

## BEN WEINTRAUB

Malvina recalled a couple of one-on-one discussions that she had with Ben Weintraub. Once, when he mentioned that he considered the terms pity and sympathy to be completely interchangeable, Malvina countered with a distinction. Pity, she insisted, implied some distancing between the two people involved, whereas sympathy connoted involvement, implying equality and solidarity. Ben, who prided himself on his skill with language, was highly impressed.

On another occasion, in the early 1930's Ben would visit the Soviet Union and, on the way home to Chicago, he would stop in New York City for business. Malvina, then already living in Philadelphia, came to New York for a couple of days at that time and managed to see him, anxious to hear the impressions of his trip. As always when she visited New York without Jacques, she would stay at the YWCA Hotel, an extremely circumspect place where everyone had to be in by 10 P.M. and where only women were permitted to room. She met Ben for dinner, and he began to complain bitterly to her about his disappointment with the "great Soviet experiment" as he had observed it on this recent visit. Like many of the idealistic among their generation, Malvina, Jacques, and Ben had regarded both Communism and Socialism as answers to the problems of the world. Ben now began to express somewhat different opinions. Malvina, feeling that it was wrong to express such opinions in a society that was already so antagonistic and hostile to change, tried vigorously to change his mind. They argued heatedly and vehemently during dinner, and after that, took a long walk, arguing even more vigorous for two or three hours that followed.

By the time that Ben saw her to her hotel door, Malvina was chilled to the bone. Entering her small room there, she saw that the staff had left her simply one thin blanket on the bed. She called downstairs for more blankets, and they brought her a second one, equally thin. Finally in desperation she phoned the housekeeping staff again and insisted on at least two more blankets. They brought her one more and told her firmly that this was all that they would be able to spare that night. Teeth chattering, and cold to her bones, thinking that she would never be warm again in her life, Malvina piled the three thin blankets on top of the bed, got into her sweater and overcoat and, with her gloves still on, she crawled into bed. Ten minutes later she removed her gloves and overcoat, five minutes after that her sweater, and eventually, little by little, she took everything off the bed except for the very first blanket that they had given her. The blankets, it turned out, were of pure wool and, although they looked painfully thin, each one was intensely and sufficiently warm.