

## Chapter 6

### My Maternal Grandfather

According to the story I always heard, my mother's father was not born in Nemirov, but in a small town, a *shteytl* always referred to as Zhornish. I never learned exactly where Zhornish is located, or if it still exists today.\* I always assumed that it was not too distant from Nemirov. The fact that he was not born in Nemirov indicates that his mother and father, Elyeh and Khawvah [Khavah, Eva] may not have been natives of Nemirov, or that they had moved away. Also, the story was that he had also lived at one time in Kharkov, implying that the family may have resided there for a period of time before returning to Nemirov later. The question must remain unanswered because I do not have enough information to piece together the connection between his birthplace Zhornish, Kharkov and Nemirov where he and my grandmother were married and lived until their departure for America.

I never gave any thought as to the reasons why my grandfather's birthplace was not Nemirov. The fact that my mother rarely spoke of her paternal grandfather Elyeh or of her step grandmother, Bayleh, might be taken to imply that they were not resident in Nemirov during her childhood. In contrast, she had many tales to tell me of her maternal grandparents, especially Shmeel Libes for whom I was named. It may be that as a child my mother visited her father's father's house rarely, that is if he and his wife were living in Nemirov. It may also be possible that my grandfather was estranged from his father and his step mother. This is conjecture on my part. In truth, I never heard my grandfather say a negative word about his father.

My grandfather as far as I can remember spoke very rarely, if at all, about his father, and even less about his father's second wife, his step mother. That my grandfather may have been estranged from his father is even more probable when I remember my grandmother Sooreh's opinion of her father-in-law to whose name she always appended a negative qualifier or epithet. She always referred to him as "Elyeh merder" [Eli murderer] implying that he was an overly stern hard hearted man, in her

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\* See Maps 1 and 2. Zornish still exists.

opinion at least. And of his wife Bayleh, my grandmother hardly ever spoke except in less than mildly negative terms.

My grandfather, always aloof from such mundane matters as gossip and certainly never one to demean himself resorting to invective or strong personal opinions regarding any one, even his children, rarely spoke of his father. About all I ever heard about his father was that he and his mother had married at an extremely early age. And almost by way of self deprecation my grandfather Shaiyeh would tell, not without some revulsion, that his mother had given birth to him when she was fourteen years old. Whether the story is true or not is not so significant as the turn of mind my grandfather revealed when he chose to tell it. The story usually came out quite casually in passing as part of some other topic of conversation more as a statement of a fact of history than an event which had caused him any psychological trauma resulting in a negative opinion of his father.

In fine, I must conclude that there must have been some basis for his silence about his father, other than the story of the broken sewing machine which he repaired in secret. He died when I was nineteen years old. When I reached the age of understanding, I should have taken the trouble to question him about his life before I was born. I did not because I never imagined that one day I would be driven as if by some daemon to relate the past of my family; that I would be in a state of fear and anxiety considering it a matter of extreme urgency to ensure that the memory of those who came before me and in whose image I am formed would not be erased but would live on in my children's memory after I am no longer here to tell the tale.

Returning to the question I put to myself whether my grandfather had lived in Nemirov after his mother's death and his father's marriage to his second wife, I believe I can safely answer myself with a yes. His father Elyeh had more children with his second wife, among whom were Sam Bodie and Muriel King of whom I wrote in an earlier chapter. My mother knew him as a child in Nemirov but was not as close to him as her maternal grandfather Shmeel Libeh's. She also mentioned my grandfather's three younger sisters, Shayveh, Oodyeh and Boonyeh, the four of whom were children of Elyeh's first wife Khawvah [Eva] for whom my mother was named.

Somewhere among the family pictures in the bottom cabinet shelf of the east bookcase in the living room, or in the bottom drawer of the secretary desk in the dining room, there is a picture of Oodyeh and her husband and also of Boonyeh and her two sons, Charles Marian and William Black. These pictures were taken in London. I vaguely remember my mother telling me that Oodyeh's married family name was Shvarts and Boonyeh's was Malamud and that both had been married in Nemirov before emigrating to London along with my great grandfather Elyeh and his second wife Bayleh and their children. Just when I do not know, but probably toward the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. I have no recollection of the third daughter, Shayveh, of whose existence Esther reminded me after reading the first draft of this book.

From bits of information gleaned from my mother and also from what my sister Esther learned during a visit to London many years ago, I now venture to reconstruct the story of the newly acquired English family names, Black and Marian, of my grandfather's two sisters. Also, at the same time I will clarify why the family name of my mother's cousin William, the Saville Row tailor, was Black while that of his brother Charles, the physician, was Marian.

Oodyeh's husband, for whom William had worked as a young man, owned a high class men's tailoring establishment called "Black and Sons." William assumed the family name of his aunt and uncle. As a matter of fact, when I met William for the first time in 1968, his tailoring establishment on Saville Row was still known as Black and Sons.

After Odeyeh's arrival in London with her husband and children, the family name was changed by translating the Yiddish "Shvarts" into English, that is, Black. Apparently William's father had died while he was still a boy leaving his mother Boonyeh a widow to raise three sons. However, the family name of his brother Charles, the physician, was Marian. Here is the reason why one brother was a Black and the other a Marian. Boonyeh's married name was Malamud which was Englished into Marian after her arrival to London with her three sons.

So much for my grandfather's sisters in London. I actually heard very little from my grandfather Shaiyeh about his early life. He rarely spoke about himself. In fact, he was rather taciturn and rarely engaged in "small talk." I already mentioned the story of the broken sewing machine in Elyeh's workshop which I heard, not from him, but from my mother. The machine broke down and no one knew how to repair it. My grandfather Shaiyeh, still a small boy, set it to rights, but only after insisting that everyone leave the room so no one would see how he went about repairing the machine. When he was sure no one was looking, he replaced the belt connecting the foot pedal with the drive wheel. My mother firmly believed that he had removed the belt in the first place. The introduction of the sewing machine in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Nemirov was an innovation that transformed the entire tailoring craft eliminating the drudgery of stitching seams by hand.

My grandfather Shaiyeh died in the Spring of 1931, probably 62 years of age, which would place his year of birth in 1869. I was away at college, Union College in Schenectady, New York, and was not told that he was ill. Nor was I ever told how he had died. When I came home for Spring recess, some of my uncles and aunts and my grandmother came to the house where we lived on Empire Boulevard in Crown Heights. They were all sitting around in the living room, silent with blank expressions on their faces. When I asked where was Zaydeh, some began to cry silently and someone, I do not remember who, told me that my grandfather had died while I was away at school. This was a shocking surprise that left me numb. To this day, there is no final chapter for me in the life of my grandfather. It is a story that has no

ending, there is no closure, the book remains open with the last pages missing and so will never be read.

My mother, misguidedly and well intentioned, wished to spare me the anguish of coming home on short notice to a funeral. I was just four hours away by train on the New York Central Railroad and could have closed the book on the life of the one person in the world whom I loved like I never loved another, the love of a child without conditions or questions. The bond between us was one of a grandfather and his first grandchild. Here I am a man of eighty-two years still feeling a gap, an emptiness, a break, a discontinuity in the chain of events from which his grandfather disappeared without a word, without a look, without a gesture of farewell.

In returning to what I know of my grandfather Shaiyeh's life before I was born, I depend entirely on what I heard from my mother, my aunts and uncles and my grandmother Sooreh. For example, only a few days ago when my sister Esther was visiting us here in Durham [March 4-8, 1994] she related the story she had heard as a child how my grandparents met and married. My grandmother Sooreh was inside the little thatched-roof peasant house of my great grandfather Shmeel Libeh's engaged in some domestic chores and singing at the same time. My grandfather Shaiyeh came by and leaned "ahfen ployt" [on the fence] and listened to her singing. She had a beautiful voice and my grandfather, according to Esther, fell in love with her. I must caution you that Esther tends to embellish tales with trills, triplets and other musical adornments. My grandmother was apparently betrothed at the time to a baker. She insisted in breaking off the engagement, something that was not done, or least mightily frowned upon. A word is a word. An engagement to be married is as binding as the marriage itself. But according to my sister, love prevailed and my grandmother married my grandfather instead of the baker to whom she returned the string of pearls, shneerel perel, he had given her as an engagement present.

Shaiyeh must have been about nineteen or twenty years old at the time. He was born in 1869/70, so if he was indeed nineteen years of age when he married, the year of his marriage would then be 1888/89, or about two years prior to when my mother was born in 1890. My grandmother, according to my mother, was older than my grandfather, about two years older she would say. If this was actually the case, then my grandmother was probably about twenty years old when she married. She died in 1940, if I remember correctly at age 72 which would place her year of birth in 1868, and would make her at least one year older than my grandfather.

I imagine that Shaiyeh learned his trade from his father Elyeh who was also a tailor. In time, probably not long after he married, my grandfather established himself in his own workshop where he had a number of tailors working for him. My grandmother's brother Elkooneh who was still a young man at the time, worked for him. My mother tells the story that Elkooneh did not know how to speak "goyish," that is Ukrainian, let alone Russian. As a matter of fact, neither did my grandmother.

Once a customer came to the shop and asked for the "krahvyets," [tailor] and my grand uncle Elkooneh sent him to the "shvets," [cobbler or shoemaker].

Some of the tailors in my grandfather's "rahbawtcheh" [workshop] were non-Jews, that is local Nemirover gentiles. My mother tells the story that when a child would sneeze, the Jewish tailors, in addition to say "tsim gezint," [to health] would also add a coda "zawl fawlen ahf ah kop fin ah goy" [may it fall on the head of a goy] whereupon the gentile tailor would add a coda to the coda, "zawl fawlen ahf ah kop fin ah yeed" [may it fall on the head of a Jew]. My grandfather spoke not only Yiddish, but also "goyish" or Ukrainian as well as Russian. It was necessary to be able to converse in Russian because many of his clients were members of the landed gentry, the "preetsim." He also took part in theatricals, and was what my mother called a "lyoobeetnik," an amateur actor.

One of my grandfather's customers was the "Iknahgeynyeh," a woman who was a member of the local gentry, actually a sort of feudal lord of the whole of Nemirov which was her purview. My father used to say that Nemirov belonged to her. At least, the perception of the Jews was that she owned the city of Nemirov. She was of German extraction and very progressive in her administration of the civil affairs of the city. My father remembers that she installed electric street lighting and that she built a large public market of brick. My father remembered that when the site for the market building was being excavated to install the foundations, many human bones were uncovered in "kvoorim," [graves]. He believed these graves and the bones to have been ancient, as they were most likely were neolithic, perhaps.

At any rate, my grandfather Shaiyeh used to sew for the Iknahgeynyeh who would bring back cloth from "zahgrahneetsah" [from abroad, from beyond the border]. My grandfather was one of the few ladies' tailors in Nemirov who knew how to cut and sew ladies' riding habits. These had voluminous skirts which were draped covering the legs of the rider who was mounted side saddle. Once he was called to the noble lady's house to cut a special piece of goods and sew her a dress. It was evening and the bolt of cloth was stretched on the floor and surrounded by lighted candles so my grandfather could lay out the pattern and cut the cloth. No table was large enough to hold the piece of cloth to chalk out the garment. Once he had finished chalking the design and cutting it, he raised the cloth with a fanning motion so that all the candles were extinguished. In the darkness he snatched a small remnant of cloth which he coveted having in mind to make a dress for my mother. Purloining remnants of a client's cloth was not an uncommon practice among tailors. In fact the great Yiddish folk singer Victor Chenkin recorded a song in which a tailor surreptitiously snatches a piece of cloth to make a vest.

The year 1903 was a fateful year for the Jews of Russia, the year of the pogrom in Kishinev in Bessarabia, not too far from Nemirov across the Dniester. It is the region which became Moldova with the break-up of the Soviet Union. The pogrom which became known world-wide was but one symptom of the Tsars

reactionary policies designed to thwart the revolutionary movements and political unrest stirring in Russia at large. As a means of diverting attention from the injustices and oppression which were the root causes of the growth of the revolutionary fervor in the country, the Tsarist government not only looked aside from the violence being perpetrated against Jews but even encouraged and sponsored pogroms.

It is interesting that the word "pogrom" which came into the English language at the turn of the century is a Russian word as is also the word "hooligan" (khoolygán). Gentiles of the lower echelons of Russian society, the "lumpenproletariat" of the towns where Jews numbered as much as fifty per cent and more of the population, as was true of Nemirov, were recruited to become "pogromtchekis." They were sent to towns where they were not known. There was one such in Nemirov, a Vahskyeh, a Ukrainian who also spoke Yiddish, who was said to have enlisted as a progromtchik for operations in some Jewish towns somewhere in Podolia, probably not too far from Nemirov. He must have done this more for profit than for hatred of Jews, whom he did not hate or love in the first place. Looting Jews was an easy way to earn some money. When Vahskyeh got drunk he would start yelling "bahreh zhidi" [kill Jews]. I am uncertain of the meaning of the Ukrainian word "bahreh." I heard my father use it as a term for wrestling, so it may mean "fight Jews.")

Well, there was a "shtahrker" [a physically strong and fearless man] who was not afraid of a fight and who could lay his adversary out with a single blow, one Boorekh Yahkhets. He was a burly carpenter framer, a "plyotnyik," that is one who handled heavy timber in framing a house [a finish carpenter was called a "stolyer"] who decided to teach Vahskyeh a lesson. He waited for the opportunity for Vahskyeh to be in his cups in a local tavern, very likely owned by a Jew, and start yelling "Kill Jews." The story my father often told was that Boorekh found Vahskyeh drunk one day sounding off what he advocated should be done to the Jews. This provided Boorekh with the provocation he needed to take action. He beat Vahskyeh up so badly that he never again in his life repeated these words. Boorekh was arrested, but was let go without being charged.

The fervor of the revolutionary movement was even felt by Jews who previously had little or no political ambitions or desires to be included within the gentile society as a whole. But the younger element, the young men who shaved their beards, put the study of the Torah aside preferring secular studies in modern schools and universities, from which they were excluded in the first place, sympathized with and even participated in the revolutionary movement.

Women also became active in revolutionary activities, of more immediate relevance than their personal struggles of daily existence. They considered themselves members of the new intelligentsia who had risen above the constraints and liabilities of the working class from which they originated. They had photographs taken of

themselves holding a book in one hand while the other supported their heads slightly inclined to one side. There are pictures like that of my mother as a young girl in New York, a girl who spent her days over a sewing machine in a sweat shop but had "socialist" leanings for justice, transcendental yearnings and hopes for a better life. These young people turned their efforts to debating questions of civil justice and liberty and human rights, which in effect were the same age old Jewish questions of justice and mercy and ethical conduct now dressed in a secular revolutionary raiment.

My grandfather shaved his beard and did not wear a long caftan. He was a man who went ice skating and took part in amateur theatricals. It is not surprising that my mother inhaled the spirit of the revolutionary movement when she was a child in Nemirov. She was a socialist even when she was a child. She had learned revolutionary songs in Yiddish some of which she taught me and which I still remember.

"Mir hawben gehzehen in a shteeb

"Mir hawben gehzeengen leeder

"Oongekimen politsey

"Farnehen awleh breeder.

(Chorus in Russian)

"Hey, hey daloy politsey

"Daloy samed zahvreh

"V'eev Rahsyeh."

Translation:

We were sitting in a house / We were singing songs/ In came the police/ and arrested all the brothers./ Chorus in Russian (which I repeat parrot-like not knowing the meaning.

And here is a lullaby that she used to sing to me and my sister. It is too bad that I cannot set down the music on this page for you to hear. Perhaps when I am through writing this chronicle, I may sing them into a tape recorder for you to hear. I no longer remember the exact order of the verses not having heard this song since I was a five-year old child, and a song which I have not recalled to mind, let alone sung out loud, for at least sixty or seventy years.

"Es yoogt in es troogt mi shvahrtse vinten

"Es yoogt in es troogt a vint

"Fin Sibeeria shikt deer gresen

"Dahn tawteh, oi mahn tai'er kihnd

"Er shikt deer greesen doorkh di vinten

"Fin doos kawlteh lawnd

"Dorten shteyt dahn awlter tawteh

"In hawlt a lohpahtah in der hawnt

"Er groobt in groobt voos teefer in teefer

"In vahrfht dee ehird oi arois

"Zahmel koikhesh far revolootsyeh

"Shloof mahn tai'er kihnd."

Translation:

Winds are blowing and roaring, a black wind/a wind is blowing and roaring/ from Siberia your father/sends you greetings/ you my dear child. / He sends you greetings through the winds/ from that cold land/ there your old father stands/ and holds a spade in his hand. /He digs deeper and deeper/ and throws out the dirt/ infinite strength for revolution/ sleep my dear child.

At any rate, the Tsarist program of assaulting Jews and encouraging pogroms to divert attention from the revolutionary movements of the time turned out to be a catalyst energizing the mass movement of Jews to leave Russia and to seek a better life in the Gawldineh Medeenah, The United States of America. Jews from all over the Pale Settlement both from the tiny little villages and the larger towns where Jews were often fifty per cent or more of the total population. All were ready to make the journey to America. The times for the Jews in Russia were akin to those of the days of the California Gold Rush. Families of Jews were leaving Russia and coming by the thousands to the land of opportunity for a better life.

The bug for emigration bit my grandfather too. He always made a living for his family and had a secure position as a sought after high-class ladies' tailor whose customers were numbered among the local landed gentry. So he went to America in 1903, a man with a young and growing family. When my grandfather took my thirteen-year old mother with him to seek a better life in the New World, besides her, there were four other children, Libeh, Benny, Davey and Becky who was still an infant in arms.

My mother always said that she was in "doos drahtsiteh yoor" (in the thirteenth year) when she arrived in New York in 1903. We say a child is ten years old during the entire year after his tenth birthday. The traditional Jewish way would be to say he is his eleventh year, that is the whole year after his tenth birthday date. So in 1903, my mother had already turned twelve and was in her thirteenth year.

Their journey after leaving Nemirov was a flight from the Russian authorities, rather than a pleasure trip. It was necessary to "gawnvihnen di greynits," that is to steal across the border in the dead of night. The Tsarist policy of keeping the borders sealed to those who wished to leave seems to have been traditional in Russia right



up to the fall of the Soviet Union a couple of years ago. One sneaked out of the country without passports. In general, the use of passports for foreign travel was not too common before the First World War. It was almost impossible for the average small town Jew to get permission to go "zahgraneetsah" [abroad] without fear of reprisals real or imaginary from the Russian officials including the police.

So without further ado, my grandfather and my mother set out for the New World and headed for the border. I imagine it must have been the border with Austria-Hungary which is not too far distant to the west from Nemirov. I never found out if they went by train, I doubt if many of the Russia railroads at that time went in a westerly direction, most went north-south from Kiev, to Kamenyets-Podolsky, possibly to Vinitza and ending in Odessa. There was a railroad that went by the outskirts of Nemirov and connected with Odessa on the Black Sea. So it could very likely be that they went to the border by horse and wagon. My mother also related the story how they came to a river at the border where they hired a cross-eyed boatman to row them across. My mother, still a child, was frightened that they might drown. She was not sure which way the cross-eyed boatman was looking as he rowed the boat across the river.

If they left via the Austrian border, I suppose a search of the map might reveal which river they crossed. It might have been the Dniester which divides Podolia from Bessarabia, but Bessarabia at that times was in Russia. At any rate, once across the border into the land of Franz Josef they went by train to Holland, to Rotterdam specifically where they remained in some sort of temporary quarters awaiting the next ship to America.

The passenger steamship companies at that time actually had agents running up and down the Jewish towns of Russia selling ships' ticket (shifs kahrtes) to those planning to emigrate. They even arranged for lodging the passengers either in Hamburg or Rotterdam until the ships were to set sail. Steerage passage cost \$15 in American money or about 30 Russian rubles. If some of the stories I heard all my life about life aboard immigrant ships are only partially true, the price was too high even if it was gratis. My mother was deathly sick during the whole voyage, an experience she never forgot,

While they were thus awaiting a ship in Rotterdam, my mother tells the story, not without some feeling of having been offended or insulted, how some Christian missionaries mingled with the Jewish immigrants with a view of proselytizing them. My grandfather was hardly what could be dubbed a traditionally observant Jew, but a Jew he was. Among Jews of the time even the very thought of conversion was abhorrent. To be an apostate, "a meshimid" was to be a traitor to the Jewish people. It was not just a matter of making a choice and the selection of a new religious faith. The designs to convert the hapless immigrants while alone in a strange land waiting for a ship to take them to a better life in America may have been noble from the missionaries' point of view, but revolting, insulting and offensive to the Jews.

Apostasy was equated with betrayal, conversion to Christianity was the act of a traitor who goes over to the side of the enemy who has oppressed his people for so many millennia. My mother would also tell this story of the missionaries not without some disquiet and even embarrassed that she had unwittingly had contact with the missionaries.

It is so many years that I saw my grandfather, yet I have no difficulty in recalling his face and his mien and bearing. He was a handsome man with regular features with a head of very white hair. My mother always recalled that her father still had light colored hair, almost blonde, when they came to America at which time he still a young man in his middle thirties. He turned grey almost overnight. One day when I saw a picture of the great Russian bass baritone singer Fyodor Chaliapin on the cover of a catalogue of phonograph records, it struck with some amazement that my grandfather Shaiyeh and Chaliapin could be brothers. The same forehead, high cheek bones, broad nose with pronounced flaring nostrils, the same squarish jaw, shock of white grey hair, light colored eyes looking off into space and even the same tilt to the head. I no longer remember the exact color of his eyes other than unlike my own which are dark brown, his were very light, like my mother's bluish or greenish light grey.

He was always impeccably dressed even when he went to work each day riding the El and the subway to New York. I remember in winter he wore a black coat with a velvet collar, a black Derby hat, and sometimes he even wore spats on his shoes, as was the custom just before the First World War. On those days when he did not go to work he sometimes carried a cane as part of his attire.

My grandfather and my mother arrived in Castle Garden after an unforgettable arduous ten days or so at sea in steerage where men and women were separated while en route. When they arrived at Castle Garden in the Battery in New York, the final gateway to America before the time when immigrants were processed at Ellis Island, the immigration officials had some trouble with pronouncing and writing down his family name Ubogu or Obawgoo. The problem with the name was that it sounded like "hawssee bawgee" in Yiddishized English, or in plain English as "horse and buggy." To ease the confusion he took his mother's maiden family name as an alternative, Marinsky. His given name Shaiyeh [Yesaiah or Isaiah in Hebrew] was Englished or rather Americanized to Sam. My father, whose name in Yiddish was Sahn'yeh [the Hebrew Nethanel] pronounced Nesanel in Yiddish, hence the shortened version, Sahn'yeh, also took the name Sam in America. So my grandfather Shaiyeh entered America seeking a new life and, in token of which, bearing a new name -- Sam Marinsky. I already related above how he later changed his name to Charles Bodie when his younger brother, the son of Elyeh's second wife, Bayleh, came to America also bearing the name Sam but with the original Obawgoo altered to Bodie in London.

I believe I did not mention as yet that my great grandfather Elyeh, Shaiyeh's father, and my great grandmother Khawva (Eva) were related, perhaps even first cousins. The story that always circulated was that it was not uncommon for closely related members of the family to marry and that the family was "geknipt in gebinden" [knotted and tied or bound]. Whether my great grandparents, Shaiyeh's mother and father, were cousins there is no doubt. Elyeh Obawgoo's father and Khawva's mother [married to a Marinsky] must have been siblings and so their children were first cousins. Marriage between first cousins is not prohibited among Jews, but on the other hand it is not encouraged. In the mid-nineteenth century the urgency for males to marry young was all pervasive. It was a means of avoiding being drafted into the army where even the Tsarist officials considered service more of a means of keeping a firm hold over the lower echelons of society than the fulfillment of a civic duty to one's country. In fine, early marriages were encouraged and may explain, in part, why a match between Elyeh and Khawvah was made when they were quite young.

Returning now to the immigrants in 1903. When they arrived in New York they naturally turned for help in adjusting to the new environment to members of the family and fellow Nemirover already there. From what I learned it seems that they went to stay with my grandmother's sister Temah in her flat on the Lower East Side of New York. This period in her life my mother always recalled with some bitterness. My mother, who slept on a number of kitchen chairs pushed together each night, remembered that her aunt Temah was always complaining about her saying "zee veht meer fahrlahzigen dee shteeb" [she will bring lice into the house, louse up the house]. The end result was that my grandfather and mother moved out of Temah's house into a furnished room in someone else's flat.

I never enquired, and so never found out exactly where they lived for the two years before my grandmother Sooreh and the rest of the children arrived from Nemirov in 1905. Incidentally, my father also arrived from Nemirov, via London, that very same year. Those two years were especially hard on my grandfather as well as my mother who had just entered her teen years. It was a sad and very unhappy life. My mother always related how the sidewalks were wet with his tears as he struggled alone to care for my mother, earn a living and save enough money to send for the rest of the family still in Nemirov.

In Nemirov he had been somebody, had made a living and was his own boss, had his own workshop and a genteel clientele who appreciated his craftsmanship. In America his talent and fine craftsmanship was not needed and was actually a hinderance. His ability designing and cutting ladies' garments was superfluous in the sweat shop where worked twelve hours and day, six days a week. For my grandfather Shaiyeh, America was never the "golden land." In the Gawldineh Medeeneh he was always out of place, a fish out of water so to speak. He was a craftsmen whose craft was redundant in America. Clothes were mass-produced in factories for the "masses."

The personal relationship between craftsman and client did not exist. Both were anonymous and had no knowledge of each other.

And in addition to having left the secure place in life he once had in Nemirov, he found that such abstract qualities as self-pride, self-respect with regard to one's work in life, the foundation stone of one's status and position in the community, was utterly extraneous and even laughable in the crowded streets, tenements and sweat shops of the Lower East Side. He was completely overwhelmed by the "hustle and bustle" of New York life. He could hardly cope with the added problem of having to care for a teen age daughter while working all day in a clothing factory and living in a furnished room in a tenement flat. Because he had no one to take care of her while he was at work, he did not send my mother to school. Instead, he took her along with him to the shop where he worked and where she was also set to work.

Exactly what sort of work my mother did I never learned. Child labor was apparently already illegal in New York at the time. She often repeated the story that when the inspector would come by the shop, the tailors would hide her among the bundles of unfinished garments and bolts of cloth. It was customary at the time for the shop workers to take home bundles of unsewn garments to be finished at home, this after twelve hours of work in the shop. The "oprayter" [operator or factory tailor] himself, as well as other members of his family, finished button holes, sewed on buttons and, in general, did what was called "findishing" in Anglicised Yiddish. Later on with the organization and growing power of the garment workers' unions, finishing details were no longer done as "home work," but directly in the shops by "findisherkes," that is finishers who were usually women [findisherkes is the feminine form of the word findisher.] My mother may have been a findisherkeh in the sweat shop working alongside her father rather spending her days as a pupil in school.

These were indeed hard times for the new immigrants who disembarked in New York. They found themselves almost within walking distance of the tenements and sweat shops where they were to live and work in conditions hardly in concert with what they had imagined America to be like. "In Amerikeh shahrt men gawld in dih gesser." [In America one shovels gold in the streets.] Many Jews fled from Russia to escape poverty, it is true. But these same Jews also came looking for a dignified life free of the Tsarist repression and treatment as unwanted outsiders notwithstanding the fact that Jews had been in Russia -- in the parts of Poland taken over by Russia at the end of the eighteenth century -- for more than 600 years and even before being invited to settle there by the Polish King Casimir III, 1310-70, in the fourteenth century.

Immigration to America turned out not to be an escape from poverty, but a life where one struggled and lived from one pay-day to the next. My grandfather went from a life of dignity and pride in one's work to a life where personal dignity and pride in one's work was of little account and even laughable. In America my grandfather did not find a better life than he had in Nemirov. But his children did and even more

so his grandchildren. Had he been a man without a trade and living from hand to mouth in Nemirov, then America would have been a golden land for him as it was for the thousands and thousands of other Jews who came here without a trade and hence without the burden of pride in one's craft. Quality of workmanship of which one could be proud was not a requisite to become an "oprayter," a "Columbusnik" [an operator who learned his craft in America] in a clothing factory. The Columbusnik did not suffer because his former craft had become redundant. He brought no such baggage with him from Russia. He learned how to run a seam with a sewing machine here in America for the first time in his life. He may have suffered and grown old and worn out from the hard physical work in the sweat shop, but at least, he was spared the suffering of his soul which the craftsman experienced when he found what he had held dear in Russia was of no account at all in America.

My grandfather was always a man of few words who kept himself aloof from people with whom he felt he had little in common. Rarely, if ever, did he engage in idle conversation just to pass the time of day. I cannot recall any specific conversation I ever had with my grandfather Shaiyeh, perhaps because I was still too young to have talked with him as a peer before he died in the Spring of 1931.

I do, however, remember talking with or hearing my paternal grandfather, Jacob Markman (Yahnkel "Bahlaboos"). He would come to our house almost every week when we lived on Essex Street and he would tell stories, some lasting for weeks and weeks which he recited in installments. He was of a more practical turn of mind than my grandfather Shaiyeh; for example, he taught me how to coil up rope using my hand and my arm bent at the elbow to wind the rope around. I will write more of him and my paternal grandmother, Bahsyeh, in the next two chapters.

My grandfather Shaiyeh was of a generation later than my grandfather Yahnkel "Bahlaboos" who wore a beard. Shaiyeh, in his youth, sported a full moustache. Unlike my grandfather Yahnkel he did not say his daily prayers. I still remember the many times when my father's father, Yahnkel "Bahlaboos," was visiting us and it was time for the afternoon and evening prayers. He would stand facing east in front of the ice box as if it were the reading desk in a synagogue and recite the *minkha* and *ma'ariv* prayers which he knew by heart. On the other hand, I doubt if my grandfather Shaiyeh ever said prayers on a daily basis. In the morning he had to run to the shop in New York; and by the time he dragged himself into the house at night, he had little if any energy to go to a nearby synagogue for evening services or strength enough to recite the prayers at home. He and my grandmother always went to services on Rosh ha Shonah and Yom Kippur, as much for the singing of the *khazan* [cantor] as for the fulfillment of a religious duty. He loved music and had many phonograph records of cantorial as well as Yiddish folk music, some of which I still have stored in the front coat closet in the vestibule.

In fine, America was not the land of opportunity for my grandfather Shaiyeh - "der zaydeh" as differentiated from my other grandfather, Yahnkel "Bahlaboos" who

was "der ehilter zaydeh" because he was older. Shaiyeh came to America in 1903 as a young man in his mid-thirties and after a span of 28 years died in 1931 an aged and worn out old man of 62 who never saw a light or a hope of reaping the material and spiritual riches said to had for the taking in America. America ever remained like Zion, a transcendental goal to strive for, a hope which makes the mundane struggle to attain a good and better life tolerable. It is a goal never fixed in time, always to be attained in the future. But the unattainable eventually leads to disillusion and loss of hope. The better life was destined to be the lot of the generations that followed. My grandfather stoically accepted that America was a dream, a hope which would never become a reality for him, and when my aunt Becky died in 1926 at the age of twenty-four, he also died.

The immigrant is a transitional man, the one who had the courage and high hopes to uproot himself and prepare a way for his children and grandchildren. It was a common phenomenon, when I was still a boy and even later, for the father to be a tailor or carpenter and the son to be a physician, a teacher, a lawyer; for the craftsmen who earned his bread by the sweat of his brow to have a son who earned his bread with what is in his head.

Perhaps, if Shaiyeh had not remained in New York, but had gone on to a small town in upstate New York or in the South or out West, he would not have had the bitter and disappointing life. America would, indeed, have been a "gawldihneh mehdeena" for him. However, the truth is that as a craftsman, as a ladies' tailor, how could he have made a living in the hinterland? As a craftsman he would have been worse off than in New York. Who needed a ladies tailor in the South or in the corn belt, or in the wide open spaces of New Mexico or Arizona? How could he compete for customers with the Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward catalogues? Only those immigrants who had no trade but had a talent for buying and selling, merchandising it is called today, but known as peddling then, were able to make a life in the little towns in the vastness of America. The peddlers would eventually become storekeepers, then merchants and, more often than not, be counted among the leading citizens of the towns where they operated their business and lived their lives. The more remote the place, the smaller the Jewish community. The lonelier the life of the isolated minuscule Jewish families, the stronger the forces leading to assimilation, but greater the rewards and the possibilities for the acquisition of wealth.

The majority of the immigrant Jews in New York, and especially in the almost 100% Jewish section of Brownsville in Brooklyn, were "opreyters," workers in the needle trade, either as displaced craftsmen tailors or as Columbusniks. There was also a sizeable number of Jews in the building trade, mainly carpenters and to a lesser extent painters and plasterers. Bricklayers and stone masons were almost exclusively Italian immigrants. The first American-born generation tended to take up more mechanical trades such as plumbers and electricians. My uncle Benny, one of

my mother's brothers, became an electrician on his own and, while still in his teens. He worked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard and also the Baltimore Navy Yard during the First World War. He did not become a tailor which would have been considered a step backward to immigrant days and work in the confined world of the shop, the clothing factory.

To return to my grandfather Shaiyeh. The family lived mainly in rented flats in Brownsville, a more pastoral setting with private houses, trees lining the streets. In the less-built up parts, Italian families pastured goats. The last place the family lived before my grandfather died was Blake Avenue on the corner of Hinsdale Street. Blake Avenue at the time was the location of an outdoor market where the peddlers stationed themselves along the curb with their pushcarts loaded with fruit, vegetables and other comestibles. The ground floors of the tenement houses were occupied by grocery stores, kosher butcher shops, fish stores, bakeries, dry goods stores, hardware stores as well as stores selling sundry types of merchandise including yard goods, crockery and the like. The street was always teeming with people, especially during the daytime when the housewives were buying supplies for the evening meal, "sahper" (supper). After nightfall, the pushcarts were covered with tarpaulins and secured for the night.

The pushcarts were in effect wheeled platforms about ten to twelve feet long and about four to five feet wide supported in the center like a see-saw by a pair of large spoked wooden wheels. These were shod with iron rims and joined by an axle under the cart. A wooden prop was placed at either end of the pushcart to make sure it did not turn into a see-saw while stationed in its place. At one end, a pair of handles projected for the peddler to manoeuver the cart when he had to move it, that is push it. One pushed a pushcart.

Another digression. Some pushcart peddlers, if they had the means, invested in a horse and wagon on which they loaded their merchandise. They would go up and down the streets announcing what they had for sale including the price---Ladies, potatoes, fifteen pounds for a quarter, "Or, Junk, I buy old junk, junk!" The junk man's wagon always had a pair of poles with a string of bells attached between them which jingled and rung as the horse plodded up and down the street. Or the old clothes peddler, or should I say buyer of old clothes. He had no vehicle. He just carried the old clothes he bought over one shoulder yelling "Old Clothes, buy old clothes," over and over again.

My grandfather was totally oblivious to the turmoil and unsightliness of the street market he had to pass through to get to the house. He usually ignored the women seated before the door on the sidewalk taking the fresh air, the "yentas" whom he barely greeted, let alone paused to make idle conversation with. He walked through them to the door and into the hallway and up the stairs to his flat on the second story.

I still see him sitting in his shirt sleeves (he never went outside without his coat on) at the kitchen table in the small space between the end of the table and the built-in kitchen dresser (a built-in cupboard with shelves and drawers which was standard equipment in kitchens at the time). On the opposite side of the room in the corner next to the window was the black cast-iron coal stove which heated the flat and on which my grandmother cooked. And on the wall to the left of the window was the kitchen sink and washtub made of slabs of black slate supported on cast iron legs and where Belly, the black shaggy-haired dog was tied and who always charged out at me with snarls and loud barks whenever I came to visit.

There in the small space with the table on his left, the wall at his back and the dresser at his right, my grandfather would sit quietly after eating his supper thinking his thoughts to himself. He always had a glass of whiskey as part of his meal, a carry over from his days in Russia. It was during the days of "Prohibition" when distilled spirits, whiskey, was illegal and it was necessary to buy from bootleggers. I still remember how he once came in with a half gallon jug under his coat and immediately tested the contents. He poured some of the whiskey into a saucer and then lit it with a match. The flame burned blue showing that it was potable. A yellow flame would have indicated that it was poison and probably wood alcohol. He also judged the proof of the whiskey by noting how much liquid was left after the blue flame was out. The less residue, the higher the proof.

When the two older boys, Benny and Davey, went to work and also my aunt Becky, who died at age twenty-four as a result of a failed goiter operation, they contributed from their pay each week for their "room and board," so to speak. But as far as I can remember, perhaps because I was rarely there at supper time, the family did not usually sit down to the table together. This may have been because each came home from work at different times and also because each child seemed to have preferred special dishes, which my grandmother without so much as a contrary word would prepare. I remember that Benny like cutlets. The family did celebrate the Passover seder together including the two daughters-in-law and my aunt Libeh and her family. My mother felt that our little family, the four of us, should celebrate on our own; but we always arrived at my grandmother's house later in the evening after we had our own seder.

There are a few incidents during my childhood that remain vivid in my mind till this very day. My grandfather Shaiyeh loved animals, as did my uncles, especially Benny and explains why the dog Belly was an integral part of the family. I really wanted to be friends with that dog but she seemed to hate me and would charge out at me as if to tear me to pieces, so I thought when I was a little boy. I never dared go near her where she was kept tied under the washtub and kitchen sink. My grandfather would take her out for walks. To keep a dog, and especially in a flat in a Jewish neighborhood, was certainly not customary. The immigrant Jews were indifferent to dogs and cats neither liking nor disliking them. They had far more



pressing concerns to like or dislike. Having a dog in the middle of that "gehenna" which was Blake Avenue certainly set my grandfather and his children apart from the rest of the tenants in the house where they lived.

One evening when he came home from work there was a commotion in the hallway of the house. Women and men were standing about wringing their hands with fright. Apparently, a burglar had hidden himself in one of the flats and the people were frightened. My grandfather without a word, walked into the flat supposedly occupied by the "gawnif" [thief] and was ready to haul him out. He was not afraid. Fortunately his bravery was not tested, because the thief apparently had fled a while before through a window and down a fire escape.

He was not prone to excitement or irrational reactions when prodded by people around him being carried away by some accident or fear of an accident that might have occurred. They would carry on frightened by rumors and gossip. When the fire engines would sometimes go clanging and with sirens screaming down Blake Avenue, my grandmother would become frightened that the building they were in was on fire. She would try to rouse him up from his Sunday afternoon nap to go see what was happening. He would turn over and laconically say to her that when the fire was already lapping at his toes, to please wake him and not before.

He used to go to work to the shop in Manhattan on the subway each morning. The train was always crowded and he rarely, if ever, was fortunate enough to have a seat. One day a young girl came down hard on his toe with a spiked heel shoe. She apologized saying she was sorry. My grandfather answered that he accepted her apology, but his toe was still hurting.

It was from him that I learned that to admit guilt for a misdeed does not wipe away the misdeed. For example, George Washington admitted he had chopped down the cherry tree because he could not tell a lie. Nevertheless, he did something bad and the cherry tree will never bear cherries.

Another story with a moral which he often told, and which my mother also repeated. There was a gypsy who had a very beautiful crystal glass for drinking water. He used to send his son to the well for water when he was thirsty. But he did not just hand the glass the child, he first gave him a thrashing to remind him to be careful and not break his beautiful crystal glass. What would be the good of punishing the boy after the glass is broken? It is better to teach him not break the glass in the first place rather than whip him after he broke it.

If George Washington's father had taught him it was wrong to chop down a fruit tree in the first place, George would not have done so, nor would he have had been so self-righteous because he could not tell a lie. As if telling the truth was something out of the ordinary to be proud of! The world exists on truth.

When I was about seven or eight years old, or perhaps even a little older, I do not remember, I wanted a Bee-Bee gun, an air rifle that shoots small pellets, bee-bees. My mother, of course, was against guns, toy or real, as she even was against

my joining the Boy Scouts because they wore military uniforms. But I longed to have a bee-bee gun and despaired of ever having one. We were visiting my grandmother's one day when my grandfather and my uncle Benny returned home after being out for a while. I still remember the warm loving look and the sparkling of his eyes as my grandfather unbuttoned his overcoat and took out a brand new shinning black bee-bee gun with a walnut colored wooden stock. I mention Benny because he had accompanied my grandfather as a "maven" [expert in the matter] to help him select the proper bee-bee gun.

I was overwhelmed with joy, my mother had been outranked, and now I wanted to try the gun. My grandfather took a round silver plated tray from the kitchen dresser, set it on top of the wash tub, placed me in the door to the dinning room and told me to shoot. My grandmother's objections to the destruction of her tray went unheard. Urged on by him and Benny, I continued to shoot at the tray leaving it dented forever with the love I, an old man now, still bear for my grandfather Shaiyeh!

Shaiyeh smoked cigarettes. The brand was Melachrinos made of Turkish tobacco. He always used a small ivory cigarette holder which he kept in a small case into which it fitted. I inherited the cigarette holder and gave it to Charlie (named for my grandfather) when he and Nathaniel and Eliot were here last Fall (1993). It had dried out completely and had shattered into pieces in the process. Charlie said he could mend it.

But he also smoked a pipe from time to time. We were living in Essex Street at the time and I would go by a small candy store on Linwood Street near Blake where they also sold pipes and tobacco. I used to go by that store very often on my way to a blacksmith shop on Ashford Street. There I would stand in the open door for long periods of time watching the blacksmith at his forge and anvil shaping white hot horseshoes with a massive hammer, and then after dipping them into a tub of water to cool, testing the shoe for size while still hot on the horse's hoof, searing the cutaneous matter and giving off an odor which I still smell today.

I decided I wanted to buy my grandfather a pipe and tobacco for no special reason like a holiday or birthday. We never celebrated birthdays and besides I did not know his birthday, nor did he exactly. Birthdays were of little or no importance in Jewish life. I saved my spending money for quite some time. I usually was given a nickel each day after having lunch at home and on my return to school. I do not remember how I saved the money, but when I had accumulated enough, I went to that candy store on Linwood Street and bought him a pipe, I think it had a bent stem. I also bought a tin of Prince Albert tobacco. I do not remember how much I spent, perhaps fifty cents for the pipe and ten cents for the tobacco.

**Chapter 6*****My Maternal Grandfather***

He was totally taken by surprise when on our next visit to my grandmother's house, I gave him the pipe and the tobacco. He said nothing. Just looked at me. I could see his heart through his eyes, and the slight smile on his mouth spoke more to me than any words he would have spoken. I cannot describe his expression as he held the pipe and tobacco in his hands, but I still know it well enough today because it has been engraved on my heart all these years.

