

## Chapter 3

### Sahnyeh Saldawt Raised My Father's Father

The fourth generation on my father's side which proceeded mine is not as well known to me as that on my mother's. The reason is that my father's father, my paternal grandfather Yahnkel (Yakob, Jacob) Markman, also known in Nemirov with the qualifying epithet "Bahlaboos [householder, head of a family, boss, master] was orphaned of both mother and father when he was a very young child. He did not remember his mother or his father. Consequently, he did not relate any stories about them for me to remember.

They had died during a cholera epidemic, perhaps in the late 1840's or early 1850's while my grandfather was probably still an infant. He was born in a little village, a shteytl, the name of which to me sounded like "P'tchehreh." I do not know where it is or was located, probably not far from Nemirov.

Yahnkel Markman was raised by an uncle whose name was Sahnyeh [Nethanel in Hebrew, Nathaniel is the English equivalent] for whom my father was named. The epithet "Saldawht" [Soldat, that is, soldier] was also appended to Sahnyeh's name, because he had been a "Nyikohlai'evske sawldawt." He served in the Russian army for twenty-five years during the reign of the Tsar Nicholas I.

I do not know if Sahnyeh Sawldawt was Yahnkel's father's brother, in which case his family name would also have been Markman, or whether Sahnyeh was his mother's brother. If Sahnyeh's was the latter, then the family name would not have been Markman.

Sahnyeh Sawldawt must have already been a married man when he undertook to raise my orphaned grandfather. It is interesting that my maternal great grandmother, Libeh, my grandmother Sooreh Dintsye's grandmother, five generations before me, witnessed the kidnapping of Jewish boys for army service, beginning in the late 1820's. My grandfather's uncle Sahnyeh could very likely have been one of the boys my great great grandmother saw carried off.

It is fitting that I say a word or two about the inhuman custom of separating young children from their parents in order to carry out the Tsarist policy of converting the Jews who had fallen into the clutches of the Russians as a result of the partition of Poland at the end of the eighteenth century. It may be worthwhile for

you to look up Michael Stanislawski's, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews*, published by the Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1983, and learn about this from a dispassionate and scholarly Jewish historian.

The prime purpose of this policy was to convert the Jews to Christianity by placing young children into "cantons" where they could be indoctrinated and converted before being officially conscripted into the army when they reached the age of twenty-one, the legal age of conscription for non-Jews as well. And once inducted into the army they were required to serve for twenty-five years. Some of the kidnapped boys were even less than ten years old and had not yet lost their milk teeth, though the law said they should be between twelve and fifteen. My great great grandmother Libeh's description of the boys crying for their mothers and wetting themselves and fouling themselves in their own excrement is not an exaggeration.

I have no idea when Sahnyeh Sawldawt was born, but he was certainly at least forty-five years old when he was mustered out of the Russian army and found his way back to Nemirov where he may have been kidnapped for the army while still a child. But this conjecture on my part. There he married and very likely already had children of his own when he "adopted" his nephew, my paternal grandfather, Yahnkel Markman. I mentioned earlier in this account, that my grandfather remembered serfdom. The serfs were freed in 1861 when he must have still been a boy, probably not yet in his teens at most. This would place his date of birth about 1850, perhaps a few years earlier. His parents probably died at during the first part of the decade of 1850's. At that time, Sahnyeh Sawldawt must have been at least forty-five years old, and recently mustered out of the army. This would imply that he was born during the first decade of the nineteenth century, perhaps about 1805 at the earliest or 1810 at the latest. He must then have been conscripted into the army about 1830 at the latest or just before when he would have been about 21 years old, the legal age for conscription. It may very well be that he was not kidnapped as a child and so escaped the horrors of the life of a "cantonist" living with a peasant family and subjected to forced conversion to Christianity. When this policy was instituted not long after the accession to the throne of Nicholas I in 1825, Sahnyeh was about 15 years old, if he was born in 1810 or 20 years old if born in 1805. Therefore, very likely, he was among the recruits the Jewish community were required to select for conscription. If this is the case, Sahnyeh was already twenty-one years old when he was one of the unfortunate Jewish boys picked to fill the quota of recruits the Jewish community of Nemirov had to hand over to the military authorities.

In fine, I must say that my father never knew his paternal grandparents, nor did he ever know the uncle who raised his father, Sahnyeh Sawldawt for whom he was named when he was born in Nemirov in 1885/1886. I also must add that I never learned if my grandfather Yahnkel Markman had any brothers or sisters or any other family at all. He was a great story teller, and I have no doubt whatsoever that had he had any siblings, uncles or aunts or other family, I would have heard something about them from him. He always referred to himself, as did other members of the

family, that he was a "kahl'iker yoosim" [a full or complete orphan], that is orphaned of both mother and father.



## Chapter 4

### My Father's Mother's Family in the Nineteenth Century

The information I have regarding my father's maternal grandparents, though scant, is still far more than that of his paternal grandparents. His father, Yahnkel Markman, as already related above, never knew his parents. My father's maternal grandfather, my great grandfather was Doovid (David) Krahsnyahnsky, for whom I was also named when I was born in 1911. My father remembered that his one and only grandfather did not speak with a Nemirover accent, but that he spoke "zeyher far'tsoigen, vi a litfahk" [very tightly enunciated like a Litvak]. I do not know the name of his wife, my father's maternal grandmother and my great grandmother . It may have been Rookhel [Rachel], judging from the fact that three of my paternal cousins were named Rookhel.

Nekhawmeh's daughter, her firstborn and also my great grandparents' first grandchild, my cousin Rookhel, Rachel Cooper, was born in Nemirov probably not long after the turn of the century. I have a photograph, taken about 1906/1907, of some of the newly arrived siblings including my father [Sahnyeh], his brother Eedel, his younger sister Goldeh, his older sister Nekhawmeh along with her husband Yoil [Joel Cooper] and their child Rookhel who looks about four or five years old . Jean Markman, my late cousin Irving Markman's wife, gave me this picture. Irving was the youngest of Eedel's three children. Rookhel's presence on the photograph would imply that my great grandmother, Rookhel, had died before Nekhawmeh's daughter was born about 1902 or 1903.

Doovid and Rookhel Krahsnyahnsky were not natives of Nemirov, but had immigrated there from " di Liteh," that is from some where in Lithuania during a time of famine. Doovid's especially marked Litvak accent which seemed so foreign to my father when he was a child, consisted mainly in the vowels; for example, Poilish becomes Peylish (Polish), broit becomes breyt (bread), pit'ter becomes poot'ter (butter), feess becomes foos (foot). Also Litvaks cannot pronounce the "sh" sound as in fish which becomes fiss. They also have trouble with the "ch" in English as in

Chicago which becomes Tsikahgeh. The Hebrew "bahrookh ahtah" [blessed be you], becomes "booreekh atoo" in Nemirov and "bohrookh ataw" in the Litvak accent.

In fine, on the basis of what my great grandfather sounded like to my father, in addition to the fact that he was said to have come from "di Lite," I would venture to guess that he originally came from was somewhere not far from the Baltic Sea. This region in medieval times was part of the kingdom of Lithuania. Later it became part of Poland and finally, at the end of the eighteenth century, was taken over by Russia. This was the area of Poland where the greater majority of the Jews had lived since the fourteenth century. They had come there on the invitation of the Polish king Casimir II (or was it I?) from the Rhineland in Germany bringing with them the Yiddish language. The Tsar designated this region, which also included the Ukraine, as the "Pale of Settlement." This was the only area in imperial Russia where Jews were permitted to reside, except for certain classes, one such as craftsmen and those merchants of the "per'viny'eh geeldyeh kopets" class. This is what Russian title sounded to me when I heard it said by my mother and father. In other words my Litvak great grandparents could legally move from "di Lite" to Nemirov for both were within the boundaries of the "Pale of Settlement."

I have no notion of what my Litvak great grandparents looked like. My father's descriptions of them are very vague for he was still a young boy when they died. As a matter of fact, I do not remember him ever telling me anything about his grandmother. All that he ever said about his grandfather was that he had a strong Litvak accent.

At any rate, Doovid and Rookhel Krahsnyahnsky arrived in Nemirov from where Litvak Yiddish was spoken. They probably had been recently married for my grandmother Bahsyeh [Bahtyah in Hebrew], their oldest child was born in Nemirov. My mother always used to joke about this saying that my father was a real Yankee, even his parents were native born Nemirover. They also had two other children: a daughter whom my father always referred to as his "meemeh Toobeh [Aunt Toba]; and a son whom my father always called "fet'ter Avrum Eetskhok" [Avram Itskhak in Hebrew, that is, uncle Abram Isaac in English]. My father always recalled his aunt Toobeh and uncle Avrum Eetskhok with the same terse anecdotes and details which he never elaborated. I know no more than what I relate here. On the other hand, I did have some contact with one of his aunt Toobeh's sons and a granddaughter of his uncle Avrum Eetskhok.

Di meemeh Toobeh was an unfortunate woman in that her husband, Froikeh [Ephraim in Hebrew], whose family name I do not recall and probably never heard mentioned, emigrated to America and never sent for her and their children. How many children they had I do not know, nor did I ever know. I always heard that "der fet'ter Froikeh" went to America and left Toobeh in Nemirov and that he never sent for her nor did he ever come back. As a result of this abandonment, she remained an ageena [grass widow] all her life.

Froikeh actually did not disappear and may have kept in touch with his wife and children back in Nemirov. My mother and father knew of his whereabouts and activities during the early 1900's. If I ever saw him it must have been while I was still an infant or a small child. What I know of him is only from the stories I heard from my father who considered him an eccentric, not normal. He would sometimes comment that Froikeh was undependable, without a conscience, a man who abandoned his wife and children, not out of malice, but because he was always immersed in one labor union cause or another. My mother agreed with my father's opinion of his fet'ter Froikeh, but at the same time she admired him because of his fervor on behalf of "the working class," principally the Jewish tailors in the sweat shops of New York.

The greater majority, perhaps near 100 %, of the workers in the "needle trade" in New York during the first decades of this century were Yiddish-speaking Jews from the Russian Pale of Settlement – Ukraine, Bessarabia, Bukovina, White Russia, Lithuania and Poland. One need but read the works of Jacob Riis or Hapgood Hutchins to learn what the life of the sweat-shop worker was like. As a child of fourteen my mother worked about twelve hours a day in a sweat shop on Delancey Street on the Lower East Side. There was a great deal of agitation among the workers and several unions were organized, not without resistance from "di bawhs'es" [the bosses]. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union was founded in 1900 by the merging of seven local cloak makers' unions. The men's tailors' union was organized about this time too as the Amalgamated Garment Workers Union. The whole of that decade, especially the years between 1909 and 1911 was a period of bitter strikes and reprisals on the part of the owners against the workers.

Apparently Froikeh was an activist during these tumultuous times and perhaps the most pervasive reason why he never could turn his mind to his obligation to bring his wife and children to America. It seems he was always involved with transcendental matters which for him were far more important than his personal needs. My mother would always add when speaking of Froikeh "ahz awhl'eh toog hawt ehr gehahrget a bawss" [that daily he killed a boss]. According to my mother, Froikeh was one of the "grinders fin di leenkeh yoonyen" [founders of the politically "left" union], that is the union that was socialist oriented. I do not know which union he was in part responsible for organizing, the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union or the Algamated Garment Workers' Union.

His union activities all date from before 1911, the year I was born. He had probably come to America about 1900 or even before. As a matter of fact a Nemirover "lawnstlait" society or club had been founded about 1880 and was known as "der awlter farai'en" (the old society or club). In other words, there had been a movement of immigrants from Nemirov to New York long before the pogrom in Kishinev in 1903 which impelled Jews to leave Russia, not only from the Ukraine, but also from the rest of the Pale of Settlement.

The only other information I heard about fet'ter Froikeh was that he left New York, just when I do not know, and that he went to live somewhere in Virginia. I suppose that the tailors' life interminably bent over a sewing machine in the factories which he had devoted himself to unionizing and for which he had sacrificed his family, was not for him. I never learned what he did for a living in Virginia. Also, I never heard him mentioned in later years. He became a vague memory to my parents by the time I was an adult.

My father's uncle Ahvroom Eetskhok, the brother of my grandmother Bahsyeh, was a carpenter. He too was born in Nemirov as were his sisters. I never heard any details about him at all, except that he was a very strong man and that "ehr hawt gekehnt awfessen a pit kahrtoflyes" [that he could devour a "pit" of potatoes. "Pit" is a Russian measure of weight, the equivalent of which in pounds or kilograms I do not know. But used as a metaphor, I suppose it was like saying that he could eat a barrel of potatoes -- an inordinately large appetite.]

My father had a cousin in this country whom I met once or twice when I was a child of perhaps ten to twelve years old. I am not certain, but he was probably the son of the meemeh Toobeh. He looked almost as if he were my father's brother, younger and slighter in build. He was alone in the United States -- no brothers or sisters, only his cousins, my father and his siblings. He was not as broad shouldered as my father, but he had the same brown curly hair, the same deep set dark brown eyes, the same thin nose. Unfortunately, I do not recall his name, and there is no one left for me to ask.

When he first came to see us he was still a bachelor. Not long after, however, he married a girl from eastern Europe, not from Nemirov. His bride, judging from the picture he gave us and which must still be among photographs I inherited when my mother and father died, was less than beautiful. She was extremely thin, had bobbed hair in the latest 1920's "flapper" style, looked wane and frightened. She too was all alone in America, and her expression betrayed that she was lonely and forlorn. She awakened pity, a real "nebekh" [nebbish, the English neologism for the Yiddish word].

My father had a another cousin of whom I had some notice, a son of Ahvruhm Eetskhok who had emigrated to London sometime before 1905, the year my father came to America via London. I no longer remember his first name, but I do his family name. In Nemirov it had been Krahsnyahnsky which was changed for him on arrival in London to Cohen. My father visited him in London where he remained for a short while, about six months. He was surprised to see what a poor life the Jews of London had. An entire family in one room heated by coal in an open fireplace. I do not know if his cousin lived like that, but my father could not wait to leave London for "di gawldeneh medeehneh" [the golden land].

Many years later, I do not remember how it came about, but I was in contact by correspondence with the daughter of my father's cousin. This was during the war years in the early 1940's when I was teaching at the university of Panamá. Her name



was originally Rose Cohen which she had changed to Zenka Bartek. I imagine, though I have no proof of this, that she too had been named for her Litvak great grandmother Rookhel (my great grandmother also) which became Rose in English.

At any rate, to get back to my second cousin Rose/Zenka Krasnyanksy/Cohen/Bartek in London. Her mother's maiden name was Bartek and so she chose that. She wrote me that her mother had been born, somewhere in Eastern Yiddish speaking Europe, but where exactly I do not recall. Zenka had a flair for literature, was a published writer, I believe, and also a poetess. We carried on a correspondence for a year or two but I learned very little about her family. Her interests seemed to be mainly literary or current world problems or introspective revelations about her own inner life and interests.

I did learn that she had a brother who had tuberculosis. I do not remember if he had died or not. But that he had TB did not surprise me when I recalled how appalled my father was when he saw how his cousin and so many of the other Jews were living in London when he was there in 1905. I did not give any thought to the fact that the life my father had described was from the beginning of the century and it was at least thirty-five years later. The lot of the working class Jews in London must have improved by then, as it certainly did in the United States.

At any rate I remember her letters as being extremely well-written and thought provoking, really literary pieces. She married a struggling English poet whose family name was Porteus and sent me a photograph of the two of them. This was 1941 or 1942, and she looked as liberated as any young girl in 1992 -- short hair with bangs over her forehead, a smile revealing large squarish front teeth -- an adaptation to the environment I suppose for she had typical English buck teeth. Porteus was clinging to her. He looked frail and other worldly, almost wraith-like, a real nebekh. I lost track of Zenka Bartek during the war years while I was still in Panamá, and it never occurred to me in 1968 nor when Malvina and I were in London in 1972 and again in 1977 to try to find her, something I now regret.

Thus it appears that in comparison with my mother's nineteenth-century forbears, I know very little of my father's largely because my grandfather Yahnkel Markman was an orphan and my father had only one set of grandparents. I have no way of finding out the names of Yahnkel's parents, other than by conjecture based on the names of my father's sisters and brothers: Nekhawmeh [Nekhamah in Hebrew]; Eedel or Yeedl [Yehudah in Hebrew]; Maryam, my father Sahnyeh, Goldeh, Moische, Rayz'yeh. More about my father's brothers and sisters later.

It is possible that Nekawmeh was named for her father's mother and the Yeedl was named for his father's father. In other words, these could possibly have been the names of my great grandparents, the mother and father of Yahnkel Markman. But this is a wild guess, for the names of the first two of my father's siblings could just as easily have been derived from my grandmother Bahsyeh's grandparents, the parents of Doovid and Rookhel Krahsnyahnky.

**Chapter 4**

***My Father's Mother's Family***