

Dec 2-1946

Dear Sue

You can keep this with  
your "Family Tree"  
Love  
Dad.

I would have mailed this sooner,  
but waited until you had moved

#  
to 3098.

Letter from

Milton Westheimer  
to

Sue Ransohoff

11/25/48

If here to stand, then stand we here  
Till hell shall freeze; and know no fear.  
Or if we fear, yet here we stand!  
This is our own, our native land.

From time to time I have tried to write a sort of family biography, to be supplemental to the Family Tree which I compiled in 1925; not that the annals of our family offer any dramatic incidents, nor were there any members who contributed in outstanding manner to the history of our country; but rather to preserve for its future generations the data of a family taking its roots in an immigrant lad of 19; I think I am proud of its members, all contributing respected citizens - making up the pattern of part of the bulk of this "melting pot" of the U.S.A.

When Father arrived in New York, it was a city of 250,000; its northern boundary was 14th Street. The total population of the United States was about twenty million, and that year, 1844, Henry Clay was defeated for the third and last time, fortunately, in his selfish and unscrupulous bid for the Presidency. James Polk was elected.

Mother, too, was an immigrant, and the purpose of these lines will be to depict the influence of my parents' character and example, on a family of their eight sons who grew up to manhood, and on their grandchildren too. They had ten children; one boy died in youth through an accident; the only daughter died in infancy.

Father came to this country in 1844, just 102 years ago. He was born in 1825, May 30th - an easily remembered date, as it is Memorial Day in the United States.

So in 1844, a 19 year old lad, Ferdinand Westheimer, left his home village in Germany, Rimbach, and took ship for the promised land, America. Rimbach, in Odenwald, Hessen Darmstadt, a village about twenty miles from Frankfort am Main. His parents were Leser Westheimer and Bessel Kahn; the family tree is attached to these notes; it is noteworthy that his father was in youth known as Leser-Jacob (Leser, son of Jacob); up to 1787 Jews in Germany had in general no family names, so Leser's father, Jacob, had no family name at all, but Jacob, on attaining his majority, took the name of Westheimer. Why this choice? I don't know; probably that of a Gentile patron of the family.

With father, there emigrated his older brother, David, and his younger brother, Samuel. Father was the fifth of a family of six - five boys, one girl.

I have a dim recollection of hearing that the vessel on which they embarked took three months in crossing; this seems improbable for if it had taken only half that time, the supply of food and water (drinking water) must have been a severe problem; 1844 was a big year for Germans to emigrate to the United States.

How did he and his brothers, Samuel and David, earn their living? I wish I had asked more about this; Father peddled merchandise in the country around New York - that I know. It was not un-

farmer to entrust him with a commission and funds - to buy an important article - a dress or jewelry - a wedding present for an engaged daughter, etc. - and have him bring it out on his next trip. In this he was undoubtedly successful. He bought a horse and wagon; I have seen a daguerreotype of him, the horse and wagon, and a Spitz dog. The farmers welcomed these itinerant merchants; as they were usually Jews, a separate set of cooking dishes was provided to meet their wishes. When Father left a farm he would mark the pan or skillet  $\Sigma$  ("clean") for the next itinerant "merchant".

Mother's parents, Meyer and Ella (Baer) Flarsheim and their seven children came to the U.S.A. in 1848 (see Flarsheim Family Tree); Mother was the youngest, about six years old. I remember her mother, but only as a sweet thin lady, dressed in a stiff black silk dress with a wide silk belt. As a child, I used to get five cents worth of beer for her in a little tin bucket. This was in St. Joseph, Missouri, when we were still living down on Jule St., next to the "crick". She died on Rosh Hashannah or Pesach - that is, she passed away in sleep, dressed in that stiff black silk dress, ready for the Jewish holiday services.

I wish I had inquired as to how and when Father and Mother met - the details of their courtship, engagement, marriage. They lived together 52 years - were married January 9, 1861; Father died January 9, 1913. Mother died December 18th of that same year; she really died when Father passed away. For hours, day after day, she would sit, nodding her head, nodding, nodding. Not much emotional mourning, just passing in her mind the years, I guess, in which she had borne him ten children - nine boys, one girl. How she must have grieved for little Ida, her sole daughter, denied to her as she had died in infancy.

Any story of our family should be based on St. Joe - St. Joseph, Missouri, U.S.A. Although I have lived more years of my life in Baltimore, still ole St. Joe is the starting point. I was born there, on Jule St., in 1872, January 31st. St. Joseph, Missouri - here Father came in 1859, later on his brother Samuel - two bachelors; a third brother, David, went to Baltimore. If you are interested in tracing lives, just turn to the Family Tree at the beginning of this brochure.

When Father came to St. Joseph - as I hear the story - he "clocked" the two main farmer arteries to the town; 6th Street, and Frederick Avenue, and chose the latter for a store. Whether soon as built, or later, he hired a painter to inscribe on the wall facing up Frederick Avenue -

Cash  
Paid for  
Produce

The story runs that he painted only the oval and the centerline, and then went on the traditional painter's drunk, leaving the world to know that the building was "Paid for".

To fill the shelves of a General Merchandise store was beyond their resources, until they thought of an inexpensive but space-filling article - so the top shelves held wash tubs. Later, when the Union forces

swept through the town, and again later, the Southern troops - each absorbed most of the merchandise, but neither had any use for the tubs.

On the lot adjoining that store, they started a house, and here Father brought his bride, our mother, in 1861. In this house were born nine of their ten children -- Irvin, the youngest, was born in Newark, N. J. These children were nine boys, one girl. Ida died in infancy; Isadore when nearly 14 years old, of an accident. Eight sons grew to maturity, married and had children; Morris died in 1927--it doesn't seem that long ago--so that now, as I write this near my 75th birthdate, seven sons and their wives are living, all with offspring. Eugene is 85 - Irvin 67 - that is the span of the children.

Whether it is that mothers with many children lead happier, more serene lives, or whether the serene are likely to have larger families, I don't know. I wish I could depict here the unruffled background of our home. Of course there were scuffles among us boys, and debates and arguments galore, but there was Father reading, with an occasional "Kinder" of admonition, if too much noise; Mother would keep reading, or knitting, or mending, however, with her calm smile of understanding never seeming to fade.

There was a rather marvelous community of understanding between them; I can't fathom it, unless it was an evidence of unalterable love. Only once did I see Mother cry, as well as I can recall it, and that was at table--she always sat at Father's right--it must have been caused by some harsh word of one of us, some lack of appreciation. Maybe she had worked diligently to make the meal a happy one, and some one of us, unthinking, or rudely criticized the food, or a napkin, or what not. It was soon over. I recall Father said not a word, just those deep eyes of compassion of his looked sadly outward, not at anyone in particular; Mother was not weeping aloud--and it must have passed without a word.

In fact, I can recall no time when either parent criticized a child in presence of the other, or of another child. Nor did we get much criticism, even in private. Mother had very firm principles of conduct for us, mostly directed to matters of courtesy, but they were couched in generalizations. Her religion was based on a Jewish credo; I have forgotten it, sad to say. But she did not base her precepts on Biblical texts, it seems to me--in fact, Mother was not bookish, tho' she must have done a lot of good reading, for her language, spoken and written, was clearly and cleanly worded; whether consciously or not, she seemed to choose the simpler Anglo-Saxon words and phrases, avoiding such as would distract attention to the word rather than the thought.

Getting back to religion, or precept--she did not use Biblical texts to impress right living, but employed all the resources of heart and mind to transmit her broad automatic integrity, so that acts should spring not only from honesty but from unthinking honor.

By precept, rather than preaching, our parents established habits of behavior in their children that seem to me to be carrying on to the 3rd generation. There was no holier than thou attitude in parent, and seldom in a brother.

I wish I could paint a picture of that 52 years of their life together. Words don't seem to lend themselves to it properly--not to me, at least--too clumsy to catch the spirit. Mother's smile had a sort of chuckle to it, as if she were about to chuckle audibly; Father's smile as Lincoln's--his eyes, too, had a world of sympathy, almost sadness, for a world needing friendship and understanding--all the while his lips and his eyes, too, were on the side of a smile.

Father was short, not over 5 ft. 5 inches, I make it; but he seemed taller, carried himself erect without any artificial posture. He was broad and sturdy. Someone (Morris) used the phrase "a barge of a man". Always well dressed, shoes always shined--I remember his admonishing us, or one of us, to always wear clean collar and well shined shoes. In following this, I have Leo as the exemplar--never a dandy, but never wearing a collar "half clean".

In a few weeks, January 31, 1945, I shall be 75 years old, so I am now looking down a vista of that length. My earliest recollection is 69 years ago, when I was 6 years old, for I recollect being sent to a sort of Kindergarten held in the building that used to be "the store", Father's store, facing on Frederick Avenue, next to our yard. Our house faced on Jule Street, just the opposite way. The house was brick--a double house--for Uncle Sam and family lived in the other half. His was a family of girls--seven girls and two boys, of whom one died, leaving seven girls, one boy.

St. Joseph was founded by--or at least named for--Joseph Rubidoux. His must have been a large family, for the lengthwise streets--those extending at right angles from the river--were named after his children--Felix Street, Faraon, Jule, etc., etc. The cross streets were numbered. When Father arrived there in 1859, there was not a mile of steel rail west of the river. St. Joe is right alongside the Missouri River--at this point about a mile wide. It is the "Big Muddy"--just keeps rollin' along--but eats big chunks out of the banks, so that the shore line changes materially.

The bridge across to the Kansas side was a toll bridge, and I have heard that Father was the author of the plan to have the Kansans pay their toll on egress on Missouri end, and vice versa; you figure its purpose. The original bridge was built in 1872--the year I was born. It was rebuilt in 1906 (after I had moved permanently to Baltimore, Md.). At the Kansas end was Elwood, a town of only about 700 population.

In stating the dates of the founding and population of St. Joseph, I am struck with the newness of the West. It was first a trading post, started by Joseph Rubidoux--a French half-breed--in 1826, one year later than my father was born. In 1943, only 16 years before my father went here, the town site was laid out and named St. Joseph.

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At this point of intended conclusion, I read the sheets to Helen, my dear wife and understanding critic; she thinks it is rather on the sentimental side. But as it was written essentially for family consumption, I am letting it stand "as is"; for I might have made

Father must have gone to a singing school, he used to sing,

" Come, let us learn to sing, rest, rest,  
Do, re, mi, fa, sol, la, si, do.  
Loud let our voices ring, rest, rest,  
Do, si, la, sol, fa, mi, re, do. "

and others -- he had a resonant, baritone voice.

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I would like to relate an interesting incident that none of you may know of:

You all know that for very many years Mother was President of the Hebrew Benevolent Society in St. Joseph. One cold, wintry evening, when we were visiting St. Joe, a poor man came in to see Mother, and she promptly took him to the kitchen for a hot meal, and then came back to where we were, in the little sitting room. She knew that I was at that time President of the Baltimore Benevolent Society, and asked me what our routine was for applicants. I told her that before paying any money, we instituted a rapid check-up (which seldom required more than half a day). She then said: "Milton, we have a similar method, with a small change. We never make a check-up until the man gets a good meal and \$2.00."

You all remember the night when a cyclone struck our house, when Father and Mother were out visiting. All the house blew down, except the original kitchen, so that when our parents came back, they found the entire family huddled there -- no-one injured. For the rest of that night, we all slept in Uncle Sam's house, which suffered no damage.

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In the early days, probably before I was born, Mother made Father's shirts -- the stiff bosom of bleached, and therefore whiter, and the body of unbleached muslin, which wore longer. I have photographs of all the children -- suits worn by Sidney and by me were made by her.

I am attaching hereto a letter Father wrote us on his 87th birthday.

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At this point, I realize that I have almost entirely omitted mention of the philanthropic attitude of our parents, but you all are aware of their continued activities in charities and very material donations, culminating in Father's will, by the terms of which about \$50,000.00 in legacies went to employees of the firms in which he or his children were interested and to household servants. This, as I remember it, was in addition to the list of charitable bequests.

*Milton*

C  
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St. Joseph, Mo., May 30th, 1912

Dear children:

By your untiring efforts, strict attention to business and deserved success, you have placed us your loving Parents in a position to have ample means to enjoy every comfort of life as long as we may be permitted to be with you. I have therefore concluded to discontinue participating in the division of our Profits in the Business and for you to divide in equal shares the entire profits of the Business.

I know, dear children that you do not need it and feel convinced you never will, but it is a source of pleasure to me to do this and to do it on my Birthday and request you to grant us the pleasure of accepting this as a Birthday present.

For several years I am sorry to say I have not been able to contribute anything to the management of our business which has been a source of grief to me and this act will I think allay this feeling when I know that you from this on reap the full benefit of your labor.

And now, dear children, although I will no longer be financially interested in our business I still feel a deep interest in the same and request you to please keep me posted from time to time of anything of importance in it.

Before closing this letter I desire to express the wish that your children may make your lives as happy as you each of you made ours.

Your loving

Father

I wish you continued success and happiness.

(Copy of a letter from Ferdinand Westheimer)  
(to his children, on his 87th birthday )