Chapter 7

My Paternal Grandmother

The few remembrances of my father's mother, my grandmother, Bahsyeh Krahsnyahnsky Markman which I still am able to recall are indistinct and vague, probably because I was still a young child when she died, but more so because we did not see her very often, On the other hand, I have vivid recollections of my paternal grandfather Yahnkel who used to come to our house on Essex Street in the East New York section of Brooklyn almost every week, and so I have much more to relate about him.

In order to distinguish between my father's parents and my mother's parents, we always referred to my grandmother Bahsyeh as "di elter Bawbeh" and to my grandfather Yahnkel as "der elter zaydeh." We did so not because they thought they were our great grandparents as the word "elter" would imply, rather because they were older than my mother's parents Shaiyeh and Sooreh Pilch Bodie whom we called "di yeengeh bawbeh" and "der yeenger zaydeh," the younger grandmother and the younger grandfather.

I do not remember my grandmother Bahsyeh ever coming to visit us. That is to say, I have no memory of her in our house as I do of my father's father. Both she and my mother were estranged, the reasons for which I shall relate further on. As a child, I had no idea what had caused this estrangement. And so, I was always in a sort of limbo not knowing who was in the right, my mother or my grandmother, or on whose side to be on. I never heard a word about the matter from my grandmother. I was too young to be told, I suppose. My mother was the only one from whom I heard of the reason why they were alienated from each other. In a childish and simple way, of course, I deplored the situation knowing my mother expected me to be on her side, though she never said so explicitly. It was a given which was not debatable.

In short, during all my childhood, and even after I was a grown man, I was in an emotional "no man's land," not only regarding di elter Bawbeh, but also regarding my father's sisters and brothers as a whole. Yet curiously enough, on an individual basis, my mother was fond of all my father's siblings including their husbands and wives, except for his oldest sister Nekhawmeh and his older brother Yeedl. She had a warm friendship with his younger sister Goldeh. His younger brother Moishe was a constant visitor to our house all through the years. And my mother was certainly fond of my grandfather Yahnkel. It was primarily because of her

enthusiasm that he would tell us stories. Some, almost as long as novels, he would tell in installments chapter by chapter during his weekly visits.

I do not recall my grandmother's voice, or anything she might have said to me in conversations. This does not mean to imply that we never spoke to each other. I just do not remember. This is understandable because I was eleven years old when she died. Also, the absence of any graphic or distinct memories of her is the result of having seen her so infrequently.

My grandmother Bahsyeh was the firstborn of my great grandparents Doovid and Rookhel Krahsnyahnsky, the Litvaks who immigrated to Nemirov during a famine, probably before 1850 or so. The truth is that I never heard any stories about my great grandmother, Doovid's wife, or even remember ever hearing her name. I assume that her name must have been Rookhel, Rachel, because the first grandchild, Nekhawmeh's daughter, as well as two other grandchildren, Maryam's and Goldeh's oldest daughters, my cousins, were named Rookhel.

My Litvak great grandparents must have already been married when they arrived in Nemirov. My grandmother Bahsyeh was born there. My mother always jokingly referred to her as being a real "Yankee," that is a real native of Nemirov. My maternal grandfather Shaiyeh was not born in Nemirov, nor was my paternal grandfather Yahnkel. He was born in a village the name of which sounded like "P'tchereh" to me.

As I said before, my grandmother was the eldest of three children. I assume there were only three because I never heard any more mentioned. She had a sister Toobeh and a brother Avrum Yeetskhok, both of whom I already mentioned in an earlier chapter.

When my grandmother Bahsyeh died one week after her fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1922, it was said that she was seventy years old. That being the case di elter Bawbeh was probably born in 1852 and not long after her parents arrived in Nemirov. I should indicate a caveat here. The truth is I do not know if Doovid arrived in Nemirov with a wife or if he came as a bachelor and married Rookhel there. My father never really told me anything about his grandmother. And of his grandfather, all he seemed to have remembered that when he was still a little boy Doovid was already an old man who spoke "zeyher fahrtsoigen," with a marked accent, that is, he spoke with a Litvak accent.

As a matter of fact, I know very little of my grandmother's childhood or her life before she married my grandfather. Like him, she was born before the serfs were freed in 1861. I had previously calculated that my grandfather Yahnkel had been born about 1850 which would imply that he and Bahsyeh were about the same age. However, according to my sister Esther, he was considerably older than my grandmother who was actually his second wife. His first wife had died, presumably in childbirth, and left him a childless widower. How much older he was than my

grandmother, I cannot even guess, nor are there any of my father's siblings left whom I might ask.

The one certain datum point I have is their fiftieth wedding anniversary in 1922 when my grandmother was seventy years old and was consequently born in 1852. She was probably married by the age of twenty or less, approximately 1872. But how old my grandfather was at the time of his second marriage, I will never know for certain. How much older than Bahsyeh? My sister believes he may have been sixteen years older, which would mean that he was a grown man when the serfs were freed in 1861.

The arithmetic is as follows: 1852 (Bahsyeh's date of birth) minus 16 (the supposed difference in their ages) = 1836 for Yahnkel's date of birth; 1930 (date of his death) minus 1836 (supposed date of his birth) = 94 years old at time of death. The latter conclusion is probably wide of the mark because he did not look that old to me when he died. I was there at his bedside a hour or two after his last breath, and now in retrospect, would say he was in his mid-eighties. He always told me "Ikh gedeynk pahnshineh," I remember serfdom, as if he were remembering an event from his childhood and not something he had known as a grown man. Therefore, I would guess that he was still in his teens when the serfs were freed and that he was born in the mid- or late 1840's, say about 1845. That being the case, he was probably sixteen years old in 1861 when serfdom ended and about twenty-seven years of age when he married for the second time in 1872. If these calculations are reasonable, it would imply that he was about seven years older than my grandmother. More about my grandfather Yahnkel "Bahlaboos" in the next chapter.

The physical aspect and the demeanor of my grandmother Bahsyeh is limited to the one and only image I retain in my memory of her. I do not remember how she moved about, nor how tall she was. I still see her sitting erect in a wooden chair with her hands folded in her lap in the "front room" of Maryam's flat on Rockaway Avenue. She was spare of figure, so it seemed to me. Like my father, her face was a slightly elongated oval with a small fine sharp nose, high cheekbones and dark brown eyes. At least that is what I remember as a small child and as much as I am able to recall after so many many years.

I still see her with a long dress down to her ankles. I doubt if I ever saw more than the tips of her shoes peering out from the hem of her dress as she sat in her straight backed chair. Nor did I ever see her without a triangular kerchief, a fahtcheyleh, covering her head, usually white, especially on the Sabbath. In other words, my grandmother conserved the custom of modesty universally practiced among the women of her generation in Nemirov. She covered her head hiding her hair from view with the kerchief.

In the more "fundamentalist" or pietist Jewish communities in the Russian Pale of Settlement and in parts of Austria-Hungary, brides were shorn of their tresses the day of their marriage and were destined to wear wigs for the rest of their lives. To

look upon a woman's hair, one of the principal components of her beauty, could lead a man, including husbands, into temptation and to harbor unclean thoughts. The sight of a woman's hair could cause thoughts of lust and the sin of having a "yeytser hora" an evil inclination. Unlike the more scrupulously observant and pietistic Khasidic and almost "fundamentalist" Jewish communities in parts of Poland and Galicia, Jewish women in the Ukraine, in the government of Podolia where Nemirov was located, were usually not shorn of their tresses when they became brides. Many Jewish communities in the Ukraine, though quite observant and in many cases followers of Khasidic Rabbis, were more liberal in this respect and brides kept their hair and after marriage but always covered their heads with a kerchief.

It is interesting that there was no lack of "wonder rabbis" in the Ukraine where thousands of Jews were followers, devotees or disciples of Khasidic rabbis. Yet women, like my grandmother Bahsyeh, born in the mid-nineteenth century, did not wear a wig nor was her hair shorn when she married in 1872. She retained her hair perhaps because her father was a Litvak, and Litvaks were more cerebral in their religious observances. They were "misnahgdim," dissenters, and opposed to the non-intellectual, emotional practices of the khasidim. And even more remarkable, the Khasidic movement originated in the Ukraine, right in Podolia, the birthplace of the Bal Shem Tov, Master of the Good Name, the founder of the Khasidic movement. It is also interesting that the custom of women covering their heads with a kerchief was also current among the Ukrainian peasants. Women among Ukrainian peasants covered their heads with kerchiefs when they were married and kept to this custom all through their lives.

To return to a description of what my grandmother looked like to a child of less than eleven years old. The picture I have is one of her sitting upright in a straight backed wooden chair in the "front room." The front room was really the parlor or living room and usually faced the street, hence the name "front room." This name was also applied to the parlor in flats located in the rear of the tenement house in which case the "front room" faced the backyard because the flat was "tsi di bek," to the back, in anglicized Yiddish. Rent in apartments "tsi di bek" was lower than in the flats "tsi di front." Her dress reached down to the floor and her hands were folded in her lap. Her hands were most unusual, the like of which I had never seen before nor ever again. The fingers on both hands were curled as if holding an imaginary tennis ball. They seemed frozen in place.

The story is that when she was a young woman, probably not too long after she was married, she went down to the river (tahkh – in Yiddish this word is used for both river and lake or pond). I do not know if she went to a river or to a lake or a pond in the dead of winter and fell through the ice. One of the after-effects of this accident was that she could never straighten her fingers again. Now in retrospect I believe I can explain why she could no longer move her paralyzed fingers. She probably suffered from rheumatoid arthritis resulting in the destruction of the joints

in her fingers. Arthritis seems to run in my family. My father suffered with rheumatoid arthritis from about the age of 52 till he died in 1963 at the age of seventy-seven. On the basis of the fact that he favored his mother, I feel it is reasonable to conclude that she was stricken with arthritis as a young woman, as was the case with my father. The joints of her fingers were destroyed and paralyzed into the curled shape I remember as a child. My father must have been a young boy when this happened for he always mentioned the fact that "mit di krimeh hent," with crippled hands, she cooked delicious meals and baked marvelous khallas, bread and cakes.

My most vivid memory of my grandmother Bahsyeh is at her fiftieth wedding anniversary celebration which my father's sisters had arranged. The party was in Maryam's flat where my grandparents lived on Rockaway Avenue about two blocks or so south of Pitkin Avenue in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. Maryam was my father's next older sibling – more about her later. There were tables laden with food crowded into the front room and the dining room and where the family, including sons and daughters and their spouses and children were seating themselves. My grandfather and grandmother were asked to sit next to each other at the head of the table. But he demurred saying he preferred to sit opposite facing her so he could look at her.

My aunt Nekhawmeh, my father's oldest sister, always glib of tongue, in her role as the firstborn rose from her place and gave a discourse on the life of her parents as she remembered it going back to her early childhood in Nemirov. Among the stories she related was one concerning the building of their first house. Nekhawmeh remembered how my grandmother kneaded the "vahlkyes" with her bare feet. I explained the materials and methods of construction of peasant houses in Nemirov when I described the little house of great grandfather Shmeel Libeh's, my maternal grandmother's father whose name I bear. Nekhawmeh described how my grandmother Bahsyeh mixed the clay with the straw and even horse manure, "ivnyikis," with water and shaped the billets of clay, the vahlkyes. These were inserted in the spaces between the short horizontally placed logs which were then rammed down with an enormous wooden mallet, a doobeenah, so that the malleable clay material was squeezed out and covered the outer surfaces of the logs. And it was at that fiftieth wedding celebration when I was eleven years old that I saw my grandmother Bahsyeh for the last time.

It is, therefore, not surprising or unexpected that my recollections of her are so few and so dim. My grandparents arrived in New York a few years after my father who came in 1905. My grandfather Yahnkel came alone about a year or two later after having spent some time in Argentina, about 1906 to 1908. More about this in the next chapter which is devoted to the story of his life. He had left my grandmother behind in Nemirov to sell the two houses they owned as well as other possessions.

She carried some of the household goods with her, especially the goose down pillows and featherbeds, some of which were given my father when he and my mother married and on which I slept for most of my childhood. Thre were two samovars, one brass and the other silver, in the flat on Rockaway Avenue which she brought with her from Nemirov. She also brought the silver flatware which my grandfather ordered made when they married. The various knives, forks and spoons were ultimately distributed among the children. My father was given a few pieces as well as the "sahlyarke," a silver saltcellar in the shape of a small bowl supported on four small hollow legs. One of the legs has a hole in it. My father told me that when he was a boy he used the sahlyarkeh as a whistle by blowing into the little hole. I have one fork and the sahlyarkeh which we use at Passover. I have tried the whistle, and it works.

My grandmother also brought the bed linen and the family feather beds. It was traditional to fatten geese for Passover. The goose fat would be used for cooking and the down saved to make featherbeds for the children when they married. My father remembered when he was a small boy it was his chore to pluck the down from the geese. One such featherbed, really an enormous pillow large enough to cover a double bed, was given him when he and my mother married in 1909. I remember it well having slept under it.

My mother gave us this "iberbet," featherbed, in 1947 when we came to Durham and Duke University. But before giving it to us she sent it out to be recovered. The original ticking was very old indeed and she wished to have it renewed and finished as a modern goose down comforter. She sent it out to a firm specializing in making such repairs. When it came back she noticed that the featherbed, now a comforter, was rather heavy. They had stolen the down, which my father had plucked over many many years and countless Passovers in Nemirov, and substituted chicken feathers. My mother never got over this loss. She gave us the ersatz featherbed, but it was worthless and so Malvina decided to give it away to some charitable organization.

My grandmother probably arrived in America, I would guess about 1907 with the samovars, the silverware, the featherbed and the money, in gold rubles, from the sale of the two houses and household goods. My father's youngest sister, my aunt Rayzyeh, a young girl and still unmarried, as well as Maryam and her husband Hershel, came about the same time. None of my father's nuclear family were left in Nemirov. In fine, when my grandmother died in 1922 she had been in this country about fourteen years or so at the most. This being the case, it is natural and not surprising that she held on to the customs and the life-style of Nemirov. At the time when she arrived in this country, she was already a grandmother and in her mid-fifties. Here she lived in a totally homogeneous Jewish community, Brownsville in Brooklyn, the only gentiles being the policemen, the postmen, the trolley car conductors, the street cleaners and most of the school teachers. I doubt if my

grandmother ever learned to speak English, she had no need to do so. She never wore dresses that exposed more than her ankles and always kept her head covered with a kerchief.

Because my great grandfather Doovid was a Litvak it is not surprising that my grandmother was taught to read the siddur, prayer book and probably given the same basic religious education as that given to boys who attended kheyder, elementary school where one learned to read Hebrew and the Bible. Girls did not attend kheyder. She was probably educated at home by her father or by a melamud, elementary teacher, who was hired to come to the house to teach girls to read both Yiddish and sometimes also Hebrew. At any rate, my grandmother with regard to being able to read the siddur and say prayers was on a par with many men whose education was limited to what they had learned in kheyder.

My father often remembered and told me that on Sabbaths she would read from the Tseneh Ureneh, a Yiddish translation of the Bible including the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. And at the close of the Sabbath she would intone the Yiddish prayer Gawht fin Avroom, Yeetskhawk in Yahnkev, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, asking God's protection for her children and all the family.

The Tseneh Ureneh was meant to be read by women who had not learned how to read Hebrew but would still be able to profit from reading religious subjects in Yiddish translation. Women were not required to fulfill the mitsvah, commandment, religious obligation, of praying in company with a minyan, quorum of ten adult men. Women were not counted in making up the required number of ten to form the quorum. Thus, women rarely learned how to pray or how to read the Bible in Hebrew. Instead they would read Yiddish translations of the scared scriptures, as for example, the Tseneh Ureneh.

It is extremely difficult for me, even painful, to relate why my mother and her mother-law, my grandmother Bahsyeh, were estranged during my childhood. I almost feel that I am betraying the memory of both my mother and grandmother in keeping the history of the bad feelings between them alive. It will profit no one.

It is with a feeling of guilt as if I were an informer betraying a vow of secrecy that I pass the story on to you and make a confession akin to a wrong-doer's admission of his guilt. But I cannot keep the story within me, I cannot forget that all through my childhood I did not know how to cope with the negative feelings my mother had for my father's brothers and sisters, feelings even bordering on enmity in the case of her mother-in-law, my grandmother. And, as God is my witness, may I be forgiven in this world and in the next, I am not betraying her by attempting to be impartial in the telling of this sad story.

I have already related how I never got to know my father's mother as well as I did his father. The reasons for this are that she died when I was eleven years old; she never visited our house as far as I can remember; and we rarely came to visit her.

On the other hand, I knew my father's father very well because he would visit

us on a weekly basis while we lived in Essex Street and less frequently only after we moved to Empire Boulevard in 1926. Another reason why I remember him so well is that I was nineteen years old when he died. I remember nothing of my grandmother Bahsyeh from my very early childhood, that is before the age of six or seven.

My mother was not only estranged from her mother-in-law, but also from the other members of my father's family in varying degrees of disfavor on an individual basis. She cared very little for my father's eldest sister Nekhawmeh or his older brother Yeedl. She was indifferent to Maryam but was touched by the fact that Maryam was living in extreme poverty and had such a hard life since coming to America. Maryam was a good and simple soul, guileless and without any malice for anyone despite the hard life she was having. Her husband Hershel, whom she had married in Nemirov before coming to America, was not unhandsome. He had a drooping blonde moustache looking more like a Ukrainian peasant than an urban Jew. He had been a barrel maker, a bawdner, cooper, in Nemirov. In 1919 when the Volstead Act was passed prohibiting the manufacture and consumption of alcoholic beverages illegal, "Prohibition," he found himself without job and with a trade that was entirely redundant since no one needed whiskey or beer barrels any longer.

It is just a well that I digress here and tell something of Hershel. The family name was Herman, an authentic Ukrainian name, probably pronounced Gehrman in Russian just as Horowits is pronounced Gorowitz and Hamlet, Gamlet. When he was left without a job and an income because of "Prohibition," the family, especially my grandfather Yahnkel was deeply concerned and he went about trying to find some other trade which Hershel might take up and make a living. Store keeping or peddling or business as a possibility never came up for the reason that no one in the family had ever conceived of making a living other than by following trade, be it carpenter, tailor, tinsmith and the like. My grandfather at one time had a second hand furniture store in partnership with my uncle Moisheh on Fulton Street in Brooklyn. And now in retrospect, I wonder why this was not thought of as a possibility for Hershel to try. But the truth is that Hershel was a very quiet and self-effacing man, "er hawt Gawht di neshoomeh shildig," he is in debt to God for his soul, and would never have been able to cope with the stress of buying and selling.

As a cooper Hershel knew how to handle wood, so my grandfather thought he could do something in the building trade, this after a number of years struggling for a living doing other things. My grandfather proposed that my father find him some work. At that time, in 1923-24, my father was building about twenty one-family houses on speculation in Flushing, Long Island, on 28th Street just north of Northern Boulevard (the street names have been changed since then) and he suggested that Hershel might try his hand at becoming a lather, that is the workman who nails laths to the upright studs in preparation for plastering. Nowadays lime mortar, plaster, is rarely used for finishing interior walls; and if it used, it is not applied over wooden laths as in the past, but on sheets of rocklath nailed to the

studs. Sometimes wire mesh is nailed to the studs as a base for the plastering. Dry wall construction is the most common type used today; namely, sheets of sheetrock 4' X 8' in size are nailed to the studs and the joints covered with paper and plaster-of-paris.

So my father spoke to the lath sub-contractor and Hershel was given a job as a lather. The laths were rough sawn undressed strips of wood about 1/4" thick, about 1-1/2" or so wide, and about 48" long. Lathers were paid on a piece-work basis, so much per bundle of laths. I imagine that each bundle may have had fifty or so laths. I am not sure how many. The object was to work fast. Special care in nailing was not required because the laths would be covered with plaster. Three nails, one in each stud, was all that was required and also that the laths be spaced more or less horizontally leaving about a quarter inch space between each so that the wet plaster could be keyed there. Because lathers worked fast without any need for accuracy or fine finish. Workers in other trades, especially finish carpenters or trimmers, who were fast but sloppy and careless would pejoratively be dubbed "lathers."

I used to go to the job on Saturdays and on those days when there was no school. I still remember seeing poor Hershel struggling to nail the laths to the studs. It was customary for the lathers to put the nails in their mouths, then with the left hand reach for a nail and hold it and the lath in place and almost simultaneously, with one blow with the hammer drive the nail through the lath and into the stud.

Hershel who had been first rate craftsman who could make the oaken staves and construct barrels of any size or shape, could not bring himself to hold the nails in his mouth used for nailing the laths. He moved too deliberately and was too compulsive making sure that each nail was accurately placed in the middle of each stud. And this took time. He wore a apron with a large pocket in front for the nails which slowed him up considerably. He finally made himself a small wooden box which he tied on the front of his apron. He thought he could speed up the process by reaching for the nails in the box instead of digging for them in a pocket.

The end result was that Hershel could not nail enough bundles of laths in a day to make a living and he to give up the idea of becoming a lather. I do not know what finally happened to him or if he was ever able to make a living again, or even a half-way decent poor living. My grandfather who continued to live with Maryam for a while after my grandmother died. He had brought some capital from Nemirov, as I mentioned above regarding the sale of the two houses in Nemirov by my grandmother who actually carried a sizeable amount of money in gold rubles with her when she joined my grandfather in New York. I believe my grandparents helped Maryam and Hershel and their three children financially while they lived with them before my grandmother died.

Now after this digression, I still find it difficult to relate what my mother gave as the reason why she kept herself distant from my father's family, especially my grandmother Bahsyeh with whom, so it seemed to me as a child, I believe she was

never reconciled. The differences between them arose even before my mother and father were engaged in 1907. It seems that my grandmother was not too enthusiastic about having my mother as a daughter-in-law, not because she had any personal animus against her, but rather because of one of my mother's names. My mother's complete given name was Khawva [Khahvah, Eva] Bahsyeh [Batyah], the latter being exactly the same as my grandmother's. That being the case, it meant that none of my father's and mother's offspring – children, grandchildren and even great grandchildren – would ever be called Bahsyeh and so her name, her soul so to speak, would be end in oblivion. Today, this problem would never arise, except perhaps among the most strictly orthodox observant Jews. It is still traditional among Ashkenazim, European Jews, never to name a newborn child for a living person, rather for someone who has died so that the name will live on. Children are frequently named for great grandparents especially when the grandparents are still alive. I was named for two great grandfathers, Malvina was named for an old lady who was the mother of her grandfather's first wife. Di bawbeh Mahleh continued to live with her son-in-law and his orphaned children after her daughter died. Sarah was named for two of her great grandmothers [Sarah-Dinah Sarah, my maternal grandmother and Malvina's paternal grandmother whose name was also Sarah]; Alexander for two of his great grandfathers [Alexander Jacob, Malvina's paternal grandfather and my paternal grandfather, Yahkov], and Charlie was named for my maternal grandfather and Malvina's maternal grandfather [Charles = Shaiyeh or Isaiah or Yesaiah, and Wolf or Zev = William]. Nirmala Eva is named in part for my mother, Eva; Karuna is named for herself; Eva Toba is named for both her maternal grandmothers; Nathaniel is named for my father, Sahnyeh in Nemirov, Sam in America and in Hebrew Nethanel Bentsion; and Eliot is named for one of his father's paternal uncles, Eli Bodie Enzer, who had been named for my great grandfather Elyeh OObawgoo, the father of the man for whom Charlie is named.

In short, my grandmother Bahsyeh was opposed to the marriage because she and her future daughter-in-law had the same name. So the shidukh, marriage, began without the wholehearted enthusiasm on the part of my grandmother Bahsyeh. On the personal level she probably had nothing against my mother other than that she represented a barrier to her name ever being passed on the succeeding generations descending from my father.

There was another incident, one even more extreme in its effect on my mother, which hurt her so that she never forgot it and always recalled it with some bitterness. My mother and father had been engaged for almost two years and were married in July of 1909. My mother had prepared for the wedding making sheets and table linens as well as sewing dresses for herself. In the picture taken at the time of their engagement in 1907 when she was about seventeen or eighteen years old and which hangs on the wall in front of my desk where I am writing this, she is wearing

a magnificent dress she sewed herself. I believe the material looks like a silk corduroy with velvet trim.

I do not, know what my mother's reaction was to her future mother-in-law's fear that her name would be obliterated in her son's progeny if he married my mother. My mother probably considered the matter of little importance. She was a Socialist at heart, a needle-worker who knew the hard and unrewarding labor of sewing in a sweat shop. She was interested in the theater, in literature, and had pictures taken of herself with her elbow on a table and her hand supporting her tilted head with her fingers extended and touching her forehead – the standard pose of young Russian Jewish working girls who aspired to a richer life of the mind. This being the case, she probably had negative feelings about my grandmother's "old country" ways. This is a conclusion based entirely on conjecture, for I never heard a word about this from my grandmother herself who would certainly not have spoken of this to a child of less than eleven years old. I never heard if my grandmother and mother ever had any words about the problem of my mother's name.

But something must have occurred during the two years or so before the wedding causing a rift which was exacerbated and erupted into an argument during the actual wedding celebration between members of my mother's and my father's families. My mother was the eldest child and her brothers and sisters were all still young children or in their early teens, so they could not have been involved. Just what had caused the altercation I never found out, other than that the bride and groom were bystanders. The unseemly altercation ended when my father's family left the wedding. Just who left I never asked and never found out. It was most unpleasant for me to even think about this unseemly event, let alone have an interest in prying out details.

I imagine my father's eldest sister Nekhawmeh was certainly one who left or one who might have played a major part in the events leading up to the departure of his family from the wedding. I conjecture and say this not because I have any reason or proof that what I say is true, but rather because I do not have any recollection of my mother ever addressing or talking to Nekhawmeh; nor did we, as a family, ever visit her house or she ours though we lived at no great distance from each other. And furthermore, I come to this conclusion, based on the fact that my mother was warm to my aunt Goldeh and was especially fond of my uncle Moishe who always looked up to his older brother, my father. She was certainly warm to my grandfather Yahnkel "Balaboos" who visited us on a weekly basis. She pitied Maryam, had negative feelings about my father's brother Yeedl who she believed to be envious of my father. She seemed indifferent to Rayzye, the youngest of my father's siblings who was still a very young girl when my mother and father married.

I just remembered an incident told me by my mother which leads me to conclude that my grandmother Bahsyeh harbored a strong dislike for my her. I do not know what the cause of her negative feelings for my mother was other than that

they had the same name. It was my mother's misfortune to be the reason why her name, Bahsye, would not live on in her son's succeeeding generations.

My parents set up housekeeping when they married in a flat, I believe it was the one where I was born, which by the standards of the day was rather expensive, $15 a month. According to my mother's story, my grandmother Bahsyeh came for a visit one day and noted the new and expensive furniture and other household appoinments. My grandmother disapproved of this extravagance despite the fact that my father was earning high wages and could very well afford the expense. Her comment to my mother, probably not yet twenty years old at the time was, "Dawbreh gawspawdeenya, yahk prawvneh speena," An efficient housewife with a full purse.

The distance between my mother and my grandmother Bahsyeh was widened even further the very day I was born and they were never reconciled. I heard the story time and time again from my mother, a story which I have never articulated with spoken or written words until this very moment. I never heard my grandmother's version, not that I would have ever asked her about it even if she had lived until I had reached the age of reason. As I have mentioned before, she died when I was eleven years old. The story is very simple and the words which caused my mother such great pain over the years are very few indeed.

I was born October 10, 1911 at home in my parents flat on Stone Avenue near Pitkin Avenue in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. My grandmother Bahsyeh came to visit to see her new grandchild. My mother was still in bed right after the confinement. My mother repeated the story over and over again of what happened during that visit using the very same words which have been graven in my mind all these years and which I have not forgotten and am pained to repeat even now when I am eighty-two years old.

My grandmother sat beside the bed where my mother rested with the newborn infant beside her and said, "Mawhzel tawhv, zawlst eem ertsee'n, awber tsi zahn khawsineh zawlst nit zahn," Good luck, may you raise him, but may you not be at his wedding]. I suppose she expressed her great hurt and disappointment still harboring more than a little resentment to have wished her daughter-in-law the same fate she had, to raise a son and then not be present at his wedding. I am sure that my mother did not invent this story. Yet I cannot understand why my grandmother was so vindictive, other than that my mother represented oblivion for her name Bahsyeh knowing that none of my father's children's children would ever bear her name.

Her words still move me to a disquiet of mind. And her prophesy came true. When I and Malvina were married 10 March 1945 in Guatemala, my mother was not there. I remember I did not want any substitute mother to accompany me under the wedding canopy, but said nothing. I was fearful of unwittingly offending the relative of my mother-in-law, di meemeh Khana Leebeh, from Denver, Colorado who happened to be visiting Guatemala at the time. She stood in for my mother during

the ceremony. I never let on what my feelings were about this, having someone substitute, even as a matter of form, for my mother who was absent and thereby fulfilling my grandmother Bahsyeh's prophesy. She was, in fact, not present at my wedding as my grandmother had not been at her son's.

I held this secret, if secret it is, within me all these years, sometimes feeling so sad for my mother, more than just a distress that eventually fades and is forgotten. I never judged my grandmother or faulted her, even on the day of my own wedding when her prophesy came true. I just did not know her as well as my other grandparents, especially my mother's father Shaiyeh, or my father's father Yahnkel, both of whom had a deep and positive influence on me all of my life and whom I was fortunate enough to know from my early childhood up the time I was about nineteen years old.