Gerald Tulchinsky

Oyfn Veg Session Four Discussion

On the Wagon – Early Adventures in Business History and Reflections on Military History; Responding to Michael Bliss and Jack Granatstein

"Hallo! Boddles, Reggs, Old iron. Hallo! Boddles, Reggs, Old iron. Hallo!" Zaideh, David Stemeroff, my grandfather, had a powerful voice and was such a known figure in our Terrace Hill neighbourhood in Brantford that his horse and wagon usually attracted the response of householders so anxious to be rid of their castoffs that they left them by the curb for him to pick up.

He also loaded up on other detritus, including books. Books! People threw out books, would you believe? Sir Walter Scott, Mark Twain, H.G. Wells, The Hardy Boys, and many of the classics. Sure, most weren't in good condition. But to a curious eight year old, these volumes opened windows onto the world of adventure and ideas not current in our Jewish household of the early 1940s. And I took many of them home.

Our horse, an ancient beast, yanked us along, seated on the bench atop the wagon, finally to Zaideh's barn – he pronounced it "barrenn"– located across the open field behind the United Church, where he carefully unharnessed the animal, brushed her down, and fed her oats, hay and water. He took the harness and hung it on the wall. Then he unloaded the wagon of broken chandeliers, punctured iron pails, unserviceable washing machines with rollers awry, steel sheets, rusted iron tools, and pieces of chains, tables, jacks, bars, angles, screws, nails, and unidentifiable metal bits. And bottles and paper.

This was Zaideh's business which included his horse, wagon, barn, and, above all, his enterprise. A small man – maybe only five foot six – he was very strong and lifted his "merchandise" around the place easily. An immigrant from Russia, he came to Brantford with his young family via London, Boston, Berlin, Goderich, and Mitchell, and was known in the neighbourhood as "that old Jew." He was like ten or eleven other local Jewish junk collectors who gathered up the castoffs and piled them up in their yards or barns waiting for the buyers to drive in from Hamilton in their late–model cars or big trucks. As I learned later, these junk collectors like my Zaideh scattered around Ontario were essentially price takers, like western wheat farmers dealing with grain buyers and elevator companies. The Hamilton brokers set the price they would give for these materials, and if junkmen held out for higher amounts, brokers might negotiate but might buy elsewhere. In the production of new steel, the mills in Hamilton required huge quantities of scrap iron. Zaideh and all the others were part of a province–wide supply chain that fed one of the major sectors of Canadian industry.

Not that he fully understood the whole complex picture in which Stelco and Dofasco were also price takers because they were in turn dependent on demand for their product from, say, the auto makers who could shop for the best prices for sheet steel from mills in the United States as well as in Canada. No, no. Unaware of all this, Zaideh calmly sorted out his stuff in his "barrenn," separating one metal from another, say iron from brass and copper, with mallets, chisels, drills, and sledge

hammers. This labour sometimes went on for hours, though he would take long breaks while carefully making one of his hand-rolled cigarettes and puffing away uncaringly next to inflammable materials. He was usually deep in thought and said very little to me. He and all other Jewish junkmen ceased their collections on Friday afternoon, the eve of Sabbath, their yards and barns unvisited until Monday morning when their trucks and wagons were again mobilized to sweep through the city's neighbourhoods and surrounding countryside for salvageable materials.

It was in the factories, however, where the biggest hauls of scrap metals were to be found. Companies like Cockshutt Plow, Brantford Coach and Body, Waterous Engineering, and Massey-Harris, were large enterprises whose factories spread across acres of land in the city's industrial districts of Eagle Place at the end of a spur line off the Lake Erie and Northern Railway out along a foul-smelling canal. They and many smaller metal-cutting manufacturers left huge quantities of iron and steel shavings, chippings, and other metal waste that quickly found its way onto the junkmen's trucks and eventually back to Hamilton whence it came, then back into Stelco and Dofasco blast furnaces to be admixed with coke and pig iron to form rails, sheets, bars, rods, and angles for a booming wartime economy.

The junk men also scoured the nearby countryside. Old iron rakes, discs, harrows, plows, tractors, and other broken-down farm equipment rusting away behind barns and sheds were bought up and trucked into Brantford and broken apart. The purchase price might be for cash or barter, the buyer possibly offering new dry goods, toweling and sheets by the yard, or brand new kitchen utensils, such as aluminum pots and pans. Sometimes, though, rural folk spurned such business contact with epithets like: "get off my farm, you goddam Jew." So their detritus stayed put until a junk man of a more acceptable ethnicity turned up. As price takers people with such attitudes were not rational participants in the market.

In Hamilton, meanwhile, the buyers marshalled the scrap metal into enormous piles in their yards located near Stelco and Dofasco and their trucks and railway cars were constantly on the move as giant cranes and bulldozers shifted scrap around. These materials came in from all over southern Ontario. Up in Berlin, a branch of my own family, the Taradays, founded by my maternal great-grandfather, Menachem Mendel Taraday (it's got a bit of an Irish sound, but he was a Russian Jew) in the 1890s, were proprietors of a big junk business located across the road from the even larger junk yard. From up and down the Grand River valley: Paris, Galt, Preston, and nearby towns and cities like Guelph, Stratford, Waterloo, and many other places, the scrap was collected, sorted, and sent by truck or railway car to the Hamilton brokers, the scrap metropolis of the nation. London might have had its own brokers, who possibly dealt directly with Stelco/Dofasco; similarly Windsor, with its huge auto plants that cut and stamped metal on an enormous scale while Kingston and Ottawa/Cornwall operated on a much smaller scale. And besides Goldblatt and Levy, there

were other Jewish scrap merchants in Hamilton who, to the best of my knowledge, were not connected to the Brantford peddlers like my Zaideh. While this business was going on, lots of letters and documents no doubt changed hands, and reports produced, though I strongly suspect that it'd be difficult even now to get access to them. Why? A sense of privacy which affects all of us and a feeling that, perhaps, there are some skeletons in the family business closet that had best remain there.

Anyway, Zaideh's scrap business collapsed suddenly in the early 1940s, but I'm not sure why. I remember hearing snatches of the discussions that took place at his house about a truck as Zaideh and my three uncles were discussing the pros and cons of buying one and eventually decided not to. Instead of trying to revive the business, all of them went to work in local factories, one to Massey–Harris, one to Brantford Cordage, and another to Barber–Ellis. Zaideh took a job in 1943 at Waterous, which was then manufacturing components for artillery, where he did brutally heavy work for sixty–five cents an hour in their foundry. So, to sum up my earliest personal experience with business, it was a horse–drawn failure, but it was mostly fun and introduced me, though only dimly, to the importance of prices, negotiation, and markets.

I got more understanding of these business fundamentals from my parents, who ran a ladies' wear store on Brantford's main drag, Colborne Street, for nearly 50 years. My dad arrived in Toronto from Russia via Romania in August 1924 and started to work on Spadina as a cleaner, packer, and dogsbody in a clothing factory. After about a year, he went west and worked around at various jobs, including harvesting, clerking, and teaching Hebrew to children of Jewish shopkeepers in Saskatchewan hamlets. He was very happy out there, especially while visiting Winnipeg and meeting the local intelligentsia who frequented Miller's bookstore on Portage Avenue. He finally settled in Brantford after his younger brother prevailed on him to come back east. He eventually did and, having bought a railway ticket to Brantford, on a whim according to family legend, landed there, walked over to Harris' grocery store, which was located near the CNR station. Here he was advised to board at a house down the street where a number of Jewish families were located. He had the idea, which was common among Jews, that he could make a living by peddling dry goods in the city and surrounding countryside.

This, like junk peddling, was a primitive business, but a business nonetheless. It involved securing goods on credit, usually for ninety days, from wholesalers in Toronto. These firms would ship the goods – say finished sheeting from which housewives equipped with sewing machines could produce items for their own needs – to him. He would pack samples into suitcases which he carried door to door trying to make sales to householders. Knowing little or no English at the outset, he confined his peddling to what he called "the cosmopolitan section" of town, that is the districts housing immigrants from eastern Europe whose languages he knew. And as his little

business developed, he expanded his horizons from the streets of Brantford to the nearby countryside, in particular to the prospering tobacco-growing area south of the city where he thought his goods would sell well. And they did. He eventually bought a car, a model T Ford, to improve his trade.

In the meantime, in August 1927, he and Anne Stemeroff were married at her parents' house on Brunswick Street in Brantford by Rabbi Levine who traveled in from Hamilton to conduct the ceremony. A few of his friends from Toronto, including the distinguished educator, Leyb Jacober, also attended. Soon, in addition to peddling dry goods, the couple expanded their business by opening a downtown dress shop, which my mom ran while he was on the road. This was a partnership and my mom, who had training at a business college and experience as a sales clerk at Woolworth's, was a distinct business asset. She was salesperson, dressmaker, bookkeeper, and buyer in the Toronto garment manufacturing district then expanding along lower Spadina Avenue and the surrounding streets.

The business operated on a shoe string: goods were purchased for sale in the store either by orders from traveling salesmen who arrived in town by train, later in their own cars, with trunks of samples supplied by Montreal or Toronto (sometimes both) manufacturers or wholesalers. These travelers arranged showings in a local hotel (in Brantford it was usually the Kirby House, an ancient edifice on Colborne Street) to which the retailers were invited for evening showings. Sometimes the travelers brought along curvaceous young women to "model" the dresses, a practice which elicited a certain amount of wink/wink, nod/nod. The retailers would place orders for dresses, coats, blouses and other items of this or that design, size, fabric, and colour; the traveler wrote up these specifics, all the while cracking Yiddish jokes, usually slightly risqué, and providing gossip about the latest goings on in the neighbouring towns and the Spadina garment district.

The second source of merchandise, and the one most favoured by my dad, was directly from sources in Toronto or Montreal. Toronto was closer, so he and my mom bought there and only rarely in Montreal. They went in frequently to Spadina on Wednesdays when stores in Ontario closed for the mid-week half-day respite, there to join retailers from other places across southern Ontario on what was known on the Avenue as "farmers' day." Their main purpose, judging from my dad's activity – which I witnessed on a few occasions – was to survey the seasonal scene, an especially important intelligence in the womenswear business because of sometimes radical seasonal changes of styles, colours, fabrics, and hemlines, usually dictated from New York. Once these major matters were attended to, the retailer would be ready to order. Given the low capital requirements for entry in the womenswear trades, there were numerous firms producing and wholesaling goods among the lofts in the buildings newly erected in that era along Spadina between Dundas and King Streets, and along Richmond Street between University Avenue and Bathurst. So

the experienced "farmers" like my dad would spend much of the day circulating circumspectly among the suppliers in the area, with a hefty lunch consumed half–way through the day, though usually frequenting the ones they already had done business with.

Suppliers were of several more or less distinct kinds: manufacturers, wholesalers, jobbers, and contractors. Manufacturers produced finished goods in their own factories by their own employees; wholesalers bought from local or out of town manufacturers and contractors, and supplied to travelers who sold selected lines to specific retailers; jobbers were bottom feeders who bought end–of–lines from manufacturers, contractors, or importers. Contractors were straight–on producers of goods for manufacturers who saw financial advantages in having their goods cut and sewn up off the premises. In this arrangement, the manufacturer supplied the fabric and the patterns, leaving the contractor to deliver to him a specific quantity of sewn–up goods for a set price. The leftover fabric, sometimes called "cabbage," was utilized by the contractor to produce goods on his own account. Many contractors became highly successful by exploiting this opportunity.

The retailer, the "farmer," looked to his own advantage while cognizant of these possibilities and shrewdly assessed the opportunities, though mindful of his/her own constraints, such as the needs of his own local clientele (say, whether youthful or not) before deciding on what to purchase. He/she would consider whether the goods were within the price range his customers could afford. The careful retailer had to avoid being too venturesome and risk being left at the end of a season with a stock of unsold merchandise. Some lines, however, like women's coats, were essentially standard items whose styles in these days did not change much year to year, although decorative effects such as belts, buckles, pleats, etc., were sometimes added. My dad did a lot of business with Mr. Shenkman, the esteemed proprietor of Hudson Cloak.

My dad's store sold medium–priced goods to a lower middle and working–class conservative clientele and he bought from suppliers quality goods at reasonable prices accordingly, carefully assessing opportunities while weighing experience against novelty. At the same time he had to balance the economic situation in the Brantford economy against that of the region, in other words 'what could customers afford to buy?' He could not always get the merchandise he wanted. I was with him when he tried to buy goods from a prominent manufacturer who remarked that he sold exclusively to one of my dad's Brantford competitors.

He was a shrewd buyer and, at certain times, a price setter. This happened when the season, say, for the retail sale of winter coats was ending in January and some suppliers might have leftovers or ends–of–lines on their racks. Depending on many factors, the marginal operators (and there were many) amongst them could well be pinched, or actually in distress. Dad would offer to buy their goods at substantial

discounts; the later in the season the larger the discount. By March, he might have been able to knock down the price of a winter coat for which he'd paid fifty dollars in August to as low as twenty dollars. With a supportive bank manager, at these prices he bought in quantity, possibly as many as two hundred coats which he had transported to Brantford and stored in a specially–built unit in his store until, perhaps, August. He would then run a huge sale on these coats at deep discount prices reflecting the bargain prices he had paid and allowing to himself a good profit. His customers benefited and so did he.

Business had ups and downs as the seasons came and went and as the local economy fluctuated. Layoffs or strikes at the major plants in town were soon reflected in sales in the stores, although my dad's business always seemed to be pretty steady. His relationship to his bank was of vital importance and the best way of keeping the manager content was to show that you actually were doing business by making regular deposits to your account. Thus, every morning my dad took his previous day's receipts, cash and cheques, to the bank to satisfy the expectations and regular scrutiny of Mr. MacCrimmon, or Mr. Mackenzie, or Mr. Fraser, or Mr. MacNairn, or Mr. MacKay, or Mr. MacTavish, at the Bank of Nova Scotia. Then the drafts from Toronto would be paid, dad got his merchandise, and business continued. My dad often remarked on the strict fairness of the bank managers; never a suggestion from them of you know what.

Over the decades that he was in these businesses of peddling and main street retailing, my dad stuck pretty well to the same kind of merchandising, mid–priced goods for the working and lower middle class. But from time to time he went into other lines, for example furs for special orders. He'd ask a regular customer if she'd like to see a fur coat of a certain type, possibly Persian lamb, in a specific style and price range. If she were interested, on his next buying trip to Toronto he'd go to one of the furriers he knew, and get the item on approval – this required a trusting relationship, but he was very well respected on the Avenue because he always paid his drafts on time, often even ahead of the usually allowed thirty days – and bring it back for the customer to say yes or no. The venture into furs was so successful that he for a while stocked a small number of fur coats and did fairly well. He also experimented with what he called "youthful lines" but gave up on those.

So, from my Zaideh's junk peddling business, which failed, I gained the unforgettable and wonderful experience of sitting up on the wagon's bench behind his plodding horse through our neighbourhood and watching him load up old iron, rags, bottles, and paper. I came to understand – dimly, I'll admit – that there was some value in these items, determined by Hamilton buyers. Simultaneously, in my own home, I acquired knowledge of the processes of retailing, the buying and selling of new merchandise, whether out of a suitcase along an inner city street, or on nearby tobacco farms, or out of a store on main street. Here, the processes of salesmanship, pricing

buying, negotiating, credit, banking, and shipping were in almost daily evidence. And while both of these petty family businesses were small, they were my introduction to business history. So I ask you, Michael, could anyone with this background be unable to tackle the Montreal tycoons at the CPR, the Bank or Montreal, the Royal Bank, Richelieu and Ontario Shipping, Dominion Engineering, Molson's Brewery, Ogilvie Flour, or Redpath Sugar?

What turned me away from business history was a combination of factors. First, difficulty in getting the really vital sources; company annual reports and other public documents are not enough for any of us in the field. Business historians need to see the correspondence and the directors' minutes, amongst other sources, and these are commonly not accessible to most of us because of a strong sense of privacy, or a feeling perhaps of skeletons in the closet, say a consideration long ago extended to a politician for a "favour" to the corporation. Some of the large corporations, like the Bank of Montreal, Molsons (I was allowed in briefly and met the legendary hockey player Jean Beliveau who was then doing some publicity for the company!), the Royal Bank, and Stelco, have employed their own historians with what I think is limited success in producing satisfactory history. I was asked to write a history of Dominion Bridge, tried two chapters but was let go after asking some questions. At least one company, the CPR, was not only impervious to me and possibly other researchers, but was also said to be actually destroying some of its critically-important historical resources. Other companies and corporations that I tried to research were just as resistant to my appeals for access. This brushoff was usually polite, though, sometimes even generous. In Montreal I was usually taken to an expensive and elaborate lunch at one of the downtown businessmen's clubs with dark panelled walls, only the kind you get in Montreal, by a corporate type to soften the blow. The CPR gave me a lunch I'll never forget. My approach to Jacques Masson (head of the family's very extensive long-time financial interests in Quebec and seigneurs of the beautiful seigneury property down the Saint Lawrence river at Terebonne) came to nothing; dressed to the nines and arriving in a chauffer-driven Rolls Royce, he invited me to the fancy dining room of the Ritz-Carlton, spent a small fortune on the choicest of food and crispest of French wine and told me zip-doodle of any use, though lots about his wartime army service (he was a junior lieutenant in Les Fusiliers Montreal). The head of the Montreal Judicial Archives, where I found some superb resources for my PhD thesis, simply kicked me out of his shop as Easter approached with a very nasty anti-Semitic remark – "are you aware of the Christian calendar?"– that left me stunned. (I should have slugged the son-of-a-bitch. My thesis advisor, Professor Maurice Careless, said: "you should have asked him back if he was aware of the Jewish calendar.") I finished my thesis, nevertheless, but I have never forgotten the remark and the hostility lying behind it.

I then decided to write a history of the clothing industry and did a lot of research on its development. Some of the leading Montreal clothing manufacturers – the

heads of century old Jewish firms –when approached just smiled and said "we don't keep those kinds of records, too bulky." A prominent Montreal accountant confirmed that statement. So it was clear that this was largely a Jewish story, but an extremely difficult one to research.

Alongside these impediments, by the end of the sixties, just as I was finishing thesis, my interests were shifting away from Montreal business tycoons to Jewish history. The Eichmann trial of 1961 had made a profound impact on many Jews, and the ensuing bitter controversy between the historians over Hannah Arendt's allegations of Jewish complicity drew me into the world of the Holocaust. I well remember reading Raoul Hilberg's path–breaking 800 plus page *Destruction of European Jewry,* which came out in 1961, over three or four days, so hard was it for me to put it down. There it was, brilliantly set forth with compelling detail, the five stages of the Holocaust: identification, expropriation, isolation, transportation, and destruction; there was the complicity of the Jewish councils in ghettos, there were the enthusiastic collaborators and passive bystanders in every country, as well as the rescuers, the partisans – and there were the victims. I was just completely blown away.

What also drew me away from focusing solely on business history and into the world of the Jewish experience was the Six Day War of 1967. In the spring of that year the question was: was the crisis that led to the war to be another Holocaust? Some of us thought that it might, though the military answer (and Ruth's cousin, Fredo, doing battle leading his battalion of tanks in Sinai) came soon enough. Slowly, Israel reemerged as a major focus of my life. Slowly, the Canadian Zionist experience along with the remnants of business history, Jewish clothing enterprise, brought a new book project, the history of Canada's Jews, hence *Taking Root* and *Branching Out*, later the single book *Canada's Jews*. I incorporated a lot of my research on clothing manufacturing into those books, but I never did complete a discrete, comprehensive study of the clothing industry.

However, while working in recent years on the biography of Joe Salsberg, I came across the horrible disaster at a Richmond Street clothing sweatshop loaded to the rafters with merchandise in January, 1950 when nine people, several of them Holocaust survivors, died in a flash fire. There it was again, business history: manufacturing, labour, entrepreneurship, capital, marketing, credit and styles, and the modern Jewish experience. I'm intrigued again. So, maybe, just maybe…

So here I am, just having turned eighty, still not knowing what kind of identity as an historian I really have. Oh, and I write short stories, so we can add that to the mix. Let's just say that, though I'm *farmished*, *tsetumult und farblundget*, (Yiddish for completely mixed up) I'll keep going as long as I can to accompany you, while recognizing the imperative given us by our eminent historian predecessor, Simon Dubnov, "*Yidn. Schreib und Farshreib*." (Jews, Write it down. Record it)

As for military history, Jack, you know of my serious weaknesses there, though I did have some personal experience as an officer-in-training in the University Naval Training Division at the University of Toronto in the 1950s and as a Reserve Lieutenant, and served on ships large and small. It was mostly an interesting passage, though, of course, I saw no "action." Our family had no military tradition except for a couple of my mother's uncles, the brothers Harry and George Day (they shortened Taraday to Day) who served overseas during the First World War, Harry as a flyer in an American component of the French Air Force (according to my mom, it was the Lafayette Esquadrille, a connection I tried without success to confirm) and George, who enlisted as a sapper in July 1917 and went overseas in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Long before that, my Zaideh might have served as a conscript in the Russian Army before coming to Canada, but neither he nor any other family member spoke of it.

On the Tulchinsky side, one of my dad's older half-brothers served in the Russian Army during the First World War and seems to have been lost or gone missing, or maybe killed; his fate seems to have been a family mystery, or disgrace, and no one spoke of him except another uncle who once whispered to me that he joined the Bolsheviks. I was approached at a Jewish history conference in New York several years ago by a Harvard graduate student writing a thesis on Russian prisoners of war in Japanese camps during the Russo-Japanese War. She had evidence on the activities of one Tulchinsky who acted as spokesperson for the Russian Jewish soldiers in one of the camps, amongst whom there were several thousand Jews. This Tulchinsky could have been a family member and I tried, briefly, to track him down, but gave up after remembering that our surname was not an uncommon one among Christians as well as Jews in that part of the Russian Empire (now the Independent Moldavian Republic) my people came from. Anyway, the poor guy probably was regarded by the Japanese military as a pain in the ass, dealt with accordingly, and likely died of disease, brutality, or starvation, as did most other prisoners of war out there.

Ruth's grandfather, a native of Berzan, Galicia, in the Austro-Hungarian empire, served in the infantry on the Russian front, was wounded, captured, and survived the First World War. One of his grandsons, Fredo (Ruth's first cousin) joined the Israel Defense Force in the mid 1950s and rocketed from private to brigadier general in the tank corps and, as squadron, battalion, and brigade commander successively, saw serious action in the 1956, 1967 and 1973 wars. (His stories in Yiddish about the family in Buenos Aires are side- splitters). Other family members, mine and hers, served in a variety of IDF units: a sergeant/major in the air force, a private in intelligence, a sergeant in the tank corps, two corporals in the paratroops, and a lieutenant and a whole bunch of privates and lance-corporals in the infantry. A niece is partnered to a Lieutenant/Commander in the Israeli Navy. We are enormously proud of them all, but we cannot claim a family "military tradition."

So to get to the point that Jack addresses: Jewish service in the Canadian Forces during the Second World War and reasons for the apparent weaknesses in overall Jewish recruitment in the combat arms. Well, aside from the reasons I adduced, there are well–known historical factors which cannot be ignored. Jews had had a hard time of it in European armies, especially in the Russian empire where the vast majority of them were concentrated and even in supposed enlightened countries like France. Czar Nicholas I, in 1825, brought in a policy of general conscription for 25 years and, for Jews only, an additional eight years at the beginning of their service (for boys of ten) called "cantonment," during which time these children were to be converted to Christianity by Orthodox priests. By the time this policy was terminated in the mid–1850s, some 80,000 boys had been subjected to this treatment, though most of them died from the harsh conditions off in the Siberian wilds. (The anarchist, Alexander Herzen, wrote about this.) Military service terms were then slowly reduced from 25 years to 8, but Jewish, and probably other, conscripts were subjected to general humiliation and a variety of dangerous and inhumane treatments. The stories are legion. Over a long period of time, therefore, Jews in the Russian empire developed a powerful aversion to military service. Of course, there were individual exceptions, like the famous Josef Trumpeldor who became an officer and a hero in the Czar's army in 1905. But at just about all costs, Jews would not put on a military uniform. I understand that scholarly research on this subject is ongoing, given recently–granted accessibility to relevant archival resources in Russia.

This aversion had to have been part of the cultural baggage of the Jews who migrated to Canada, and their sons must surely have internalized that attitude. Enlisting in the CEF in 1914–18 or the Forces after 1939 would not have been a priority, even though it was widely understood that during the Second World War their fellow Jews in Germany and throughout Europe were seriously endangered. Far from serving as a spur to action, the situation might well have deterred Jewish enlistments once war began due to fears of what might well happen to them if they were captured. Besides, rumours of anti–Semitism in the Forces seem to have circulated. And we must not completely discount two other factors, such as excessively protective parents. Thus, the low enlistment for General Service in the Army and the highly disproportionate quantum of Zombies. Jack makes the point that enlistments for some non–British ethnic groups was low. Set against this, however, is the heroic combat experience of several Jewish officers and the high Jewish enlistment in the Royal Canadian Air Force, volunteering for combat there, and the highly distinguished service of several Jews. Speaking up for Brantford, our hero was Sam Finkelstein, in civilian life a wispy and quiet dress salesman, who at age thirty closed down business, enlisted in the RCAF in 1941, took pilot training, flunked that, but qualified as a navigator, served as a navigator/bomb aimer aboard Mosquitos in bombing raids in a Pathfinder squadron over Germany for fifty missions near the full quota of sixty. And then the war stopped. FIFTY. He showed me his flight logbook. When I asked him why he did

that, he just shrugged, said nothing, lit a cigarette, gazed out the window for a few minutes, and then said "let's go eat."

So I really don't know about Jews and military service. In Israel there is intense competition among eighteen-year-old draftees to gain entry into the elite attack forces like the paratroops, commandos, tough infantry brigades, Navy frogmen, and special forces. And reservists serve an annual active stretch to age fifty; my nephews tell me that extremely few take advantage of easy opportunities to beg off with "bad backs," etc. So I don't know and I leave it to military historians and psychologists to try to figure this one out. Please let me know what you come up with. By the way, Jack, tell them up at National Defense in Ottawa that I still have my old Navy uniform and remain, as always, "Ready. Aye, Ready." But isn't it time I was promoted to admiral?

Here's a final thought. I think that we historians of the Canadian Jewish experience should let up on this obsession some of us have with anti-Semitism, as if that's the most important topic in Canadian Jewish history and that the country was filled with anti-Semites: if everyone was an anti-Semite, then no one was an anti-Semite. Let us understand that other minorities experienced much worse discrimination amidst the racism that was prevalent in Canada. Many Protestants were equal opportunity haters of all minorities and for Roman Catholics many of them harboured an especially vehement antipathy, which I saw manifested every July 12th on the downtown streets of Brantford. So, to those Jews who have made a career out of searching out anti-Semitism in Canada, I respectfully suggest 'knock it off,' or at least scale back. Yes, anti-Semitism was present and it was often very nasty and damaging. (I could recount some of my own experiences) But Jews came and lived in a country that provided peace, freedom, and opportunity to all Canadians. Jews, in fact, have become the poster children for immigrant success anywhere you look, despite, maybe even because of, anti-Semitism. Let us together ask and try to answer questions about how his happened, i.e., how did they get there. Let's follow each other's research on a wide variety of important topics – say, Zionism, labour unions, the clothing industry, immigration – at gatherings like this, let's collect the sources and deposit them with our superb archivists, and finally, let's get at the job of being good historians who take full account of contexts like the Depression of the 1930s.

And at the very last, here's something for Michael and Jack to chew on. Recent research, based on super-sophisticated DNA investigations, demonstrates that European Jews, the Ashkenazim, are descended, not as previously supposed, from waves of migrants originating in the ancient Land of Israel, but from itinerant Jewish traders cohabiting with women they encountered in the places where they visited, such as the Rhineland. (I am not making this up! Check recent reports in the *New York Times*) These relationships were not one night stands, but they women married, (like Metis in the Canadian west) after conversion to Judaism. So, because the Tulchinskys originated in the general vicinity of Odessa, the metropolis that drew in folks from

the Steppes, I may very well be descended from the Tartar hordes out there. And if so, this probably makes me a distant relation of Ghengis Khan's. So I think it's only reasonable for me to expect from my friends an annual tribute of, say, two hundred horses and saddles, swords (the curved ones which make it easy to gut your enemies), spears, yurts, and other military supplies needed to equip my warriors for a reconquest of Tartary, as well as a goodly supply of bagels (delivered weekly) along with smoked salmon, cream cheese, plus kishka, knishes, gribn, halupchas, vursht, varnishkas, pastrami, smoked meat, and chopped liver, along with quality wine and a bottle of Crown Royal. All of this, you understand, as befits my station: I don't want to be greedy, but you wouldn't want me to have to go without would you?

At the very last, Michael and Jack, there's this: if either of you have metal recyclables around your place, say an old iron rake, harrow, plow, tractor, or disc rusting away out behind the barn or a back shed, please keep them for me. I'm planning on going back to Brantford one of these days to look for my Zaideh's "barrenn," to open the huge creaky door, and find his old wagon there. If I do, I'll try also to locate a horse and go into the junk business up in the old neighbourhood. That's where it all began.