



## Noble Institution Of 'The Uncle' Has Virtually Vanished

BY VERA MILLER

**G**ENERATIONS of Jewish children will reach adulthood never knowing the luxury of The Uncle. His relationship to the family was never quite explicit. But in the house where he lived, there was a neat cubed bedroom that reminded you of 'yesterday' many years ago, and the furnishings and placement of the things that were in it and belonged to The Uncle never changed, nor were they ever moved to other places in the room.

*If there was a family gathering it was, of course, understood that the Uncle would be there. During the festivities, it was fascinating to watch him tap his cane to the rhythm of the traditional dances. The cane; if leaned sideways next to his favorite chair, was a reminder to the child who disobeyed orders, and the neighbor downstairs knew silence was requested when it was tapped on the bathroom radiator.*

It was The Uncle who kept tradition alive during holiday gatherings, as everything was done to receive his approval. And at the gathering at the dinner, the cane was a part of it. Perched on the corner of the table; when The Uncle reached for it, that was the signal for the table to be cleared.

### GENERATION PASSES

*Who was The Uncle? Sometimes he was a bonafide uncle, but more often than not, he was an aged member of a family and had been taken in to live—for a while—until things settled or until he could contact his close relatives. As a matter of fact, sometimes things didn't quite settle in that generation at all, and grand-nephews grew to know him.*

Baby sitters not having come into fashion way back when, it was The Uncle(s) who took pride in this job. Theatre owners got to know The Uncle as the kids ran up to him after the afternoon movie. The children would run and halt to a skid in front of him as the youngest of the group would reach for a gnarled hand . . . and the walk home would begin.

### TIME OF ADVICE

*The walk home was the time of philosophical advice and the children knew they had a willing ear for their problems and often times the controversy between child and parents was resolved by The Uncle, who would present both sides of the story in such a manner that all was peace and quiet.*

However, if Uncle got himself in Dutch, it was a mad scramble to be the loudest in proclaiming his

innocence, for generally The Uncle would be late for dinner at least twice a week. Then he would enter the kitchen through the back door with his head held high, his cane tapping noisier than usual, and with great flourish announce that it was not right that the children be kept waiting for their dinner as it would no doubt injure their health, in which case he would hold the parents personally responsible. Dinner would be spent quietly while he extolled the manner which he raised his family.

*In the era of today's Young Suburbia, children will never know the delights of taking their problem to The Uncle and sitting on a cement stoop in the cool twilight of a Fall evening, while they would have him examine their problems; and at the same time, reach out with the toe of their laced ankle shoes to push the fallen leaves so that The Uncle could assemble the brown earthlings one by one into a neat stack with the tip of his cane.*