crime-ridden streets of Brownsville. "He was a fighter," said Ann. "He was aggressive." Writer Alfred Kazin was raised there as well and called Brownsville "a place that measured all success by our skill in getting away from it." That was exactly what Joe planned to do. He read constantly and was very demanding, not only of himself, but also of his friends. "He was tough on his friends," Ann recalled. "He felt they could always do more and do better. Never accepted them for what they were until when they got older."

To navigate the turbulent waters of the Depression, families in Brownsville pooled their resources to survive. They had to make choices about which children would have to work to support the family and which they could send to school. Although his brother and sister were sent to college, Joe Ashkin's parents told him they could not afford to send him. In fact, Joe never even had his bar mitzvah because his mother refused to pay the rabbi his fee of \$50. "This always, always bothered him," said Ann. "It hurt him. Even when he could have afforded it later in life it wouldn't have been the same."

Girls and boys grew up fast during the Depression and entering the job market and earning an income became critical at an early age. Ann worked in a nail head



Brooklyn Public Library Brooklyn Collection Dolor: Sit amet, consectetuer adipiscing elit, sed diam nonummy nibh euismod tincidunt ut laoreet dolore magna aliquam erat volutpat.



The Askhin family, left to right: Pauline, Joe, Harry, Dell and Dave.

factory in the garment industry during summer vacation when she was 13. Before long, she got her sister Sylvia a job there was well, and ended up managing three people. She and Sylvia earned \$6 per week and each gave \$5 of that to their mother.

As these Depression-era kids were reaching adolescence, they were becoming more independent, and learning to negotiate the challenges of these difficult times on their own terms. These children of immigrants had a marked tendency to pursue white-collar jobs and not follow their fathers into the factories or trades. Joe, for instance, found a job as a dental technician in the Bowery with his Uncle Izzie for \$15 a week, and his brother Dave had become a pharmaceutical chemist after graduating from college.

But for others, factory work was the only way to gain a foothold in the working world. Joseph Speckman found a job for his daughter Ann in the garment industry in the same building where he worked on Sixth Avenue in Manhattan. Ann dropped out of school and was working full time in the garment industry from 1939 to 1940 to support her family. And she was earning more than her father who was unable to work full time. He was growing ill, suffering from stomach cancer.

- 6

The BIO INTRASOL LABORATORIES ...

Above: Joe Ashkin at Bio-Intrasol Laboratories, 1942.

Right: Joe and Ann Ashkin, 1941.

Chapter 5



BIO-INTRASOL LABORATORIES

In 1940 Joe Ashkin was still living at home with his parents when he and his brother Dave decided to start a business called Bio-Intrasol Laboratories to manufacture medical injectables. Dave had recently been fired from his job as a research pharmaceutical chemist for stealing and selling secret formulas. Dave kept 70% of the new business, with Joe owning the balance. They were able to fund their new enterprise with start-up money from their father who sold some shares of his AT&T stock to raise the capital for them. Harry had been buying AT&T stock since he had started out in business in New York City, and this was his "savings account." Joe's son Michael Ashkin recalls how his grandfather often spoke about AT&T when he was a little boy, and told him that one day it would become the largest company in the world. Without this cash infusion from Harry Ashkin who had the foresight to invest his modest savings into the communications giant, the Ashkin family business might not have ever been launched.



1940

Ann and Joe Ashkin were married on September 1, 1940.

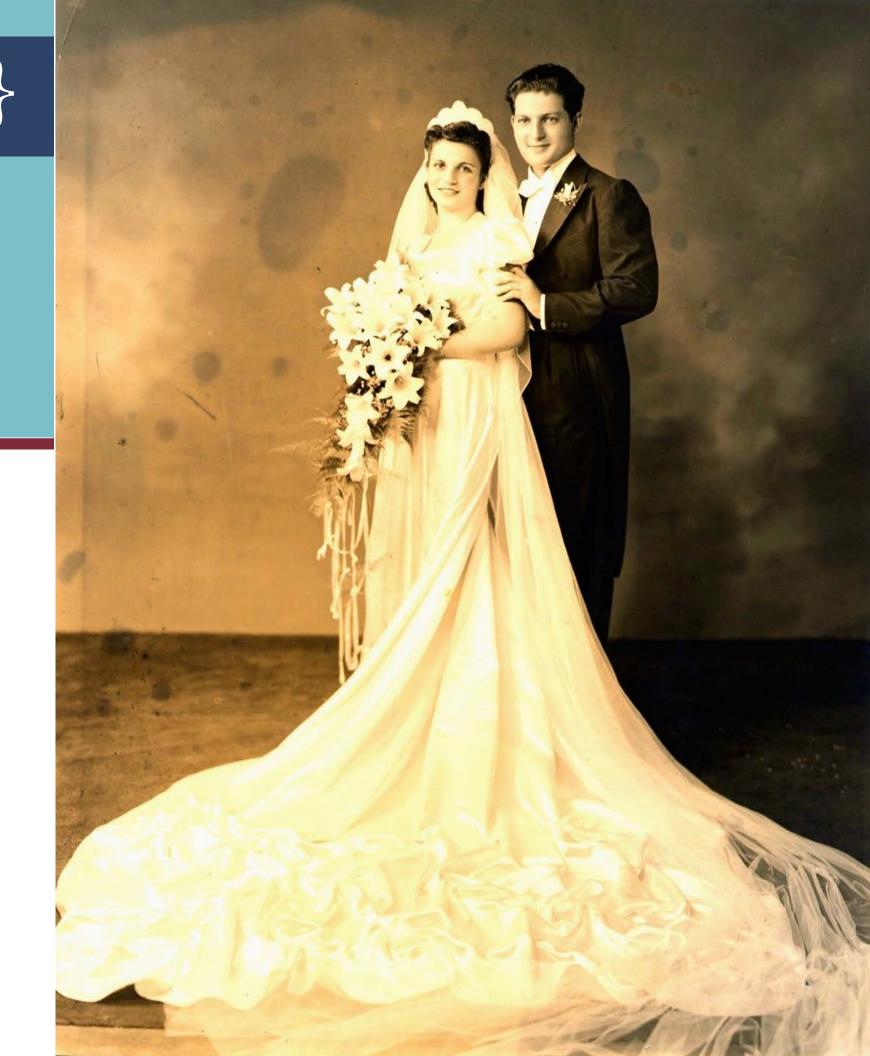


Joe (left) and Dave Ashkin (right), with a friend, 1941.

Joe earned \$25 per week and worked 52 weeks a year with no time off. Dave served as biochemist and created the formulas, and both he and Joe ran manufacturing. The two brothers rented a modest place together in lower Manhattan to manufacture their small product line that they initially sold to hospitals. Ann joined Joe on Saturdays and washed all the vials.

Shortly before her 18th birthday, Ann and Joe decided to marry, but there were obstacles. Her parents didn't approve, and Joe's parents thought he could do better in finding a suitable wife. His mother Pauline was difficult, possessive of her children, domineering and powerful, according to Ann. But Joseph and Ann had made up their minds, and decided to elope to Maryland where couples could marry in less than an hour. They secretly boarded a train at Penn Station and headed for Maryland where they found the officials who could perform the ceremony. But there was another roadblock: because Ann was not yet 18, the officials informed the young

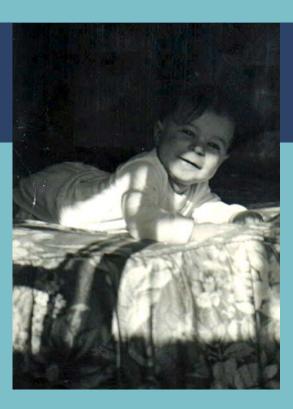
couple that they only way they could marry them was if Ann signed a paper testifying that she was pregnant. But she wasn't, and she refused to document such a lie. Angry but resolute, the couple headed back home determined to overcome the opposition of their families. Ann and Joseph were married in a small ceremony in their rabbi's tiny apartment on September 1, 1940 - with both families present. Joe's best man, Dudy Steuart, and his girlfriend Mimi, took them back to their very first apartment in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, which they rented for \$30 a month. Ann had been sleeping on the couch when she lived with her parents; so this was like a dream come true for her to have her own place. "It was a way of getting away," Ann explained. "We had a very tough life." They couldn't even afford a honeymoon. And although they had no furniture in their living room, they invited their best friends over the following week, threw a tablecloth on the living room floor, and had dinner together. "Friends are important to us," says Ann. "Sometimes more than family,



Michael Ashkin was born on August 13, 1941.



Harry Ashkin invested in AT&T stock, and from his earnings, he loaned his sons Dave and Joe the capital they needed to start Bio-Intrasol Laboratories.



1941

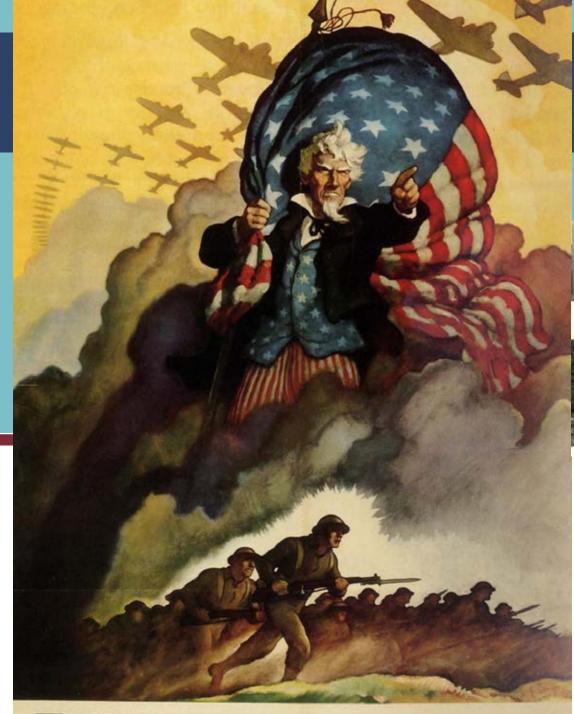
unfortunately, and I know that I sometimes was more familiar with my friends. I was able to speak and tell them more then I could tell my family."

They would need the support of their friends and each other to face many challenges in their new life together. Joseph Speckman was already quite ill with cancer when Joe and Ann were married. He died in 1941, and it was a devastating loss for Ann and her family. She was overcome with grief at the funeral in New Jersey, and threw herself on her father's coffin. Sadly, Joseph Speckman would never get to see Michael, his first grandchild, who was born on August 13, 1941.

Although there would be a number of years of struggling to come, they were thrilled to be on their own and very much in love. But Joe would continue to be plagued by feelings of inadequacy, which perhaps made him even more determined to be successful. "Dave became wealthy and we did not," says Ann. Joe began to take some night classes in business at St. John's University, but he never completed his education. "This left him feeling very inadequate," Ann recalled. "And I knew that he could <code>[besuccessful]</code> and that helped him – that helped him a lot."

One of the key products that Dave and Joe manufactured at Bio-Intrasol was estrogen, which they extracted from the testicles of bulls and sold to doctors, hospitals and laboratories. "They would grind bulls' testicles" with a meat grinder, Ann recalled, "which left a tremendous odor with the mixture and everything that he put into it." Not surprisingly, the potent aroma permeated Joe's skin and came out through his pores. Joe rode the subway home each night after work, and every time he entered a crowded subway car during rush hour, it was quickly deserted. He then had the entire car to himself on the ride home. "He would come home smelling like bulls' balls," explained Ann. "And I would make him undress in the hall outside the apartment and hang his clothes on the lines."

With the entry of the United States into World War



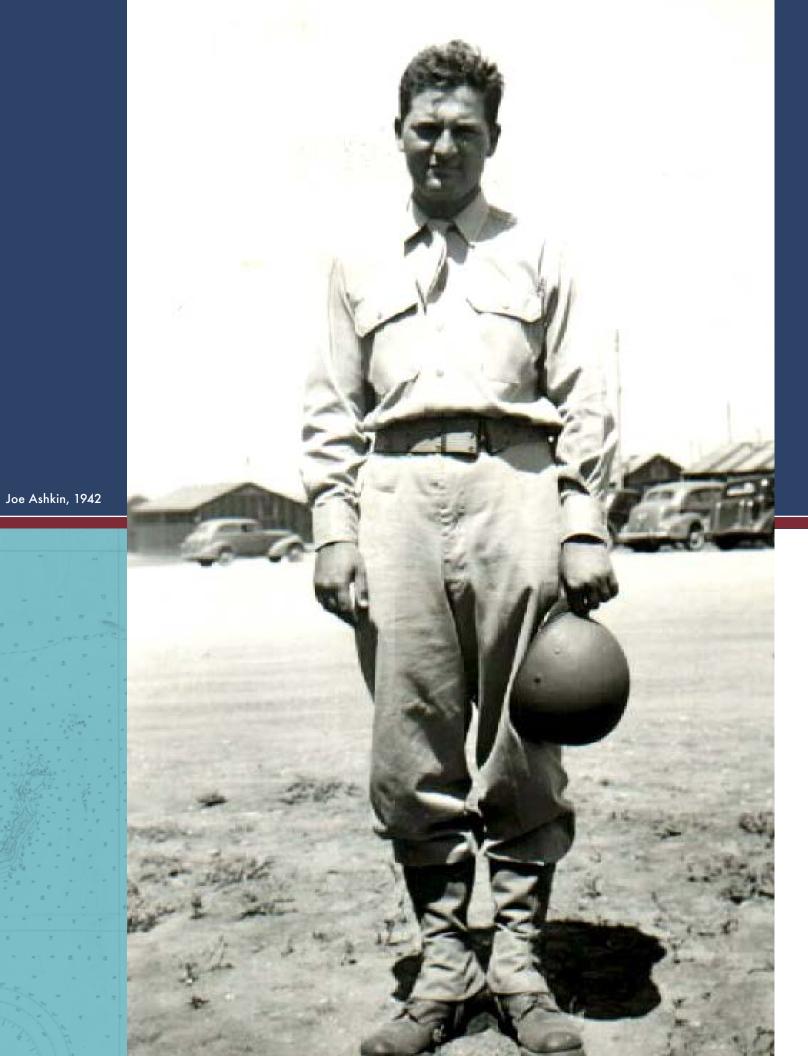
Above: Dave and Joe Ashkin (standing, center and right), with their wives, Dotty (seated, center) and Ann with 9 month-old Michael on her lap (seated, right).

BUY WAR BONDS

II following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Bio-Intrasol obtained the best wartime customer it could possibly have: Uncle Sam. World War II effectively ended the Great Depression and ushered in a long period of expansion that fueled the economy. America's factories reopened; industrial productivity skyrocketed by 96%; and some 17 million civilian workers were hired to meet the sensational new demand for goods and services. Government programs supplying and mobilizing the American forces powered that remarkable recovery, considered the "most extraordinary mobilization of an idle economy in the history of the world."







Chapter 6



YOU'RE IN THE ARMY NOW

s business at Bio-Intrasol started to grow in pace with the booming wartime economy, Joseph Ashkin was spending more and more time on the road making sales calls to new clients. During a trip to Pittsburgh, he decided to register for the draft. After all, the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, the first peacetime draft in U.S. history, required that all men between the ages of 21 and 35 register with their local draft boards. When his brother Dave was subsequently called to go into the Army, the family called a critical meeting. Because the two brothers worked in the pharmaceutical industry and supplied important medications for the war effort, only one of them would have to serve. The other would be allowed to stay and run the medical business.

Because Dave had three children and was older, everyone agreed that he should remain behind and that Joe should join the Army. Joe was pretty much in awe of his older brother at this period in time, and he could have done little to argue with this decision. But when Joe went to the recruitment center in New York to volunteer to stand in for his brother, he found that



Ann and Mike join their father in Abilene, Texas, where Joe was in basic training at Camp Barkeley.

Ann Ashkin, Abiline, Texas, 1944.





Joe Ashkin with his battalion, 1945, third from right.



Joe corresponded regularly with his brother Dave and sister-inlaw Dotty while in the Army.

the army didn't have his name on the list of people to be drafted, so he had to register again. Had he not stepped forward and volunteered, he may never have been drafted.

Joe soon got his orders to report for basic training at Camp Barkeley, located on the rolling plains of central west Texas, 11 miles southwest of Abilene. "We saw him off on the train," said Ann. "It was sad. It was very bad. It was very hard seeing him off. His mother was there...His father was never there. And his mother kept on yelling at me 'cause I didn't smile. I was crying. I didn't smile."

Founded in 1941, Camp Barkeley quickly became the nation's largest military medical training camp. At the height of the war, it housed a population of some 50,000, including German prisoners of war. The U.S. Army medical corps was a natural fit with Joe's background at Bio-Intrasol and his earlier work as a dental technician. During three weeks of medical field training, he endured rigorous physical conditioning with long road marches with a pack of 45 pounds under simulated battle condi-

tions, and took classes in such subjects as chemical warfare, anatomy and physiology, organization of the Army, communications, map-reading, sanitation, logistics and first aid.

At Camp Barkeley (now Dyess Air Force Base), it didn't take long for the officer in charge to decide where to send Joe for duty. "Last Saturday I was called up to the classification office," he wrote to his brother Dave and sister-in-law Dotty. "He asked me what I knew. I told him I used to hammer crowns. They asked if it was gold crowns, and I said it was. To this he replied, 'Good, then you're a gold man and just what we need for a general hospital.' I tried to tell the dope just how far I was from being a gold man, but he insisted. Finally I asked what hospital it was and when he told me I got sick because they are about to ship out, and Anna was on her way here. That's why I called you to try to stop her."

But it was too late. A month after Joe arrived at Camp Barkeley, Ann came to join him, arriving by train with three-year-old Michael in tow. There was no housing for families of enlisted men at the base, so Ann went into Abilene to the local synagogue and asked the rabbi for his help in finding a place to stay. She undoubtedly went to Temple Mitzpah in Abilene, founded in 1942. With the influx of Jewish service men and families to Camp Barkeley, the Jewish residents formed a congregation. But the rabbi that Anna went to see said, "Go back to New York. This is no place for Jews." He told her there were only 12 Jewish families in the entire town of Abilene. "I wasn't going to go home," Ann recalled.

She had a hard time to find a room, and ended up at the only boarding house in town. She rented a small room and paid 50 cents to use the shower. She soon realized that there was something peculiar about the place. Some twenty women were renting rooms there, and they entertained a lot of male visitors, especially soldiers from the base. It finally dawned on her that it was a house of prostitution, but she had nowhere else to turn. She and

Michael stayed there for two months until she eventually found an apartment in a family's converted garage. Joe was able to get a pass every night to see her, and usually got to her place by 6 pm, but had to wake up at 4:45 each morning to get back to camp by 6 am.

Times were tough, and Joe asked Dave and Dotty to send money via Western Union, which they did. In a letter to Dave and Dotty, Joe wrote: "If you could see how some of the men here are always in hot water and worried sick about money for their wives, you would realize how important a thing it is to me when I know that no matter what or when or where, Anna is never alone and always has someone to come to when she needs help. I am not much good at expressing my appreciation but believe me I realize what a tremendous thing you are doing for us and someday I will find a way to be able to repay all or a small part of this."

Joe and Ann made friends at the Camp, but Joe faced discrimination within his company. More than half a





1945

The Battle of Okinawa in June, 1945, resulted in the largest number of casualties in the Pacific Theater in WW II, with over 100,000 Japanese deaths and more than 65,000 Allied casualties.



The August 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagaski (shown here) caused the surrender of Japan just weeks after the end of the fighting in Okinawa.



Marines rest by tombs on the outskirts of Naha, Okinawa, 1945. The Japanese hid in these tombs and caves all over the island.

million American Jews served in the armed forces during World War II, converting them into seasoned fighters, making them comfortable in taking risks. But because the military lifted them out of the security of their old urban neighborhoods and sent them to bases often located in protestant, rural areas of the country, they encountered ignorance head-on. One day when Ann and baby Michael were at the U.S.O. where they met other wives and children of men at the base, she met one housewife from Chicago. When she discovered that Ann was Jewish, she said in all seriousness, "Where are your horns?"

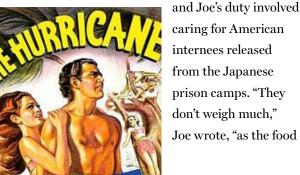
Ann and Joe's time together in Texas was short-lived because he was about to be shipped out to the Pacific Theater where troops were engaged in the bloodiest and most bitterly fought battles of World War II. Ann boarded a train home to Bensonhurst not knowing when—or if—she would see him again. She was also expecting their second child.

Joe and his battalion were part of a convoy of ships en route to invade Japan when they learned that the U.S. had dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and Nagasaki four days later. Japan surrendered on August 14th. Joe's ship was sent to Korea during the bombing, and then he and his crew received orders to head for Okinawa. "The place itself isn't too bad and looks more like one big construction camp," Joe wrote to his brother Dave and sister-in-law Dottie. "We are living in a field next to a hospital that is set up in tents. We have only our pup tents as yet but I can say that I am a lot more comfortable than I was when on bivouac in Texas...Work goes on around here 24 hours a day. When night comes the place lights up like Coney Island and they keep on working."

Shortly before Joe arrived in Okinawa, the last and biggest of the Pacific Island battles had taken place on that Japanese colony, located only 360 miles from Japan. The U.S. strategy of island hopping to take control of one Japanese held island after another culminated in the spring of 1945. The Allies planned to use Okinawa as a base for the planned invasion of the Japanese mainland

and had landed there on April 1, 1945 with some 548,000 troops before it was over. They engaged in a ferocious, three-month long battle with the Japanese who fought nearly to the last man from a vast network of caves and underground tunnels throughout the 454-square mile island. The final battle of the Second World War, the battle of Okinawa resulted in a staggering loss of life: 65,000 Allies, 100,000 Japanese and 150,000 Okinawans - civilians caught in the crossfire who were killed, wounded or committed suicide. But thankfully the end of the war was in sight. "We have been told that the war is officially over," Joe wrote. "What it means to us I don't know. Now one seems to know what to do with us now that we are here. We were needed here like a hole in the head at this time. But we are here now and it's a cinch that we aren't going to get home too soon."

Soon thereafter a massive and devastating typhoon hit Okinawa on October 7, 1945. "It got so strong," he wrote to Ann, "that we were wiped out but completely. It was so strong that the only thing we could do was get into the native burial tombs...You remember in some of the Dotty Lamour films they pictured typhoons. Well they were mild compared to this baby. It tore down every tent and building we had." They eventually rebuilt the camp,



In a letter to his wife, tJoe compared the typhoon that slammed Okinawa in 1945 to the 1937 Dorothy Lamour film The Hurricane, set in the South Seas, that he and Ann had

seen before the war.

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- 6

Thursday - 1 Oct China.

They pear Darling Balry - Some You I this is the first chance I have had to write since Sourday night. As you know in the lost few letters I wrote you I told you that a storm had been coming up for the last few days and was bearded streight for not. It struck us let Senday night in a mild form and kept on going until monday when it nelly picked up. It got so strong that by houday night we were woped out but complitely. It was so alrong that but complitely. It was so alrong that the only thing son could also was get enter the matin buried tombs: Its a good thing that the patines built this type of tout that we could get into otherwise we would have lost a few men besides our stuff.

Opposite page: Joe and Ann Ashkin, 1945, reunited following the end of World War II.



Right: Ann with Steve Ashkin, born on August 13, 1945 while Joe was in Okinawa.

they got was about zero but they get steak and ice cream twice a day and all they can eat. With that kind of treatment they won't take long to come back to normal again." Joe and his company were in a temporary holding pattern taking care of the internees. "On the 15th of this month [September], we are supposed to pull out and go to Korea to take care of the American prisoners there."

News from home was usually a time of great joy for the soldiers stationed half way around the world from their families. That's how Joe learned about the birth of his second son, Steven. Although his brother Dave had sent a telegram to Joe to tell him that his son Steven had been born on August 13th, 1945, Joe never received it. "The first word that I got about the baby was in a letter Anna wrote to me on the day the kid was born," he wrote to his brother Dave. Ann had written to him and told him how well Dave and Dotty had taken care of Michael after she had given birth, and how they had taken care

of everything at the hospital including the briss that cost a lot more than she had expected. Joe was relieved—and homesick. "Give my regards to everyone, including fat <code>[cousin]</code> Darby and his cigar." Back home, Michael was growing up and remembered seeing his mother wave to him from the window of her hospital room where she was recovering after the birth.

Joe was about to be shipped to Korea to take care of more released American prisoners when he was called into his commanding officer's tent with some unexpected news. His brother Dave had some trouble with their business, and was sent to prison for three months. Therefore Joe was needed immediately to keep the important medical business running, so they sent him home. "I didn't know when he was coming home," Ann recalled, "and someone rang the door and there he was. I almost fainted... It was pure joy, pure joy." He saw Steven for the first time. "He didn't cry, but he looked like he was going to."





During Operation Vent Printanier, July 1942, the French police arrested and imprisoned nearly 13,000 Jewish men, women and children.





Bension and Peissa Jablonski.

teaching. Foreign-born Jewish families were particularly hard-hit, and quickly grew destitute. "My own grand-father on the maternal side," said Alain Jablonski, "was a shoemaker going from house to house with a piece of leather, a hammer and three nails to fix shoes. And they took this from him … they were starving."

The French state confiscated Jewish-owned property and forced Jewish residents to wear a yellow Star of David on their clothing. "Traveling in the last metro car wasn't too bad," Alain's mother Germaine Akierman Jablonski recalled, "but we were banned from the cinema, and the library, and the playground. We had few options. We were starving." And then events took an even darker turn.

It was codenamed Operation Vent Printanier ("Spring Breeze"). On July 16 and 17, 1942, some 6,000 French police – acting in full cooperation with Nazi Germany – rounded up over 13,000 immigrant Jewish men, women and their children living in Paris and its suburbs. Their capture and imprisonment in the Velodrome d'Hiver cycling stadium (now known as the "Vel"

Jews arrested in France, 1942.



d'Hiv") took the Jewish community by complete surprise. While some men had already been arrested and others went into hiding, no one dreamed that their women and children would be rounded-up and imprisoned as well. Conditions inside the stadium were appalling, with no toilets and little food and water given to the prisoners in the extreme summer heat. Some understood what fate had in store for them and plunged to their deaths over the stadium railings.

After several horrible, dehumanizing days, the
French police packed the prisoners onto city buses and
took them to internment camps in France. The next stop

was the death camps in Poland. Between 1941 and 1944, French authorities deported 76,000 Jews to those camps where children and most adults were brutally murdered by the SS in gas chambers upon their arrival. The others were forced into slave labor.

Mary's father, 77-year old Bension Jablonski, was arrested and held for a month at the Rothschild Hospital that had been converted to a prison for Jewish detainees. He was then locked inside a cattle car with other prisoners on a train bound for Auschwitz. He never returned. Mary's brother Eleazar and his family were hiding from the French police, but one day he and his son Maurice were captured in Neuvy-Saint-Sepulchre in Indre, France. The police told Eleazar to get his things, that they had selected him for arrest and detention. But 19-year old Maurice stepped forward to take his father's place. Eleazar had a cleft palette, and could not speak clearly so the police agreed to let him take his father's place. They took Maurice to a detention center in Nexon, where he would soon begin a surreal journey through five different concentration camps.

Even though Maurice had taken his father's place, Eleazar was arrested in May of 1941 and sent to Beaune la Rolande near Orleans, a French-administered detention and work camp with deplorable conditions. His children would take the train there to try and bring him food. His 13 year-old son Joseph remembers taking him a loaf of bread, and circling the camp yelling, "Jablonski, Montreuil! Jablonski, Montreuil!" until they finally found him behind the barbed wire fence and threw the food over to him. He remained there many months, alternating between periods of work in the fields and furloughs back to Paris where life was growing harsher and harsher for the city's Jewish population. Finally, he escaped to Paris the day after Beaune la Rolande was closed and all of its inmates shipped to Auschwitz via Drancy. The French authorities then ordered Eleazar to live in the Vichycontrolled village of Neuvy-St-Sepulchre near Chateauroux where 15 other Jewish families had been placed. Summoned many times to the gendarmarie, some of the friendlier police showed him a way to escape out the back



Above: Camp de Beaune la Roland, France, December 8, 1941. Eleazare Jablonski (Mary Speckman's father) is on the first row wearing the scarf (third from right).

1944

Below: The Soviets liberated the Majdanek extermination camp in Lublin, Poland on July 23, 1944. The first camp freed by the Allied forces, Majdanek was a center for processing clothing taken from the Jews from different camps. The Russians found 800,000 pairs of shoes in the camp, many of which are on display at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



Left: Mary Jablonski's cousins Marie (left) and Dora Wajnbuch (right) wore the yellow star in France during the summer of 1941.

They were arrested at Chalon-sur-Saone while attempting to cross the demarcation line that separated Vichy controlled France from the free zone of France. Marie was deported on August 26, 1942 on Convoy No. 24 from Drancy. Her sister Dora was deported September 21, 1942 and sent from Pithiveirs to Auschwitz. They never returned.



of the building. But one day his son Maurice went with him and was captured. Eleazar remained in that same village, and his son Joseph and sister Ida managed to join him there in the spring of 1942. He tried desperately to bring his wife Elka and two other daughters to the village. Regine and Pauline, who were about five and six, managed to escape through the southern zone with the aid of the Red Cross. But Elka suffered a very different fate. She was caught trespassing over the line of demarcation of France, which separated the occupied and the nonoccupied zones. She refused to wear the star of David, and was stopped and arrested, sentenced to three months in jail in Tours (about 150 miles south of Paris). But she never completed her sentence. The German authorities shipped Elka on Convoy 8 to Aushwitz on June 22, 1942. She never returned.

Today Maurice Jablonski is the sole survivor of Convoy 51, which carried him from the French detention center of Drancy to the death camp of Sobibor in Poland. When his train pulled onto the platform, a guard said in German, "We need some young people who are strong and can lift railroad tracks and work with the tracks," Maurice recalled. "We stood on the side... and went back in the train and got sent to Majdanek with 50 to 70 other men who were selected." The rest of his companions who remained behind were killed immediately upon arrival at Sobibor. No one knows what miracle saved him.

In March of 1942 Maurice arrived in Majdanek – one of the largest Nazi extermination and work camps. He was shaved, showered, tattooed with the number 129,348, and given a striped uniform with the Star of David on it. He was sent to work in the fields, picking potatoes. "Every day, to scare us ... in the middle of the field ... there were two hanged men," Maurice recalled on a trip back to the camp a few years ago (ask Alain what year). "We didn't know why... Horrible things happened at night; people were screaming. Every night." He was lucky to be born an optimist. "I did everything to try to get out of it alive," said Maurice. "I stole. Once, I stole the dog's bowl... Anything to survive... And I don't think I was afraid ... And I was

trying to avoid getting myself killed, in these work camps. If you did anything that was not to their liking, at night, you were selected for eternity." One prisoner was shot in front of him because he wore glasses. The Nazis' plan in Majdanek? "If you didn't serve them well enough," Maurice explained, "they thought they would exterminate us little by little."

The Germans sent half a million prisoners to this camp. Nearly 360,000 died there. By the time the Soviets liberated the camp in July 1944, only a few hundred people remained alive. W.H. Lawrence, a reporter from the New York Times, visited Majdanek a few weeks after the Russians liberated it, in August 1944. "I have just seen the most terrible place on the face of the earth—the German concentration camp in Maidanek, which was a veritable River Rouge for the production of death," he wrote.

Auschwitz was his next stop. Little did Maurice know that his mother had perished there before his arrival. "We looked to see what we could grab as fast as possible before we got hit and had nothing," he said. "If we were too long to swallow our soup or anything, 'Raus, raus,' and they hit us." Then one day the guards asked who wanted to work in the coal mines. "I volunteered, since I wanted to leave," said Maurice. "I was the only one. Then they picked up other young guys like me. They put us all together and we all left for Jaworzno, the coal mines." He left Aushwitz-Birkenau in September 1943 and worked in the mines. "You had to be lucky to get out of there," he recalled. "We had problems to breathe. All the civilians coming from somewhere else wore masks, something to protect them against coal dust that constantly fell on us. But we had to swallow it. It wasn't easy. It was very difficult."

After Jaworzno, he was then taken to another work camp called Blechhammer. "In the middle of the night, on January 5, 1945, the Russians were approaching, we were picked up from everywhere and we walked all the way to Blechhammer...most of the people didn't make it after a few days. Very few arrived in Blechhammer. [death march] At one point over there the Germans had a problem, since the Russians were close. I managed to escape and take







The Allied landing at Normandy, France, on D-Day, June 6, 1944.

refuge in Russia. And I came back through Odessa ... I was the only one who busted the door where the food was kept, and followed a Russian or two—that's me. He [the Russian] got scared when we arrived because they were shooting at us from above with machine guns. I did not even turn back. I looked in the mirror, I was so hungry, and I succeeded in breaking the door and brought whatever I could to my friends." He was finally free and made his way home through Odessa.

View of the unloading

("Gate of Death") to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The Auschwitz complex was the Germans' largest and included a concentration, extermination and forcedlabor camp, located 37 miles west of Krakow,

Poland.

ramp and the main gate

His sister-in-law, Germaine Akierman Jablonski, also survived the horrors of the camps. During the Val d'hiv Germaine, her sister and mother were detained but released, and hid in fear for the next two years. While they managed to avoid capture, Germaine was arrested and sent to the detention center of Drancy on July 6, 1944, one month after D-Day when 150,000 Allied troops landed at Normandy. Her neighbor, Mr. Blumenthal, had paid the police not to take him or his children, and turned Germaine in to the authorities.

On July 31, 1944 she was packed onto Convoy 77 onto a train car marked "horses," then sent on a four-day journey to the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp in Poland with 1,300 others. There was a large barrel inside of her train car that all the prisoners used as the toilet. Germaine had a sheet inside of her suitcase and hung it up in front so they could have some privacy. "It was horrible," she recalled.

Convoy 77 pulled in next to the platform in the cover of night, with spotlights that blinded them as they left the train and crossed a large ramp. She remembers "the lights, the noises, the dogs...Screams of people being separated." She saw Dr. Mengele in his uniform at the end of the platform carrying his little cane, inspecting and selecting new arrivals for either the gas chamber or for work. Known as "der weise Engel" (The White Angel), Mengele wore a white medical coat at Birkenau and conducted monstrous experiments on the prisoners he personally selected. Once inside the camp the guards ordered all detainees to undress, whipped them and then shaved their heads. They

shaved Germaine's long blonde hair and tattooed her with the number A16659. "It was the beginning of the end," said Germaine. Daily they would strip the prisoners and then make further selections. "They tried everything to dehumanize us worse than animals," Germaine recalled. "There were hangings, always with music. Violinists played." When they asked what happened to their friends who were taken away, the older prisoners showed them the chimneys. "Here they are," they said.

As Germany's military and economic might deteriorated during the final years of the war, Jewish prisoners from Auschwitz and other camps were sent to industrial and munitions plants. "In Birkenau, we heard about the liberation of Paris," "... but we were too scared to celebrate."

In November of 1944, Germaine was shipped by cattle car to the new Kratzau labor camp in Czeckoslavakia, some 50 miles from Prague. It was a satellite of the enormous new Gross-Rosen forced-labor concentration camp network known as "the new Auschwitz," which would grow to hold some 60,000 Jews and other nationalities. Kratzau housed about 1,000 women who were forced to march to a munitions factory a few miles each way during the harsh winter. Living and working conditions were grim. Hunger was a permanent reality. Many starved to death or died from exhaustion, but Germaine was strong enough to walk to the munitions factory through the snow in sandals wrapped in paper. Historians have claimed that, "Women and girls displayed stunning survival power in the camps. The women's psychological strength, combined with their resourcefulness and ability to improvise, enhanced their endurance to such an extent that it often surpassed the physical strength of the men." After working several months in the munitions factory helping to make ammunition and grenades, Germaine was put to work in the kitchens, where, once again, she met Dr. Mengele just a few days before the war ended.

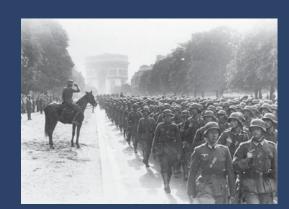
The Germans were growing increasingly vengeful and cruel as their defeat was drawing near. They mined the concentration camps and intended to blow up the prisoners inside, but the Czech partisans were monitoring

- (3



Above: Bension and Pessia Jablonski and their children, c. 1920)

Opposite: Paris occupied by Nazi troops, June 14, 1940, with Champs Elysee in the background.



NEVER AGAIN

Joseph Ashkin returned home safely from the war, but Mary Jablonski Speckman's family in France suffered a very different fate. While she and her sister Sarah had sought refuge in America, the rest of their family immigrated to France in the mid-1920s. During the interwar years, France was widely viewed as a land of equality and opportunity that welcomed immigrants. Bension and Frida Peissa Jablonski and their children lived in a tenement in the town of Montreuil on the east side of Paris, which was evolving into a thriving center of Jewish cultural life. While the Jablonski children were planning to immigrate to America where Mary and Sarah had made their home, they found jobs making clothing in their family's small two-room apartment in Montreuil. They decided to remain in France.

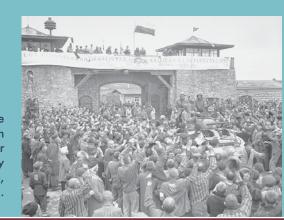
But dark clouds were gathering over Europe. Anti-Semitism was on the rise, fueled by the Nazi war machine. When Germany defeated and occupied France in June 1940, new national policies began to exclude Jews from public life, dismiss them from military and civil service, and bar them from occupations in industry, commerce, law, medicine and



Above: Five-sided badge issued to prisoners of the Kratzau-Chrastava labor camp, a satellite camp of Gross Rosen.

Right: Survivors of the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria cheer American soldiers as they enter the main gate, May 9, 1945.







their movements and dismantled the mines the Germans were planting. While there was talk of freedom in the air, few of the prisoners believed they would live to see liberation day. As the end was drawing near, a German woman working in the kitchen said to Germaine, "'In time, everything is forgotten." Germaine looked at her and replied, "Never. Never."

Then came the day the prisoners hardly dared to imagine. "On May 8th, we woke up in the morning, and there was no German on the watchtower. No one. So there were screams of joy," said Germaine. Nazi Germany had surrendered unconditionally. Czech partisans freed her and the 1,000 other women in Kratzau and the other camps in the region, which were among the last to be liberated. She could hardly believe it was true. "It was the end of the war," she said. "They were evacuating all the camps. Everyone was fleeing the Russians. The last pocket <code>[of resistance]</code> was the S.S. in Prague who fought after May 8th. They got exterminated."

It would be a long journey home to France. She was told to head for Odessa. She and her two friends walked miles and miles, stopping at farms along the way, but soon learned the city was plagued by a typhus epidemic and no food was to be found. They eventually made their way to the American zone in Karlsbad. She didn't even know where to find her parents and siblings, Bernard and Jeannette. She had no idea if they were even alive. On June 6th, 1945 the Americans sent her by plane to Paris where she moved from shelter to shelter and searched for her family.

She remembers when she first saw her mother and father. Her mother "had become much older in one year." Her hair had turned white. Her brother fainted when he first saw her, and fell to the floor. So many people were there, asking, "'Why are you here?'" Out of the 1,300 people on Convoy 77, only 180 came back. "It seemed surreal," said Germaine.

The Nazis and their collaborators had systematically and deliberately exterminated six million Jewish men, women and children. British Prime Minister Winston current Family img tk

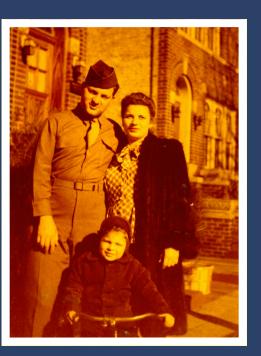
Churchill called the killing of two out of every three European Jews a "crime that has no name." In 1948 the state of Israel was established and the United Nations adopted The Genocide Convention to pledge that the horrors of the Holocaust would never happen again. At the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris, Germaine's son Alain Jablonski stood in front of the enormous granite wall of the "Righteous Among the Righteous." Inside are the names of 76,000 Jewish men, women and children deported from France between 1941 and 1944. He pointed at the names of his mother, his uncle Maurice, his grandmother and grandfather, Eleazar and Elka, and his great-grandfather, Bension. "Never again," said Alain.



Above: Joe and Ann Ashkin (left) and Dave and Dotty Ashkin (right), 1946.

Opposite: Joe, Ann and Michael Ashkin in Brooklyn, 1945.

Chapter 8



DARBY DRUG COMPANY: REINVENTION THROUGH DIRECT MAIL

hen Joe Ashkin returned home from Okinawa, Bio-Intrasol was in trouble. With his brother Dave finishing up a three-month prison term, there was no one at the helm of the organization. "It was tough," Joe's wife Ann recalled. "He had a lot to learn, a lot to do. Never complained. He loved working. He loved it. Well, compared to the Army, anything was better than that. And there was no one to tell him what to do but his brother." Dave and Joe needed a cash infusion to their operations, and took in a new partner, Sid Golden ("Goldie").

Joe hit the road again to drum up business, visiting medical supply houses and dealers throughout the country, traveling by train three days a week. He returned home with orders and helped run the manufacturing operations, but it was clear that sales of the Company's line of injectable pharmaceuticals were sagging. There had to be a better way. After all, the Second World War had triggered a sea change in the pharmaceutical industry, ushering in five new major



categories of drugs: vitamins, corticosteroids and sex hormones, sulfonamides, antihistamines and antibiotics. This was a period of remarkable advancement in medicine, a time when demand was skyrocketing for amazing new medications to treat a variety of serious illnesses. As large new markets for these revolutionary drugs were rapidly unfolding, Joe was determined to find a way to ride this unprecedented wave of industry expansion. But unlike Big Pharma, the generic industry was still in its infancy, producing a limited number of FDA-grandfathered drugs such as Aspirin, Prednisone, Prednisolone, Rawolfia, and Phenylpropanolamine Hydrochloride as well as other old time remedies. All of the existing patents had expired. However, with all the new patented, brand name products coming on the market in the early 60s, the generic industry would begin to undergo a radical transformation in the years to come when these new patents would start to expire.

Joe had recently created a medical mail-order catalogue to doctors for Henry Schein, Inc. Although Schein had agreed to continue to buy the line of products that Bio-Intrasol manufactured in exchange for having Joe develop their catalogue, which did not turn out to be the case. Henry Schein began to purchase products from Hanna Schector's company, Bell-Mar Laboratories,

instead of Bio-Intrasol. Therefore Joe made a bold decision and decided to reinvent his business model and move into the direct mail business by creating his own mail-order catalogue for doctors. To serve doctors through direct mail, he incorporated Darby Drug Company in 1947, naming it after his fat, cigar-smoking "crazy cousin whose name was Darby," said Ann. "Everyone called him the judge, and he would make us laugh all the time." Because he was a lucky and wealthy man, a judge who lived on Long Island, Joe figured it might bring him luck in his new direct mail business to name his new company after him. He would soon prove to be right.

Through Darby Drug, Joe began to sell brand name and generic pharmaceuticals and sundry medical products directly to doctors through a one-page folded sheet of paper that looked more like a road map than a catalogue. Joe put lead items on the front of the sheet to draw interest. At this point in time, doctors were like pharmacies and





could dispense and sell many common Rx medications directly to their patients to help boost their profits. Darby ordered injectable pharmaceuticals, tablets and capsules, from various suppliers (including Bel-Mar), and provided doctors with a cost-effective and convenient process for building their office inventory and increasing their profitability. "We were trying to be the 'Doctors' low cost provider of all their Office needs," Joe's son Michael recalled.

But this new direction in the business did not sit so well with Joe's brother Dave. "He had a catalogue made," says Ann, "but [his brother] Dave wanted nothing to do with this. He did his own thing with this –going into the mail order pharmaceutical business," said Ann. One of Joe

and Ann's best friends, Duddy Stuart, remembered that rift well. "That was part of the wedge that came between them," Duddy explained, one that would continue to build as Darby Drug Company became more and more successful.

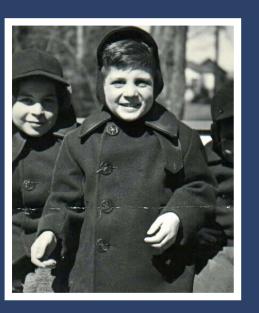
Above: Family gathering, 1948. Ann and Joe Ashkin, far left. Dave and Dotty Askhin, fourth and fifth from right.

Opposite Left: Sid Golden joined Joe and Dave Ashkin as a partner at Bio-Intrasol following Joe's return from Okinawa.

Opposite Right: Steve (left) and Michael Ashkin, 1946.



Chapter 9



THE MOVE TO LAURELTON

ith the greatest economic boom in U.S. history following on the heels of the Second World War, Americans felt a profound and palpable new sense of optimism. "We live in an era of revolution," Adlai Stevenson wrote, "the revolution of rising expectations." With government-sanctioned cheap money and low down payments, Americans flocked to the beckoning suburbs to buy their first home through the Veterans Administration and Federal Housing Administration mortgages. In 1948 Joe and Ann's landlord in Bensonhurst kicked them out with one week's notice. But Joe was a risk-taker, an entrepreneur at heart, and seized the opportunity to make the American dream a reality for his family. He and Ann found a small, picture-perfect new home at 121-15 235th Street, Laurelton, located at the end of Queens and the beginning of Long Island. "We saw a house there for \$15,000, which was a tremendous amount of money at that time, but I liked the house," said Ann. "We bought the house very concerned about whether we could carry it. Joe couldn't let go of being poor when he grew up. He couldn't handle the fact that we owed money," Ann explained. "We had to pay the house off. We paid the mortgage in two to three years."



Above: Ann Ashkin at her new home in Laurelton, Queens, 1950.

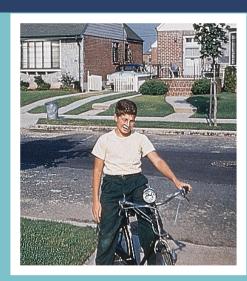
Opposite: Mike and Steve Ashkin in Laurelton, 1950.



Joe and Ann Ashkin's new home in Laurelton, Queens.

1948

Mike Ashkin with his new Schwinn bike in front of his home in Laurelton, 1948.





1951

Ann and Joe Ashkin with their son Steve at Camp Ramiquis, 1951.



The Ashkins' friends Mimi and Duddy Stuart at the Ashkins' home in Laurelton.

"I knew things were really difficult," Michael recalled,
"and I think they reached. I mean, my mother would cook
dinner every night, and it became a joke of how many different ways can you make meat loaf. We weren't traveling
anyplace, we weren't doing anything luxurious ... we didn't
have a lot of clothes in our closets. We weren't living like
poor people, because there were a lot of people that were
far worse off than we were. But we weren't living a luxurious lifestyle: it was difficult."

Michael was in the first grade when they moved into their new home, and remembers a pansy flower farm in the backyard, and long rides with his new friends on his new blue Schwinn bicycle. He and his parents made lifelong friends in that neighborhood. "It was a very, very happy place. The houses were never locked, they were open and people would just wander in and out," said Ann. "That was the greatest part of our lives," Michael concurred. "It was like having neighbors where every mother and father on the block was your mother and father. If you were told to get a sweater, you did it as if your mother had told you

to do it. It was good times."

It was also one of the darkest times. Joe worked maniacally day and night, and was prone to fits of rage on the road and in the office. "He was not afraid of getting literally in a fistfight," said Jerry Rabkin, who joined Bio-Intrasol in 1948. "And a couple of times I broke it up." Ann remembers Joe coming home from work "a wild man" in those early years after he had launched the new business. "He was abusive," Michael explained, "both physically and mentally."

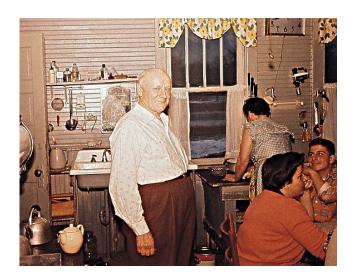
Michael remembers sleeping under his bed at night in Laurelton out of fear of his father. One time, in a fit of anger, Joe flipped over the kitchen table during dinner, grabbed Michael by the throat and held him up against the refrigerator with his feet dangling in the air. "I had to kick him in the stomach with my knee," said Michael. "And he let me go." Michael ran out of the house. "He picked up a baseball bat, chased me down the street. Couldn't catch me. Got in his car and tried to run me over. But I ran up on a neighbor's porch … He rode across

the lawn, ripped the bushes out of the lawn and put one wheel up ... until my friend's father came out, Jack Rifkin, the father of my friend, Steve, came out and said, 'Joe, what are you doing?' And my father was embarrassed. He realized he had lost it."

There were other challenges as well. Joe and Ann's son Steven was a weak, sickly and introverted child since birth. He contracted spinal meningitis when he was a small boy. "I was sure we were going to lose him," Ann said. Steven started to slip into a coma, so Ann began to bang pots and pans together to try to keep him awake. She called the doctor and Joe, and they raced to the hospital and stayed by his side until the doctors sent them home.

Later that night, their friend Duddy came to the hospital dressed like a doctor so he could get in past visiting hours. He sat beside Steven and read to him all night so he could hear a friendly voice. "He would do anything for us. And our friends were that way—all of them," said Ann. Penicillin was still scarce after the war, but Joe managed to get some for Steven that helped him win the long and

difficult battle against meningitis. "He was an invalid for a long time. He had a hard life," she said.



Abe Sobel married Mary Jablonski Speckman after her first husband's death. They opened up the Sobel Star Hotel in the Catskills, and the Ashkins spent many an enjoyable summer there. Mike also got a job as a waiter there. Standing, left to right: Abe Sobel, Mary Sobel. Seated: Ann and Mike Ashkin.

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