

Linking Northern And Central NJ, Bronx, Manhattan, Westchester And CT

## My Stories

By JLNJ Staff(<https://jewishlink.news/author/jlnj-staff/>) | March 15, 2018(<https://jewishlink.news/2018/03/15/>)



### Part 19 (written 2004)

#### (Continued from last week)

When my initial testing period was over, I was given a regular desk in a large room occupied by the other five or six clerks doing similar work. Slowly, step by step, I was given more responsible work to do, until the day came when I was allowed to handle a shipment by myself.

I remember that the first transaction I was permitted to handle by myself was a lot of 250 tons of Yugoslavian Trepca Brand lead that had been unloaded from the S/S Hrvatska of the Jugoslav Line at Pier Foot of 17th Street, Brooklyn, under contract number 18196-P, and was being shipped by Municipal Haulage, Inc. to Flemm Lead Corporation in Brooklyn under contract number 18196-S. (Sorry, I do not remember the name of the truck driver.) In subsequent years, my memory of these details remained a standing joke in the family.

One of the traffic staff was my uncle Joel Nathan, Mom's oldest brother who had lived in Hamburg and had been in the metal business there. He worked in PB Traffic when I was hired, handling lead concentrates. He wasn't very happy that he had not been asked to bring me in to PB. Well, that's how the cookie crumbles.

Some years later, I would be responsible for the complete handling and administration of the Jugometal account. Jugometal was the Yugoslavian government's metals monopoly, with which PB had an agency contract for all of their output of all their mines and smelters. Among my responsibilities was the record keeping of advances paid to Jugometal, as a tool for management to decide whether, and to what extent, additional funds could be advanced when requested. These were the years before computers, and spreadsheets were done by hand.

Once, Mr. Ludwig Jesselson, who was then president of PB and was the executive responsible for that account, called me into his office to look over my records. As I was leaning over his desk and pointing to the spreadsheet, I looked down and, to my utter shock and dismay, saw that my tie was hanging in

his glass of tea. Unfortunately, there was no hole in the floor that I could crawl into. Mr. Jesselson took it quite calmly and allowed me to squeeze the tea out of my tie into his glass, so as not to drip all over his desk. He then called his secretary for a new glass of tea.

Talk about embarrassing moments.

To this day I am careful as to where my tie hangs. Little did Mr. J. know then that this clumsy clerk would one day allow our Benjy to marry his niece Claire.

Some years later, Mr. Fischman decided to work only part-time, and subsequently announced his retirement.

At that time, there were three employees who had more or less similar responsibilities directly under Mr. Fischmann. I was the junior of the three in seniority and also in age. As he approached his retirement, Mr. Fischmann decided, together with management, that upon his retirement the traffic department would operate under a managing triumvirate. As little as I knew about business at the time, I nevertheless realized quickly that a three-headed monster could never live for long. But we had not been asked, nor given a say in the matter.

Upon Mr. Fischmann's retirement, we three (Larry Cohen, Max Stern and myself) more or less divided the work into three areas of responsibility. That worked satisfactorily as long as it was within one of those areas. Anything of a more general nature had to be discussed between us, and it always ended up with one of us (usually me) making the final decision and taking the final responsibility.

After a while I saw that the situation was slowly becoming unbearable, not only to us but also to the other staff members when they needed a decision. I realized that we were making general decisions as a committee of three, and no efficient organization can ever be run by a committee.

I went to Mr. Jesselson to explain the situation to him, but he was already fully aware of the problem. That is how obvious it had become. I asked Mr. Jesselson to appoint one of us three as the traffic manager and the other two as assistant traffic managers. He responded that he would not oppose my being the traffic manager, but that, in view of the seniority of the other two, he could not initiate it. <https://> He concluded by telling me that since he could not appoint me, he would support me if I took the management of the department into my hands on my own. In other words, since he could not give it to me, I should just take it. <https://>

He had handed me a hot potato. I could either drop it or run with it. I decided, after some thought, to run with it, and proceeded from that day on to take the initiative of managing the traffic department without ever having been appointed and without any announcement to anyone. <https://> [hl=en](#)

I was careful not to use my elbows, nor step on anyone's toes, and continued to consult with the other two. But, it slowly became obvious to everyone that I had taken over the responsibility and was managing the department. Larry, Max and I never had a serious argument on any subject.

(To be continued next week...)

By Norbert Strauss

*Norbert Strauss is a Teaneck resident and has volunteered at Englewood Hospital for over 30,000 hours. He was general traffic manager and group VP at Philipp Brothers Inc., retiring in 1985. Prior to Englewood Hospital he was also a volunteer at the American Committee for Shaare Zedek Hospital for over 30 years, serving as treasurer and director. He frequently speaks to groups to relay his family's escape from Nazi Germany in 1941.*

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