

- Soviets deported parents from Poland, first to Siberia, then to Samarkand.

Life in Samarkand was hard. Food was scarce, living conditions appalling. My father's mother died three weeks after I was born. My mother contracted typhus some time later and sent me to another family to be cared for while she was hospitalized. When she came to take me home six months later, I did not recognize her. As I did with any stranger upon meeting them, I begged her for food.

After the war ended, we traveled through Poland, often by foot, searching for surviving relatives. The Nazis had killed my mother's parents and five of her siblings, but her sisters Cela and Itka, as well as Itka's husband, survived. In my father's case, there was no one—not his five sisters and half-sisters, not an aunt or uncle, not even a distant cousin or an acquaintance. No one he knew before the war survived.

We spent four years living in Displaced Persons (DP) camps, with my father scavenging for food and my brother Marty, who was born in a camp in 1946, constantly ill. One of my few happy memories is of my fourth or fifth birthday when I received my first present—a bar of soap.

In June 1950, when I was six, we were finally able to immigrate to the U.S. The former troopship was crammed with refugees, and everyone was seasick all the time. My father, accustomed to surviving by paying bribes, had me wear two Swiss watches on my upper arms, hidden under my shirtsleeves. He feared that if they were found, they would be seized. I was terrified that my smuggling would be discovered that I would be punished, and the watches would be confiscated.

My family was very poor, but we had enough food to live on and a small apartment in the Bronx. I went to a yeshiva nearby where I spent mornings devoted to religious studies in Yiddish and afternoons on secular studies in English. While I spoke Yiddish and German, and a little Russian, I knew no English. I learned quickly. As the first in my family to learn English, I helped my parents travel on the New York City subway and get through their evening language and citizenship classes, and I filled out forms from the government and other organizations for my family. Often the forms contained a question about the country of citizenship. Our response was "stateless." This term, stateless, evoked such a sense of not belonging that it still stirs up feelings of anxiety. Growing up in America, I often felt like an awkward outsider. My clothes seemed wrong, my manners unpolished. In many ways, I was a displaced person once again.

I have been extraordinarily fortunate in my career as an attorney and in my family. I have been married for fifty years to Elisabeth Gitter,\* a professor of English; we have two children and three grandchildren; all live within a half-hour of our apartment in Manhattan. But even now, I haven't fully come to terms with my journey from Samarkand to Ellis Island and growing up as an immigrant. Being "stateless" has had

a lasting impact on me, even though I became a naturalized American citizen over sixty years ago. Achieving citizenship does not necessarily erase all vestiges of statelessness.

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