

My name is Motel Truss. I was born in Ukraine, Russia, in
May 17, 1910, in a small village from Kiev. My parents were
ordinary middle class people. My father was a teacher and a
soifer (the person who writes the Torah) and my mother was a
housewife. Our family consisted of four children, three girls
and one boy, of which I was the youngest. Soon after my birth,
our family moved to a small town Falesht in Bessarabia. The
Jewish population of Falesht were a few thousand. Under the
Tsar's regime, life for the Jews was unbearable. Jews were
usually forbidden to own land. They were forced to live in
certain areas. They lived by their wits. Most of the Jews
lived in Shtetles (hamlets).

In 1914, when the first war broke out, the Tsar sent thousands
and thousands of soldiers to dig trenches three kilometres from
Falesht to prevent the Romanian invasion. The war on the Russian
side was not going well.

In 1917, the Revolution broke out. The Jews in general felt
relaxed thinking that the situation for Jews would change for the
better since they supported the Revolution. When the Revolution
was in full swing, the soldiers, with the help of the Goyem
(Gentiles) were preparing a pogrom against the Jews. The centre
of the shtetles was a synagogue a block from my home. The soldiers
converted the synagogue to a barracks and they were stationed
there. Many soldiers were distributed between the Jewish homes.

The Jews started to organize a self-defense party with the help of a Romanian spy (a Jew). He helped to buy ammunition from the soldiers. We were told that the pogrom will start on a Friday night.

The Jewish self-defense group was ready by Friday. It was a winter night when the pogrom started. Two Jews were killed and one wounded and seventeen hooligans were killed. Our defence guard was very good - no more deaths on our side. One day the Romanian army came and occupied our town and we had to get accustomed to the regime. For one thing the pogrom stopped right away.

Years passed and the time came when I had to go into the army and I was the sole supporter of my family. I was allowed under Romanian law to serve five months each year for a period of five years rather than the usual two and a half years. I was a travelling sales representative for a garment manufacturer, I had a laundry business and I also owned a cinema with a partner. I was doing very well.

In 1938, I was still in the army when I received a mobilization paper to be ready to go to the front to fight. I knew that the Romanians were joining with the Germans. I discussed this with my wife and we decided that I had to desert and go away. That

was the only way we could save ourselves, but it was not going to be easy. I had to go to Bucharest to see a general medical doctor. I gave him a bribe of five thousand lei to certify that I was sick. He gave me a paper saying that I had tuberculosis and that it was necessary for me to go to Paris for one year to improve my health. I could not tell him that I wanted to go away for good. I wanted to go to Trinidad. Anyway, I had very little time to put together a few thousand lei and I went to Chernovitz to buy a ticket on a German boat, "The Kardileria", which was leaving for Trinidad via Paris. At the agency, was a Jewish fellow by the name of Lerner who was selling the tickets. I did not know how he found out that I was a deserter. He asked everyone before they were leaving to make a statement of how much money they had. I had over a thousand American dollars which I could not declare officially. I had over fifteen thousand lei which I declared and all the jewellery I had. Everybody left for Hamburg to take the ship to go to France. He kept me back and I got suspicious so I asked him: "Mr. Lerner, two days have passed and I am going to miss the ship going to France. What is it?" He told me that he has a family, a wife and four daughters and after this boat, there will be another German boat leaving and he wanted to save his family. I did not have a choice and I gave him the money. I then asked for a ticket to Trinidad which cost a hundred and fifty American dollars. He gave me the ticket and I asked him to please give me a receipt as I did not have confidence in him. He gave me the receipt. I missed the boat from

Hamburg. I had to go now by train to Poland and to Germany and then to Paris. When I arrived in Paris the following day, I went to an agency to confirm my ticket. It was not surprising that the ticket was not valid. It was a good thing that I had the receipt to prove that I had really paid. So they told me that they will let me know when the boat will be ready to leave for Trinidad. I contacted the agency daily to find out when the boat was leaving. On December 19, I went in the morning as usual to find out the departure date and they told me it was leaving the next day at eight o'clock in the morning. I paid my hotel bill, packed my valises and was ready to leave the next day. That night I went for a walk. It was late - close to eight o'clock. It was a lovely winter night. I was walking and looking at the show windows when I met the fellow who had helped me to translate in French. He was a very nice guy by the name of Israel. He said, "Motel, what are you doing here?" He then told me that my boat is leaving at eight o'clock and I told him "yes, eight o'clock tomorrow." He said, "No, the agency fooled you." He phoned the shipping company right away and they told him that the boat had left already and that it was three kilometres from the harbour. They could not stop the ship but cabled it to slow down and to prepare a little boat. I then took a taxi and he came with me. We got there quickly. I took the little boat and I was the last passenger to go to Trinidad.

I arrived in Trinidad on January 1, 1939. In the morning, when I disembarked, there were three other passengers from Romania. We were told to come back later. We got suspicious and we found out that they had closed the immigration for tourism. We stole away from the ship and went to a Jewish Boarding House, owned by Mr. Rosner. It did not take long for the police to notify the Jewish Community that four passengers had disappeared from the ship. The President of the Jewish Community was Doctor Pulver and he knew where to find us. He came to Rosner and told him not to worry, we were going to leave before the ship returned from the United States of America, in three weeks' time. We then discussed where each of us would go. One fellow went to Chili and the three of us decided to go to British Guiana (now Guyana). We booked on an American ship to leave on January 15, to British Guiana. I got sick and could not go but my two friends left. After three weeks, the German ship returned from the United States to go back to Germany. They came with a policeman to pick me up and take me back to Romania. It was a doctor and two Nazis. They did not know that I understood German. The doctor was a very good man. He took out a paper and started to write something then he asked them to please sign it. The two Nazis asked what it was that he wanted them to sign. The doctor then told them that I had the black plague, which is very contagious and that if anything happened on the boat they will be held responsible. The men ran away quickly when they heard that. In the meantime, I got better.

I had to wait until February 15, when the ship left for British Guiana. When I arrived in British Guiana, the Immigration was closed. I hired a lawyer, a man who spoke a little German like I did. We understood each other very well. I told him the whole story and I showed him when I had bought the ticket. He argued with Immigration that I had bought the ticket on the January 15. The new Immigration law was passed on February 1. He said that I was sick and could not make it at that time. On this ground and these points, they let me remain. The law in British Guiana was that I had to deposit two hundred and fifty American dollars, in case I could not make a living, to send me back. I paid the two hundred and fifty dollars and I was left with five dollars in my pocket. I could not contact my two friends as I did not know where they were. I then went into the streets walking with my valises in my hand and looking around. I saw a dry goods store marked "S.S. Khoury" and I looked inside. It seemed to me that a fellow inside looked Jewish, so I went inside and asked if he was a Jew. He said that he was and I was very happy and I told him the whole story of what had happened to me. He introduced himself and said his name was Feferman. He said that he was married and had two children. He came from Brazil three months ago and he peddled. He told me not to worry as I could stay at his home. He told me I had to pay him twenty dollars for board and lodging but that he did not have a bed, so we had to go and buy one. On the way to his home, we stopped at a store and bought a small bed for nine dollars and twenty five cents. I only had five dollars which I paid and he put the

difference of four dollars and twenty five cents. We then went to his home where I met his wife and children and we started to talk. He told me how he peddled and so on. The following day, he asked me to go with him to the store where he worked and to bring the receipt with me. At the store, when I showed Mr. Khoury that I had deposited two hundred and fifty dollars on that account, he took the receipt as a guarantee, and gave me a hundred dollars in goods which was enough as a start. I started to peddle and did very well.

In the meantime, I received a letter from my wife saying that she could not sell the business nor the cinema as the Jews did not want to buy it and the Goyem (gentiles) said that they would wait until the Germans came and then they would get it for nothing. Right away I went and booked a German ticket for her and my son. I got money and sent it to her and told her to leave everything with the family and come as this will be the last boat. My son (who was a baby at that time) got sick and so they could not make it. I booked another ticket right away via Italy. She left Falesht and went to Italy. When she reached Italy, Mussolini shook hands with Hitler. This meant that no Italian boats could stop at an English port and so they were sent back to Falesht. This was the last time I heard from my wife. In the meantime, I had prepared a house and had it furnished and ready, so I do not have to tell you how I felt.

After two years of peddling, I opened a dry goods store called "The Russian Store". A few months later, I opened a hotel by the ocean and I called it "The Palalika". I did very well. Suddenly, in 1942, I was called by the police telling me there was a letter for me. When I went there, there was an English Commissioner station in Kubuchev. My father-in-law wrote and told me that my wife and all the others were dead and that he and my son were the only survivors and he asked me to help. On that ground, I asked to be allowed to send twenty five pounds sterling each month. I was given permission and so I sent the money for eleven months. After the eleventh month, I received a letter from the English Commissioner with the eleven drafts enclosed. He could not contact my father-in-law and the Germans were preparing to invade and they were packing now to evacuate. That was the last I heard of my family. I lost all contact of my son for years. When the war stopped in 1945, I tried and tried for many years to find him. I found out that he was alive in 1953, when I went to Trinidad and met a fellow named Mr. Fishman and he told me that his parents were alive and lived in Siberia. I got their address and wrote and asked them if they knew of my son. After a couple of months they replied that my son was alive and living with my brother-in-law and his wife in Levov (Limberg), but that they did not know his address. Later, I was able to contact a friend in Kechenef, Bissarabia, who gave me his address. I was then able to correspond with him but it was not until 1967, that I was given permission to return to Russia and meet my son

after so many years. He was thirty-four years old, already married and had a seven year old daughter.

In the meantime, in 1943, I got married again in British Guiana and my business was doing well. In 1948, the government changed to communism. I sold my building and the business and went to Venezuela. I was there for a few weeks and the climate did not agree with me as I had low blood pressure. I went back to British Guiana and decided to go to Trinidad with my wife and three children.

In 1948, I again started peddling in Trinidad. I was there for five years. In 1953, my good friend Aaron Karp came to visit me and he asked me if I would come to Barbados and stay a few months in his store as he needed an operation and that he was not feeling too well. I discussed this with my wife and then told him that I would. I went to Barbados and started to work in Aaron Karp's store, "The London Shop". After six months, I sent for my family which by this time consisted of five children. In the meantime, Karp sold his building and I decided to go to Venezuela again. After six weeks in Venezuela, I started to be an agent. I was doing well but I got sick again. I had low blood pressure and the doctor warned me that if I wanted to live I must return home. On my return, I started to work with Mr. Kriendler. After that, the building where Mr. Kriendler had his store was sold. I then went to work with the Pillersdorf's. After a time, Mr. Pillersdorf

was expecting his brother, Cook, to come from Poland so I had to leave again so I decided to go and open a handbag factory for myself and later on, a hat factory also. I was doing alright.

When I came to Barbados in 1953, the Jewish population numbered about thirty families of European origin, Polish, Germans, ^{RUSSIANS} Hungarian, Romanian, English and American. The first Jewish families came from Poland in 1932; the others came later in the forties and continued right up to the ^S Second World War. The Jews established themselves in business and factories. They adapted themselves to the Barbadian way of life very well and ensured a good future for themselves and their children. There was an old Sephardik synagogue build by Portuguese ~~and~~ ^{JEWISH} Spanish origin. The synagogue was sold and converted into offices. Not having a synagogue, the Jews worshipped at a private residence of the Altman family. All the Jews pray in Ashkenazin. In 1969, I called a meeting at my home and everyone came and gave pledges of twenty three thousand, five hundred dollars to buy a house. We bought a house for twenty eight thousand and took out a mortgage for the balance. We then converted the house into a synagogue which I designed. I also designed a new gate for the cemetery. I do not think that it is necessary to mention what I did in Barbados. I think that everyone knows what part I took in the Jewish community. I want to thank everyone for giving me the honour of being your President, and also for being Gaba and Cantor for the High Holidays. May God bless you all.

By

MOTEL TRUSS

Motel Truss 27/10/8