

QUOTH THE MANY U.S. JEWS AS POOR AS SYNAGOGUE MICE



BY BEVERLY KING POLLOCK

Expect You in Store

This is the time of year when youngsters look for summer jobs. I never had that problem. Summer, fall, winter and spring there always was a job waiting for me in my parents' grocery store.

From the time I could count change, I "stood in the store." I can't recall anything about hours or minimum wage; all I can remember is Mother or Daddy always said, "I'll expect you in the store at eight tomorrow morning."

Store hours were long. Usually until 9:30 at night. And although I didn't have to work all day, my emancipation came only with marriage and my father's proclamation that we would begin to close at 5:30 p.m. daily.

We lived down south in a small suburb, with the store nearby. We did a big phone business and groceries were delivered by a series of boys on bicycles.

Mother was the one who usually answered the phone. She knew all the prices by heart and could add up a column of figures quicker in her head than I could use the adding machine. And she was the confidante of all the customers.

Daddy was the chief "caterer." That is, he catered to the whims of all the customers. He trimmed a steak or roast just so. I always got a kick out of watching him cut meat with his left hand because he wrote with his right.

In our spare time Daddy would help me with my Latin or algebra over the meat counter. I could do an algebra problem perfectly in just four lines. Only thing is, I always got the wrong answers.

Daddy would work the same problem in two and a half pages, European style, but he got the right answer every time. I wonder what my teacher thought when she saw my homework assignments.

The store was small but we specialized in personalized service. My own downfall came from the open cookie bins. All that sampling! Cookies and fresh cherries were never a profitable item.

Though we were in primarily a white Anglo Saxon Protestant neighborhood, I never forgot I was Jewish. Mostly because my next-door neighbor always called me "Jew-baby."

But for the most part we were treated with dignity and respect accorded the neighborhood Jew.

Except one customer, a Mr. Hood sorta an-

NEW YORK--Although the median income level of Jews in the United States is above that of the general population, the proportion of people below the poverty level is as large among Jews as among other major religious and ethnic groups. This was reported by Mrs. Ann G. Wolfe, program consultant in the Intergroup Relations and Social Action Department of the American Jewish Committee, in a recent address to the Committee's Chicago Chapter.

Mrs. Wolfe explained that a University of Michigan study had shown that 42 per cent of Jewish families had incomes of \$7,500 or more, compared to only 19 per cent of the general population. However, she added, the National Opinion Research Survey on income showed that 15.3 per cent of Jewish households had incomes under \$3,000 per year,

compared to 15.6 per cent of Catholic households and 22.7 per cent Protestant. The figure for poverty among Protestants includes most of the black poor in the country.

Mrs. Wolfe estimated that 700,000 to 800,000 Jews in the United States subsist below the poverty level, of a total of somewhat over 5,000,000 American Jews.

In her analysis, Mrs. Wolfe explained that Jews "are like anybody else," and that the Jewish poor face the same hardships as do others in the population. Some of these include: 1. a certain proportion of individuals with physical disabilities; 2. emotional problems that militate against economic productivity; 3. limited education, which in turn results in reduction of economic opportunity, especially among the older generation and foreign born.

In addition, Mrs. Wolfe

continued, certain factors indigenous to the Jewish community itself make for poverty among Jews:

1. The average age level is higher among Jews than among others in the United States because of a lower birth rate among Jews and because there is a lower death rate of Jews at younger ages. "One out of 10 Jews is over the age of 65," Mrs. Wolfe said, and in addition, statistics on the 45-to-64 age group indicate "the Jewish population in the next decade will continue to have an increasing proportion of older people."

2. Problems of job and business discrimination still militate against Jewish economic advancement at certain levels of our society.

3. Certain segments of the Jewish population, such as the Chassidic Orthodox community largely centered in New York, have problems that stem from their own life-styles. For example, the Chassidim have "a built-in resistance to secular education, particularly at the high school and college levels. Few Chassidim have a college degree - an impediment to benefitting from the economic advantages which higher education normally bring."

In addition, Jewish religious education drains the resources of the Chassidic family. Another factor

in their relatively high poverty rate is Chassidic opposition to birth control, with resultant large families. "In Williamsburgh, in New York City, the median family size is 6.3 children, as opposed to the average Jewish family size of 2 children," Mrs. Wolfe reported. Williamsburgh is the site of the largest concentration of the Chassidic community, of whom there are 80,000 in New York. This group is the third largest poverty group in New York, Mrs. Wolfe pointed out.

Mrs. Wolfe cited Los Angeles, Miami, Philadelphia, and New York as cities in which surveys had indicated particular pockets of poverty among Jews. In Los Angeles, a 1969 study using materials from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services showed that 8,000 elderly Jews there receive public assistance and 18,306 indigent elderly Jews live in households with incomes of less than \$4,000 a year.

In Miami Beach, a study done in the South Beach community showed that "40,000 people were clustered in an area of some 30 square blocks. Of these, 80 per cent are over 65, and 85 percent are Jews. The average annual income is \$2,460; thousands are living on less than \$28 a week for rent and food."

In Philadelphia, a study by the Jewish Employment and Vocational Service showed that "about two-thirds of the persons coming for help with employment had incomes in the previous year below \$2,600... Unemployed Jews who came to this agency reflect the same problems that the poor of any group have," including emotional disabilities, physical handicaps, and limited education.

In New York, Mrs. Wolfe continued, a study by the Columbia University School of Public Health and Administrative Medicine showed that "10 per cent of the Jewish population is sustaining itself on \$3,000 a year or less."

(The American Jewish Year Book estimates the Jewish population of Greater New York as 2,381,000.) "For the foreign born Jews in New York City, this figure rises to 15.7 per cent, a figure fairly similar to the Puerto Rican community, where 16.3 per cent are living under \$3,000 per year."

noyed me. I couldn't quite figure why. He was perfectly polite in his conversations. He always spoke respectfully about "you Jewish people" and made constant references in conversation to the teachings of the "New Testament."

Yet he did aggravate me whenever he'd weigh his two pounds of string beans. He always added an extra ounce, casually. And I was too young to tell him that I'd hate to pay an ounce more for an ounce less.

One day Mr. Hood bought 68¢ worth of groceries and paid me with a dollar bill. As I turned around to make the change, from force of habit I rubbed the bill between my fingers and found it was two dollars stuck together. I hurried back to give Mr. Hood the change and the extra bill. He thanked me and my integrity profusely.

And I said to him, "I learned that in the Old Testament." Mr. Hood and I were good friends after that.

Today my own children are faced with the same kind of "problem" I had as a child. Summers they too work in their father's place of business. And as if it were the days of yore, our place too is open 'til 9:30 at night. (And we thought shopping centers were a new concept in merchandising!)

Now I know why somebody thought of that original slogan: "History repeats itself."

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