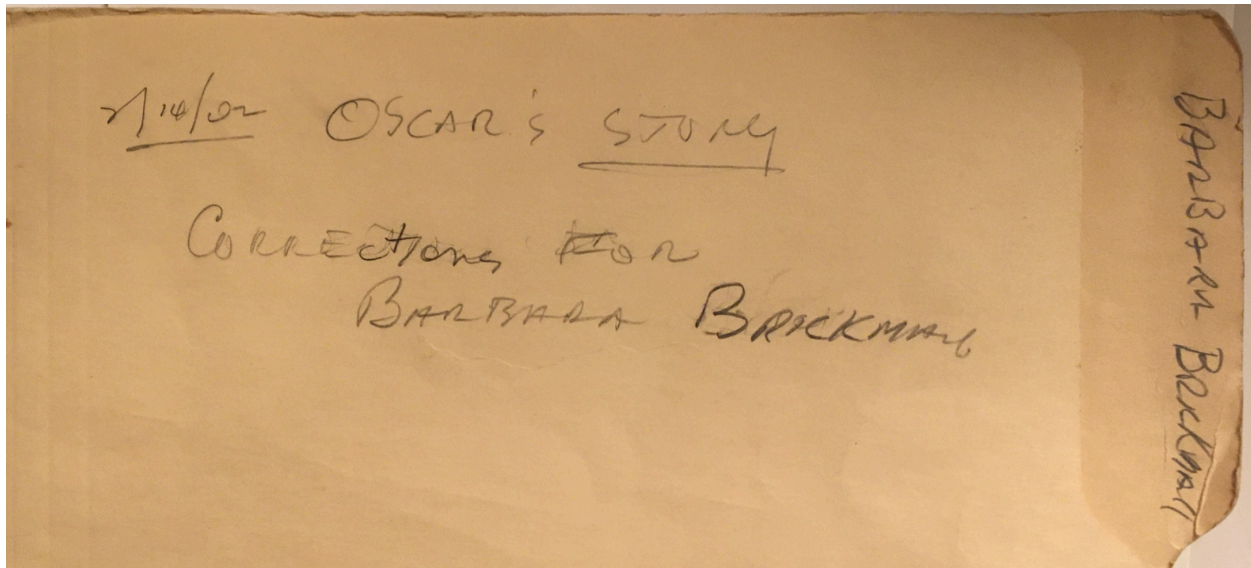
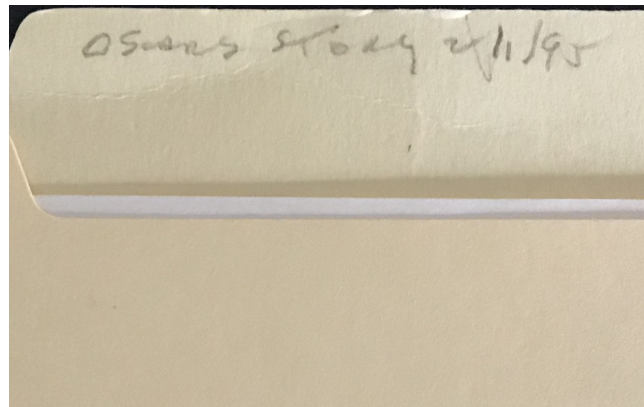
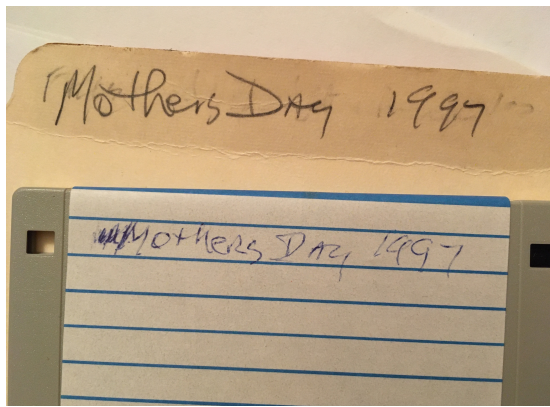


The Making of *Oscar's Story*

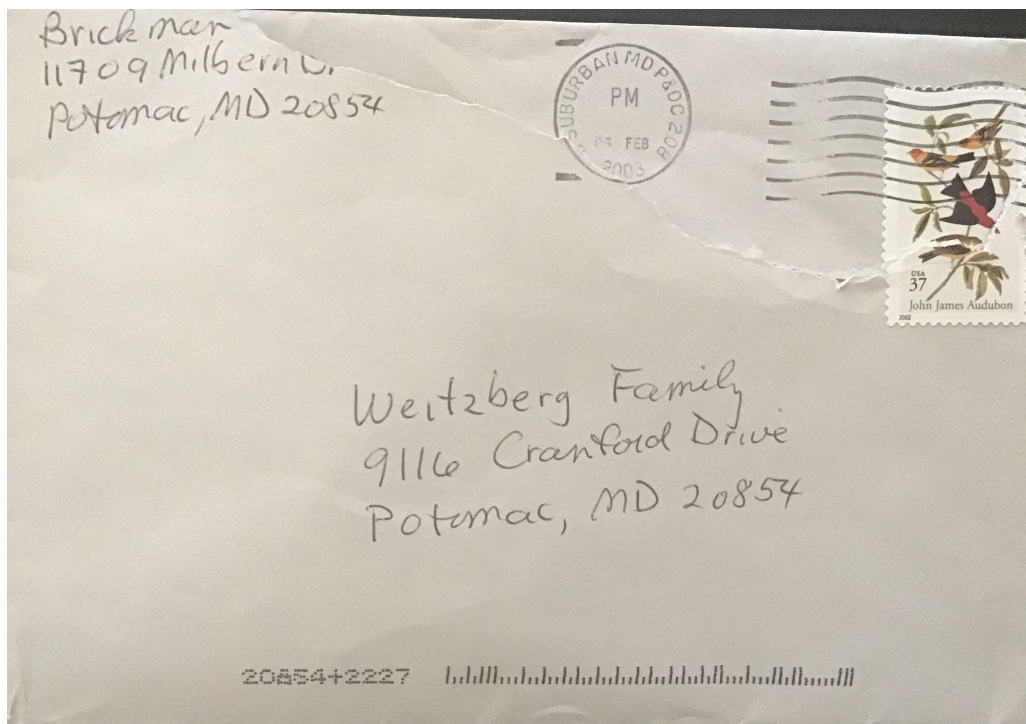
by Vicki Mechner, née Weitzberg

“What’s this?” Wayne asked me, showing me a black metal carrying case he had just found in the garage while reorganizing it. I didn’t recognize the case but was curious to see what was in it. The case was locked and we didn’t have a key, so Wayne forced it open with a screwdriver. Inside I found a black three-ring binder, five manila folders and two 3.5-inch, hard “floppy disks.”

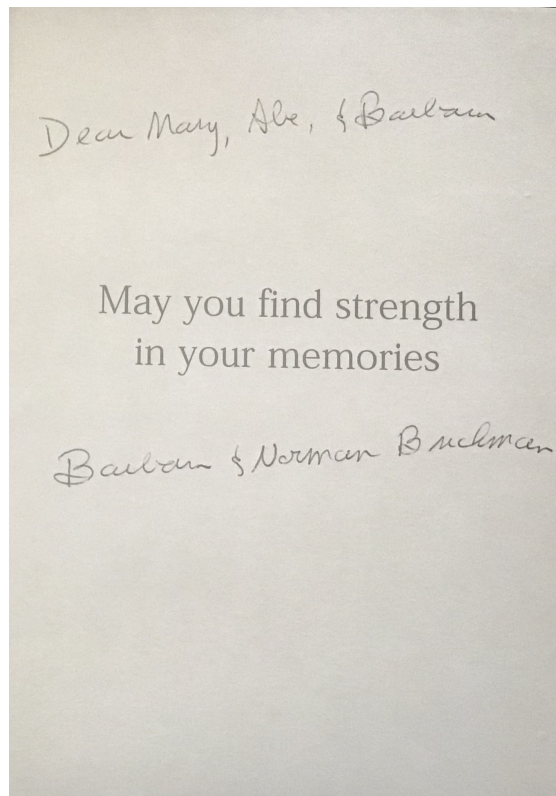
Inside the binder were 19 pages of *Oscar's Story*. Three of the file folders were labeled in Oscar C. Weitzberg’s hand. The floppy disk labeled “Mothers Day 1997” likely contains the Word file that Mary Weitzberg transcribed from the tape recording.



I knew that my dad had wanted to write about his life and was once interviewed by a high school student whom he knew from his congregation. But I had never heard of Barbara Brickman. Might she have been helping him put his story on paper? ... That evening, inspired by Wayne’s work in the garage, I went into my office closet and grabbed a handful of cards from a shoe box I had not touched in over 13 years. As I read through dozens of condolence cards that my mother had received in February 2003, I found this envelope:



Inside was a condolence card . . .



Inside of which was a note from Barbara Brickman that explained a lot:

Dear Abe, Barbara, and Mary,
It was with great sadness that I learned of Oscar's death. In so many ways he held a special place in the Har Shalom community, of which I am a part. For many years Oscar was the person I'd patiently wait to hear from during a Shabbat morning discussion. After having people ramble on about a given topic from all sorts of points of view, I and others could coalesce on Oscar & finally stand up and eloquently and succinctly express the most rational and intelligent opinion that reflected his own

intelligence, experience, and long-life perspective. He was very much venerated for the combination of his age, sharp mind, and wisdom.

A few years ago, he and I planned on writing his memoirs from tapes he would create. We got started, but alas, too late, because after several months Mary's illness and then his own interfered and we weren't able to go on with the project. For me, it was an honor and a privilege to participate in this endeavor and I'm very sorry we weren't able to see it through.

I think his files should contain both the tape recordings and the edited, written narratives that I made from the tapes.

However, I would be happy to provide on CDs copies of both, if you'd like.

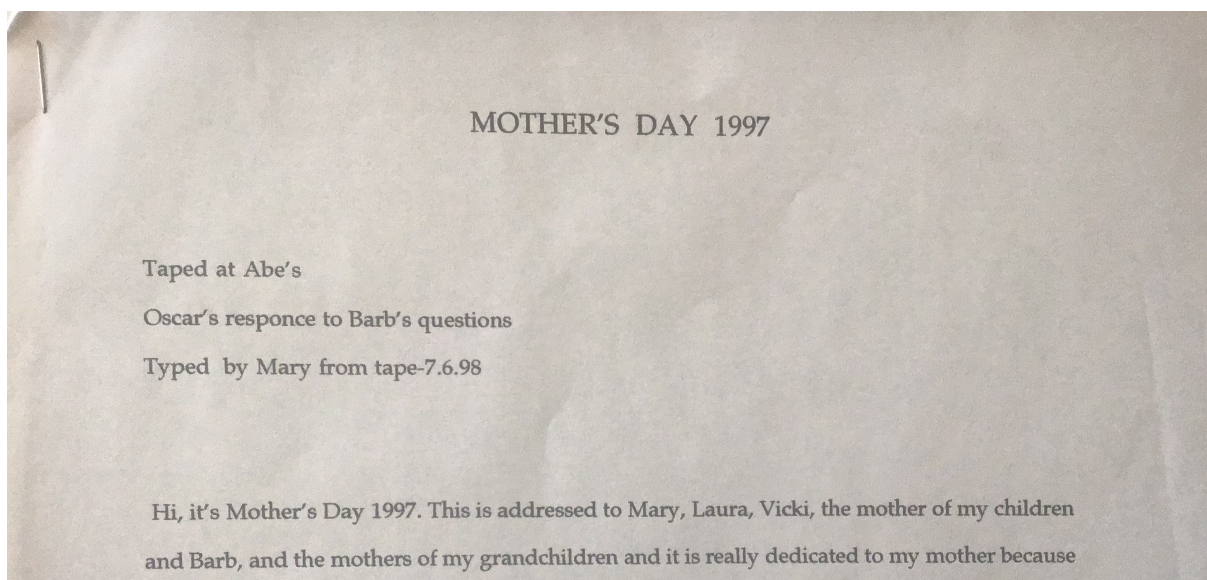
Even after a full and long life, it is never the right time to lose ^{your} loved one. And so I would like to ^{express} sympathy to you in your loss and note that Oscar's death is a great loss to many of us in the community as well.

Sincerely,
Barbara Brickman

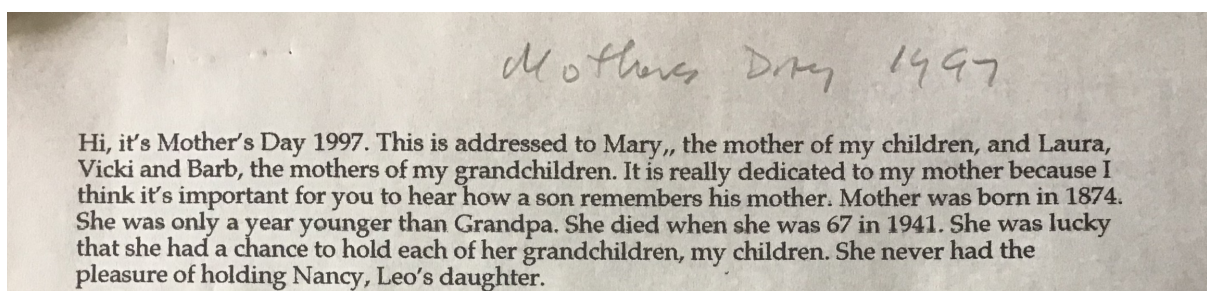
It was easy to find the Brickmans' phone number. Barbara told me she had been excited to work on Oscar's memoirs but didn't remember many of the details. The next morning, she phoned to say that her husband, Norman, had found all of the project's Word and audio files and would send them to me.

Norm's files included multiple drafts of four of *Oscar's Story's* five sections and the four audio files from which Barbara transcribed them. She had retyped the fifth section from a print-out that OCW had given her. The files' creation dates — all between late November 2001 and early March 2002 — provided valuable clues into the evolution of *Oscar's Story*: Here is what I've been able to figure out, along with some evidence for my conclusions:

On November 21, 2001, Norman created digital audio files (.mp3) of two tapes that OCW had recorded on April 4, 1999 and November 16, 2001. The latter tape opens with what sounds like a message to the Brickmans; Barbara transcribed both tapes by November 25, numbering them (in the sequence in which OCW had recorded them) as #1 and #2. Then Norman converted OCW's "Mothers Day 1997" audiotape to .mp3 on December 16. One week later Barbara numbered it #3 when she began transcribing it. . . . and stopped after half a page. That tape was more than twice as long as the others and took her until January 8, 2002 to finish transcribing it. Between then and March 3, the Weitzbergs corrected the spelling of some names and made other changes indicated in the "Corrections" folder dated February 14); the draft found in the binder matches the file dated March 3. Having listened to the .mp3 in order to fine-tune that draft still further, I appreciate how hard Barbara must have worked . . . and how hard MW must have worked when she transcribed the same audiotape almost four years earlier, in July, 1998!



The file folder titled "Mothers Day 1997" contained a later revision, made by the Weitzbergs not long after mid-January 1999, according to the dates on the back of the (recycled) pages:

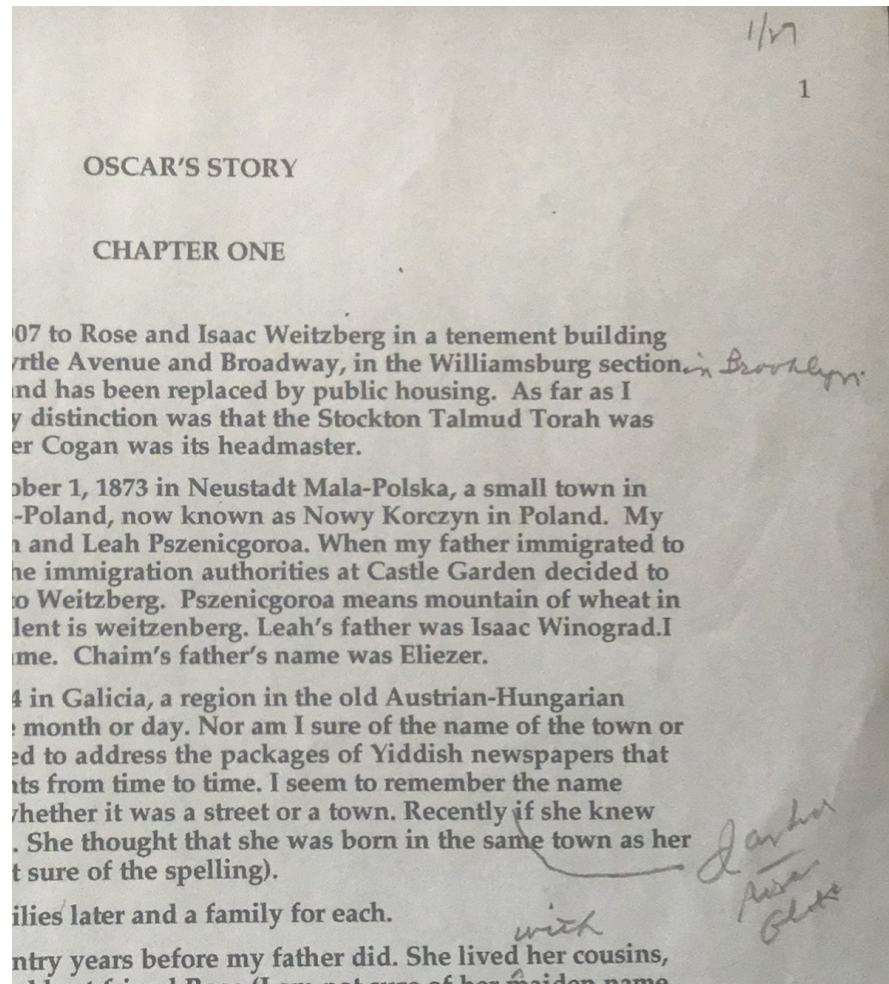


If only Barbara Brickman had had access to either of those drafts, on disk or on paper, how much time and effort she could have saved! Some of the names of people and places are particularly hard to understand when listening.

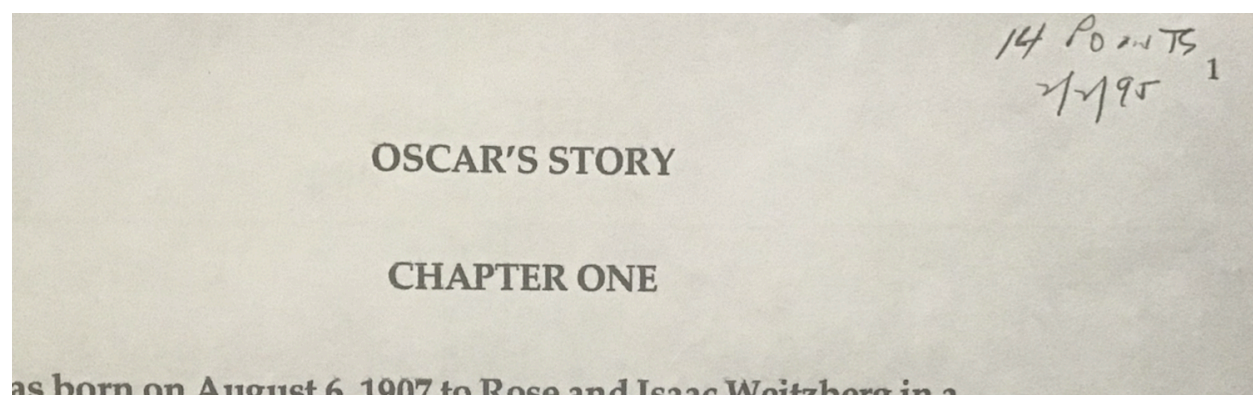
Three sections down, two to go...

As you can see on page 1 of this document, OCW had begun writing his story by early 1995. Inside his 2/1/95 "Oscar's Story" folder were a Foreword and two copies of this "Chapter One," printed in different sizes on the backs of forms and receipts bearing dates from November and December 1994. (Yes, the Weitzbergs were into recycling way back then!)

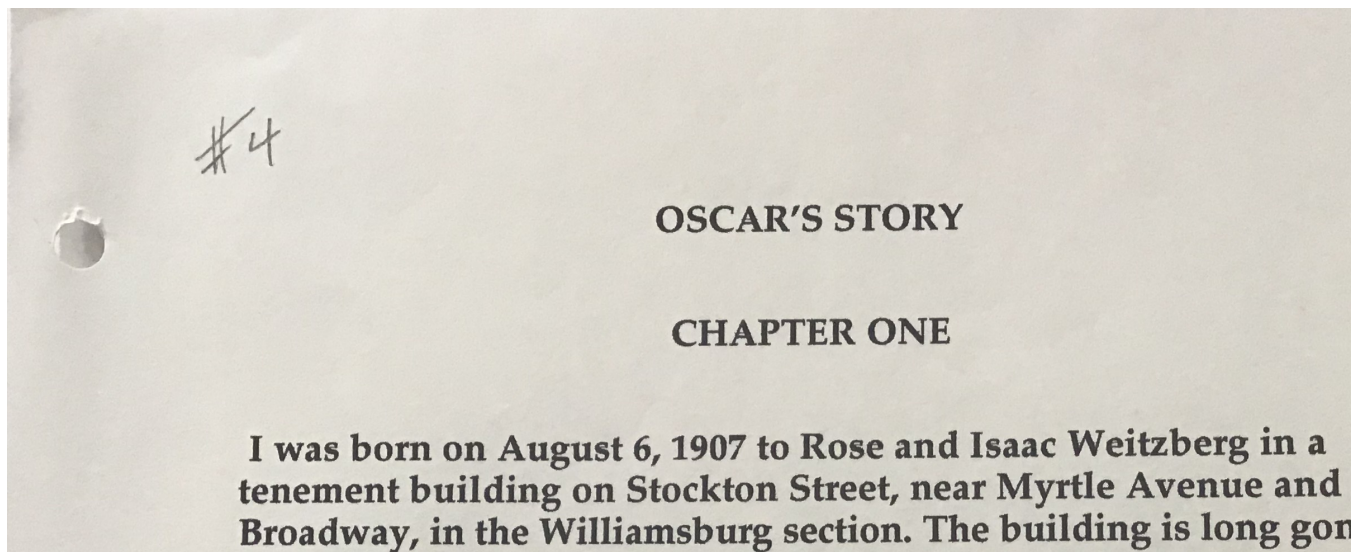
Few of the annotations that OCW and MW made on this January 27th draft were incorporated into subsequent drafts. Many have been incorporated in *Oscar's Story* – 2021.



This early draft shown above was printed on the Weitzbergs' ink-jet printer, in a serif font that resembles the Times New Roman I'm using in this document and printed at 11 points (this size). Five days later, OCW penciled his preference for using larger type in his *Oscar's Story* project:



Did Oscar and Mary number this section of *Oscar's Story* #4 in their drafts and in the binder because Barbara Brickman had already numbered the previous sections #1– #3? I don't know for sure, but here is proof that it was their decision:



There it sat in the binder, in black and white, in an in-between size, ~13 points. All the other sections were laser-printed in a large sans-serif font (**12 point Tahoma**) that neither Weitzberg ever used.

According to the archived files that Norman Brickman sent me, the Word document titled "#4 My Beginnings.doc" "was copied from a typed original. There was no taped version." Barbara retyped it on February 10, 2002, four days *before* the date on OCW's "Corrections for Barbara Brickman" folder. When she did so, in the Brickmans' **Tahoma** font, Barbara changed the title from the original "Oscar's Story, Section One" to "#4 My Parents" and saved the file as "#4 My Beginnings." However, as shown on page 6, the Weitzbergs placed a print-out of their own file in the binder rather than Barbara's file. Also on February 10, Barbara copied OCW's Foreword into a new Word .doc, which she saved as Forward.doc. Why the Weitzbergs put Barbara's version of the Foreword into the binder but not her version of section #4 remains a mystery, at least for now.

A few days before Barbara typed those two sections, OCW recorded another tape, on February 5, 2002. As with the "Flashbacks to the Rockaways" tape he had recorded the previous November, this audio file was clearly taped for someone. Now we know that it was for Barbara Brickman, who transcribed it on March 9 and formatted it on March 10. Titled "Back to New York," it was included in the binder, laser-printed in Tahoma, as the final section of *Oscar's Story*.

Which brings me to the question that has tormented me ever since I first read the draft in the binder: As I assemble *Oscar's Story* for the family, am I obligated to follow the sequence presented in the binder? The first three sections were numbered in the order in which the Brickmans received the audiotapes. The last was numbered #5 after the Weitzbergs had numbered "Chapter One" as #4.

#3 Mothers Day

Hi! It's Mothers Day 1997. This is addressed to Mary, Laura, Vicki, and Bob. the mother of my children and the mothers of my grandchildren. It is really dedicated to my mother because I think it is important for us to hear how a son remembers his mother. Mother was born in 1874. She was only a year younger than Grandpa, my dad. She died when she was 67 in 1941. She was

Dad's Tape

#2 Flashbacks to the Rockaways

November 16, 2001

The first flashback is the event earlier this week, because on Monday, Nov 12 we were shocked to learn that flight 587 American Airlines had dropped from the sky and crashed into houses in Bel Harbor. The center of the accident was on Beach 131st Street and Newport Avenue. This was really a shock because last December Mary and I were guests of Estelle Fleischer who lives in the 6th house on the corner of Newport Avenue and Beach 131st street.

#1

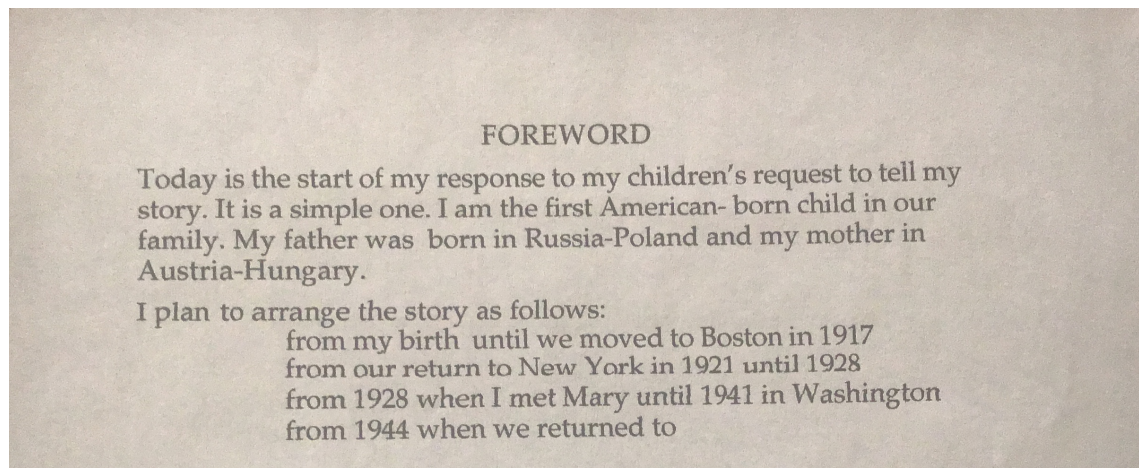
Dad's Tape

April 16, 1999, we're sitting around in our living room and we have the pleasure of Francis and Vickie who joined us for the weekend. We've had dinner and Frances was looking at a Time Magazine issue that is talking about the great minds of the last hundred years and I had seen it. And there was a piece on Albert Einstein with a quotation of Jay

Barbara Brickman
Editor's
version

7

Even though it is clear that the Weitzbergs approved of the sequence of sections in the binder, I prefer to follow the sequence that OCW outlined so clearly in his early-1995 Foreword, the first or second document we have related to the start of his *Oscar's Story* project:



The missing final word (“Neponsit”) appears in all subsequent drafts, including the one in the binder.

To conclude, here is a summary of the sections of *Oscar's Story – 2021*, my reconstruction of his original. I arranged them according to when the reported events took place rather than when OCW recorded his reminiscences about them:

| SECTION OF <i>OSCAR'S STORY</i> | YEARS COVERED IN SECTION | DATE AUTHORED BY OCW | DATE COPIED OR TRANSCRIBED |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Foreword | | Jan. 1995 | Feb 10, 2002 |
| My Beginnings | 1873 – 1925 | Jan. 27, 1995 | Feb 10, 2002 |
| Mother's Day 1997 | 1874 – 1941 | May 11, 1997 | July 6, 1998 (MW) and Dec 23, 2001 – Jan 8, 2002 (BB) |
| Back to New York | 1919 – 1921 | Feb. 5, 2002 | Feb 9, 2002 |
| Flashback to the Rockaways | 1941 and 2001 | Nov. 16, 2001 | Nov 25, 2001 |
| The Blabber, a Porkpie Hat, and McCarthyism All Around | 1953 – 1999 | Apr. 16, 1999 | Nov 24, 2001 |

When I am courageous enough to dig into the half-dozen file drawers and file boxes of Oscar and Mary Weitzberg's papers that are stored in my basement, I will look for additional information that might help fill in the gaps in Oscar's story.

In the meantime, I hope that both Oscar and Mary would approve of *Oscar's Story – 2021*. I welcome suggestions from knowledgeable readers for correcting/improving it.