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Mikelsky Story by Donald Povich

Donald M. Povich

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Good Morning. My name is Don Povich and I own Povich's Men Shop right down on Front St. in Bath. I hope you know where my store is. We sell clothes for men and boys. We have lots of Levi's Jeans shirts and pants and the like. We also sell Boy and Cub Scout Supplies. If any of you boys have been Cub or Boy Scouts you have probably bought things in our store. Now let me ask you what your names are. We'll start right here in front and go up and down and you tell me what your name is. OK start here.

I understand that you are learning all sorts of thing here in your class. I know you like to study History and geography and the like. So I thought what we would do here today is tell you the story of our business. Where the founder came from, how he came, why he came. How he started a business What bath was like at the time. How the business grew and what it is like now.

To begin with My father Morris S. Povich came to Bath in 1905 since this is 1992 can anyone tell me how many years ago that was? That's right 87 years ago. He came from a place that has been in the news lately because it was a part of Russia and now Lithuania is a independent country. Let's get the map down and see where that is. It is right here on the Baltic Sea next to Russia and Poland. Lithuania has been an independent country at various times in it's history and it has also been ruled by Poland, Germany and Russia. When my father left there in 1905 it was under the control of Russia which was not like it is now but a kingdom ruled by a royal family. The king was called the Tzar. I want someone to hold on to Lithuania for me OK you Now let's look on the map here in Vilnius the capitol (what are you holding LIT) Well my Dad lived in a little town near Vilinus call Burumonius. I'll hold that. Ok the country was Lit. and the capitol was Vil. good. Now the Tzar was the bad guy in the story. He was fighting a war with the Japanese. It wasn't a just war or anything like that it was just a war. And this bad guy, the Tzar was forcing young men and boys to serve

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in his army .My Dad was only fifteen at the time and he would have had to stay in the army for twenty five years until he was forty. My father talked it over with his father^r and mother and they decided he should flee. I hope you know that flee means to run away. Well this bad guy, the Tzar did want the young boys to flee.If he had flying monkeys like the witch in the wizard in the Wizard of Oz he would have sent them after them like the witch did Dorthy. So they wern't to travel in the daytime so a group of them went together with a leader and they travel^{ed} after dark and they hid in the daylight. So they started from Here.Lit who is holding that for me. They moved across the river at night into Poland,Will someone hold that for me ? OK POL and they hid in haystacks and barns and traveled at night through Poland into Germany, Who will hold that for OK Ger. Now they left from where? (Lit) and they went through (Pol) and then on to Germany to right here Hamberg who's going to hold that Ok Hamberg not a Big Mac like at Macdonadls but a city in Germany. Now they were home free like stealing second base.

Now they took a little sail over to England . Someone hold that (England) to Liverpool some one hold that OK Liverpool where they got a ship to Boston Mass in the USA. Someone hold that Boston Mass USA. All right they left from Lit, and they went through POL, and Ger. to Ham and then England from Liverpoll to Boston.

Now my father and the rest of his shipmates were what was called immigrants. You have all heard about the Pilgrams and the Jamestown colony and all those folks who came here in the 1600's. Well, the peolpe like my father who came in the 1900's came for exactly the same reasons.They wanted religious freedom and they wanted personal freedom and they wanted to live in a free country where they were free to work hard and go up the economic ladder and be more then poor peasants all of their lives.They came to the United States because it was the land of opportunity where everyone no matter if he were poor or had a different sounding name or a different religion or a different

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color skin or if he was a boy or a girl might grow up to be president or become rich or a great ball player or a great artist or whatever he wanted to be . He was only held up by how hard he wanted to work.

Well my father came here just like those early settlers, poor (His ticket cost 8.00 as there was a price war on (explain).)He had three dollars and a prayer book when he landed in Boston. His first job was carrying coal on his back for three dollars a week and room and food. He did not like that very much and since he had a relative in Bath he came here in 1905. What was Bath like in 1905.

I've brought a book and I'm going to read a few paragraphs and I have a few pictures we are going to look at.(Everyone come down and gather round me and we will look at them together)

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Now let us see what Morris was doing .Well he started out with a pack on his back and tried to sell writing paper and envelopes . The price was a penny for a sheet of paper and a penny for an envelope. He didn't speak a word of English and when his first customer asked him "How Much?" he had to run off to find a friend to find out what that meant. He persisted and worked hard and before long he was able to buy a horse and wagon and he increased the things he sold to thread and needles and clothes and anything he could in his little wagon. ~~So~~ now he could travel further from home so he went to the nearby towns like , Wiscasset ~~an~~ Phippsburg, Georgetown and Woolwich. He did this for five years and he saved enough money to open a small shoe store just down the street from where we are now. I have a picture of him standing in front of that store. I'm going to pass it around, Please handle it carefully as it is the only one I have.

I'm going to tell you a little about economics. So you can go home and tell your parents that you studied economics today. I going to tell about the economy of Bath. The study of economy is the study of money and buisness. Of factories and the people who work in them and the money that they earn

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and how they spend it. We say the economy is good when the factories are busy and people are working and making money and are able to buy the things which are made in other factories or grown on farms. We say the economy is bad when people do not have jobs and are not able to make money so they can't buy the things grown or manufactured P

The economy in Bath is like this little toy which I have brought with me today. It a Yo-Yo it goes up and down and that's the way the economy has been over the last hundred years sometimes up and some time down. Right now the shipyard is busy and most people are working so the yo-yo stays up. T

Well. How did our friend Morris manage through all these up and downs.? Well you remember I told you how he traveled around with his little horse and wagon. He stayed overnight in peoples homes some times he paid fifty cents and some time he stayed for free. But what he really did was make a lot of friends and they remembered him through good times and bad. They came to his store through the good times and the bad and bought clothes in his store. The people knew he was an honest and a hard working man, they knew they would not be cheated and they became loyal customers. He became well know and respected in Bath and he was elected to the city government and became a director in banks. Remember he came to this country with three dollars. He loved the United States and he never wanted to leave not even for a trip, He was good to the USA and it was good to him/ I joined him in 1951. At one time we had three stores but we never gave up the original and now 82 years later we are still on Front St. The trolleys are gone, the streets are paved but the people are still the same. Could you do what Morris did? Sure all you have to do is to work hard , get the best education you can and remember if you are going to walk a thousand miles you have to begin with one step.

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All through it's history Beth Israel had had many presidents serving as they do now for several years and then turning over the leadership to another. But in 1942 , shortly after he had arrived in Bath Abraham Kramer became president and there he remained until his death in the mid 1980's President Kramer was everything he was the closest thing we ever had to a lay rabbi . He conducted all the services Led all the minor holiday services , conducted funerals , and during his time there were all too many as the old congregation began to fade . He had a fairly good singing voice and his services were done in a typical orthodox style . Were he didn't know he was not afraid to improvise. I remember so well how he would be chanting Yskor with the Torah in his arms and when he came to the part were it is necessary to fill in the names of the departed his line was " members and memberikes of Beth Israel" He really was Mr. Beth Israel and Mr. Jew as he represented Beth Israel to the community at large.