Preface

Research often takes unexpected twists and turns. A project begins with one set of questions, but dead ends; unexpected paradoxes, and accidental discoveries take the research into unexpected places, often substantially refining the project. Such was the case with this book.

About a decade ago I attended a seminar at the Center for the Cold War at New York University's Tamiment Library to discuss a paper on postwar "Red" summer youth camps. The room was unusually crowded; the subject had attracted many old-timers—gray-haired men and women "of a certain age"—eager to revisit their youth. Although they looked old to me, they were my peers. Like me, they had attended legendary left-wing summer camps such as Camp Kinderland in Hopewell Junction, New York, and Wo-chi-ca (an abbreviation for Workers Children's Camp) in Port Murray, New Jersey, that had been organized by the International Workers Order (IWO), an adjunct of the Communist Party. Anti-communist political pressures forced Wo-chi-ca to close in 1951, and it merged with Camp Wyandot, a similarly interracial, coeducational camp based in Mt. Tremper in the Catskill Mountains. In 1952 and 1953 I was a camper at Wyandot for two memorable weeks each summer, until it also closed after an outbreak of polio.

The Tamiment seminar was reminiscence as well as analysis; one person after another spoke of how meaningful as a child it was to participate in a like-minded community for those weeks. Although organized by the Jewish order of the IWO, the interracial character of the two camps distinguished them—from one estimate 30 percent of the campers were either African American or Puerto Rican but most campers were Jewish and from communist or communist-leaning homes like mine.

Most of the seminar participants were white and Jewish. They grew up in New York City or in Jewish New York suburbs among many other Jews. This was

not my experience. I was the only Jewish student in my high school graduating class of over 300. Yet all of us at the seminar remembered the camp as a safe space where we could “be ourselves,” speak our mind, sing songs of peace and brotherhood, and in general, freely express the social views we heard at home. Indeed, if there were any constraints, it would have been from departing from camp values. But that was not my problem as a ten- or eleven-year-old. I dissembled in public and in school; at camp I remembered feeling I could speak freely.

After the Tamiment seminar, an increasing number of young scholars of the Cold War asked if I would share my experiences of camp, but also about what it was like to grow up in a communist household in a conservative suburban Republican town in North Jersey. Reflecting on this past, I began to envision an embryonic version of this project as *The Secret Life of a Red Diaper Baby*.

Initially, I set out to reconstruct what Irving Howe in his 1976 best seller called the *World of Our Fathers* [and mothers!—although I only much later came to appreciate the significance of that amendment], which I thought shaped my childhood. The memories of a few relatives who still lived provided some sketchy anecdotes and details of life before the twentieth century. Their accounts told me very little about my grandparents’ generation or of their predecessors. What were the array of possibilities available to my grandparents, and to their parents and grandparents? How were decisions made about whom they married? What occupational and political choices could they have made; what led my paternal grandparents, Ida (Chaia) and Alexander (Zishe) Walkowitz, to become secular Jewish socialists and communists, but led my maternal grandparents, Marian and Kunie Mayer (Max) Margel, to think of themselves as apolitical? And what of their siblings and Orthodox ancestors: how did the world shape the choices they made or had made for them by others; what options did they have; what paths did they take?

During the next months, which stretched into years, I engaged in the highly popular pastime of family history. I began doing extensive genealogical research to identify the places where my ancestors had lived. Translation from one language to another complicated tracing the family. Walkowitz was probably Wolkowicz, and various relatives took on permutations of those spellings. In the late twentieth century, at least one American daughter simply became “Walker.” But using online genealogical information I was able to trace over a thousand relatives scattered over eight generations back to the mid-eighteenth century in a series of central Polish and Galician villages and cities. Genealogical records, though, often did little more than hint at places from which they might have earlier come. For instance, Ida’s family, the Lubertofskys, probably came from the Polish town of Lubartów. But over time, generations shortened or modified the name to Libert or Lubert. My maternal grandmother Marian Tarnofsky’s family may well have come from Tarnów.

Frustrated by the limits of genealogical information, I flipped the project. Rather than a memoir, I decided to look for the remaining traces of lives that could be heard and seen in the present. What began as a personal quest became a larger interrogation of Jewish heritage tourism as remembered and forgotten. Relying on skill sets developed as a historian—albeit without expertise in Central and Eastern European history—I moved into ethnographic and library research. Gleaning what I could from local histories, I began to do tourism-related research that surveyed Jewish heritage tourism. The visits brought me back to a long-standing set of concerns I had with memory and history connected to public history and representations of the past in public spaces.¹ The research in several cities relied on interviews, advice, and path-breaking work done by former students, colleagues, and friends in Jewish public history sites and programs. In my analyses, I have strived to be transparent about my relationship to each of them.

I began with sites in present-day Poland and Ukraine personally connected to my immediate families' pre-emigrant past, hoping to get a sense of place, of signs of their lives in the urban environment. I then followed the paths of their immigration to London and New York, and continued my journey to a range of major heritage sites linked to varied postsocialist national histories and museum cultures of central and eastern European cities. In the end I sampled Jewish heritage tourism in eleven cities and two towns (small cities or towns that evoked images of *shtetlekh*) in eight countries.

Over the seven years I traveled, I continued to research the lives of my family using genealogical archives and public oral history collections. Near the end of my writing I rediscovered extensive oral interviews with an uncle and aunt that had been conducted in the 1980s and 1990s (ironically, by two of my own doctoral students) and some newer interviews with them I had not known. These interviews challenged the heroic images I had preserved about my communist paternal grandparents, Chaia and Zishe Walkowitz, whom I had thought of as models for "my secret life." The research and interviews raised important questions for me about the role of the Jewish family in radical politics and the heritage project. Sometimes research confirmed what I "knew"; sometimes, though, it challenged telling preconceptions I had brought to sites. The voyages of discovery thus took place at home, but also at new museums, such as POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw that opened its core exhibit in late October 2014. Weaving this personal history as "interludes" into each chapter, the book suggests the kinds of stories tourists bring to sites and then describes what I experienced and learned.

Writing can be a lonely enterprise, but it is done with the remarkable support of a collective of friends, scholars, and accidental visitors one meets along the way, some of whom I am sure to have neglected to thank. All, however, made this project possible and much the better. Many helped in ways small, many in

ways profound. And many offered advice I gratefully took. Shortcomings of course remain mine alone.

The two outside readers for the press were exceptionally helpful. One, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, identified herself to me and generously provided a remarkably candid, comprehensive, and full set of comments, suggestions, and advisories. I have striven to meet the high standard of her work in addressing them. But as an Americanist by training I was also especially dependent on readings and advice from a large and varied group of historians that included colleagues and friends: Molly Nolan, David Feldman, Daniel Soyer, Daniel Stone, Olga Linkiewicz, Hasia Diner, Frank Mechlenburg, Antony Polansky, David Shneer, Natan Meir, Ruth Ellen Gruber, Samuel D. Kassow, Barbara Mann, Vladyslava Moskalets, Jack Sasson, Kenneth Moss, Larry Wolff, Mariana Net, Thomas Bender, Ares Kalandides, Reinhard Bernbeck, Gábor Gyani, Miklós Konrád, Milan Ristovic, Olga Manojlovic Pintar, Gordana Ristic, Łucja Piekarska Duraj, Andrzej Dyczak, Katarzyna Szuszkiewicz, Michele Barrett, Alisse Waterston, Rayna Rapp, Melissa Fisher, Harvey Molotch, Yanni Kotsonis, Alona Zinder, James Deutsch, Marcin Wodziński, Anastasia Riabchuk, Eszter Gantner, Teresa Meade, Andor Skotnes, Betts Brown, Donna Haverty-Stacke, Aaron Welt, Van Gosse, and Deborah Holmes.

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Lastly, and appropriately given the personal dimension of this project, there are family, and especially women to thank. The narrative conceit looks back to prior generations and singles out the quest for stories of my Jewish socialist paternal grandmother. But the book, like my life, draws on the love, support, and advice of three contemporary generations: my wife, Judith; my daughter, Rebecca; and my granddaughter, Lucy. The first two are accomplished scholars in their own right, and advised, cajoled, and nurtured the project and author. Looking back to past generations, the project offers a legacy of activist strong women to my Lucy to carry forward.

Daniel J. Walkowitz,
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