

## About the Author:

Geraldine (Gerry Scherr) was born in Norfolk, Virginia.

Her mother's family lived in the Bronx, New York. After her father served in the U.S. Coast Guard, the family went to live with her mother's family in the Bronx. Her grandmother, Cecilia, lived in what today would be called a "row house," Gerry received her B.A. at Queens College, New York, majoring in history and secondary education. After her marriage and three children, Gerry went to the University of Maryland where she earned an M.A. in Special Education. Gerry has always loved teaching teenagers; however, when she retired from Prince George's School System she returned to teaching as an assistant aide in Fairfax County. Gerry has lived in New York, Connecticut, Maryland, and for the last fifteen years in Vienna, Virginia.



## Tales to Retell

Authored by: Geraldine (Gerry) Scherr

Sometimes my grandchildren react to something I say and then a story begins to take shape. Today's society does not, generally speaking, get together like families of a hundred years ago, telling stories or bringing up experiences that different members had over the years. We all seem to live such busy lives that it takes a truly overwhelming "happening" to bring everyone together such as a bar or bat mitzvah, wedding, graduation, Thanksgiving, or Passover.

I do not remember when I was speaking of my maternal grandmother to my grandchildren; however, they could not believe the following story as told to me by my mother and aunt.

My grandmother, Cecilia, arrived in America after her husband, who had left Poland-Russia (depending on which country invaded the small villages), when he received ship fare from his uncle to come to America. After two years my grandmother arrived with their eldest daughter, Lillian, about twelve years of age. My grandparents were a handsome couple who had four children; however, my grandfather died several months before their fourth child was born. My grandmother and her eldest daughter supported

the family. My grandmother spoke Yiddish and also spoke and understood a little English.

My grandmother was a cook for weddings and bar mitzvahs and left the apartment very early and returned later in the day. She had been asked by a distant relative/friend if they could use her bath tub to store some bottles during the day over a few weeks. My grandmother was a kind, obliging woman and told them they could use the tub. She gave them a key to the apartment, and they told her if anyone came around asking to come in and use her bathroom, she was to say that it was occupied.

On this particular day, my grandmother came home early and found that the door to her apartment had been broken down. She went in, looked around and then went into the bathroom. She saw many bottles all empty of whatever had been in them. When these relatives/friends returned later in the day, she told them to look at her door. They ran into the bathroom, saw the empty bottles, looked and smelled the drain, and exclaimed, "It's all gone." What was gone? These men had made whiskey. If caught they would have been arrested and put in jail along with my grandmother. My grandmother did not understand what was going on. Her language was Yiddish.

These men had been using her bath tub to store the whiskey and filled the bottles when they were ready to sell it to customers each day. This was the era of PROHIBITION. Making, buying, and selling whiskey was against the law. What did my grandmother know or understand of this law about selling liquor?

After my aunt and a neighbor told her about the problems she could have, my grandmother told these men that they could never use her apartment for anything and took back the key she had given them. She was being taken advantage of by these people. My grandmother got nothing out of this but the cost of replacing the door. My grandchildren could not believe that this story actually took place. Prohibition was a fearsome time as the FBI was involved and violence was always possible.