

More details about Jerry's heritage, originally in Chapter 2:

Jerry's paternal grandmother Sarah, Samuel's ma, was tough and smart. As Sarah Herskowitz, she'd come over from Hungary in 1883 and met another Hungarian immigrant, Jacob Jacobowitz, a young tailor. They set up housekeeping on the Lower East Side. In their first twelve years together, they had three kids, carefully spaced – four years before the second, then six years before the third. Then, before the new century was ten years old, Jacob died. Sarah was a widow in her mid-thirties with big responsibilities – not only Samuel and her other two kids, but her own widowed mother as well.

Maybe Jacob saved his cash wisely and chose a good moment to invest in that building at 65 East 101st St. in East Harlem. It must have been an attractive piece of property, just a few steps from Central Park, with Mt. Sinai Hospital just across the street. Maybe Jacob saw a chance to get out of the old neighborhood and become a landlord when real estate prices dived after the 1907 panic. Or maybe he died before he could put his plan into action – and maybe it was his insurance money that allowed Sarah to do the investing instead.

In any case, by 1910, Sarah Jacobowitz had changed her name and the kids' names to "Jacoby" and she was a landlord, doing better than OK, thanks very much, with rent from eleven apartments in a neighborhood that was a nice step up from the tenement where the family lived in 1900.

Unlike the other owners in her neighborhood, Sarah was willing to have colored people in her building. Blacks were migrating to New York from the south for the unskilled jobs that seemed to be everywhere in the city, and Sarah saw no reason why they couldn't have an apartment if they had jobs and paid their rent on time. She was willing to take the heat from the folks down the street named Vogel and Goldstein and Zinna and Feldman, people who fretted about the tide of coloreds who were changing the character of the neighborhood almost as soon as they'd moved in.

Samuel grew up fast. He was 13 in 1910, fatherless, the man of the house whether he liked it or not. By 1911, his older sister Bertha had married a Russian-born doctor and moved uptown, so his mother depended on him to help run the building. He was a tall kid, which gave him some authority as sergeant-at arms, when he had to knock on the doors of tenants who were late with the rent, deal with the complaints about noise, make sure the plumbers and the gas men were doing their work right. But that was just part of the weight he had to carry – his mother expected him to start bringing in money himself.

He tried selling gloves for a while. A lot of Jews were in the clothing business, and maybe his mother knew someone in a factory or a store who gave him a break. Maybe the man who hired him was a fellow named Julius Post, who had a dry goods store downtown. Maybe it was there that Samuel got his first look at Julius's daughter Frieda, who would be Jerry's mother.

Julius and Rose Post were Magyar-speaking Jews like Sarah Jacoby and Jacob Jacobowitz, Jews from families that had tried and tried to assimilate into the ugly anti-Semitic culture of the Austrian Empire and ultimately gave up trying and came to America to get a fresh start. Over generations, they'd learned to keep their religious faith and their ethnic background to themselves as much as they could, so when they came to America, their Jewishness was under wraps. And besides, you could see that the children

of Israel weren't so popular over here, either. It was no wonder their kids didn't see much point in going to shul.

Julius and Rose Post, Jerry's maternal grandparents, probably had some commerce in their family backgrounds – there certainly were a lot of Jewish shopkeepers in Hungary and Slovakia and Austria. Julius found a shop in Manhattan soon after he got over here. Emmis, maybe the neighborhood wasn't so good, but he wasn't opening up Macy's. There was enough business in the area to keep it going and support his family for more than ten years. All four of his kids worked there. Frieda, the second child and first daughter, was petite, but she made up for her lack of size with spunk and personality. She knew how business was: smile at the customers, help them find what they need, give them correct change, don't give them credit.

We derived this account from census records and from our conversation with John Rosica, who remembered some of the information Jerry had told him about his background, with context about New York's neighborhoods provided by Eric Kreitzer and perspective on Jewish history provided by Donna Halper.