Chapter 8.

My Paternal Grandfather

My father's father, Yahnkel Balaboos, as I have already related, was an orphan of both mother and father. He was raised by a relative, probably an uncle, Sahnyeh [Netanel in Hebrew, Nathaniel in English, Nesanel in Yiddish and shortened to Sahnyeh] for whom my father was named. Thus the wheel of history makes an other full turn and in Charlie's eldest son there is Sahnyeh Markman once again and for the third time in living memory beginning with the first Sahnyeh, probably born in the1820s or 1830s.

My paternal grandfather's name, Yahnkel, is a Yiddish diminutive for Yankev, that is Ya'acob in Hebrew or Jacob in English. To his uncle Sahnyeh's name there was appended the epithet or surname "Soldaht," [Sawldawt in Nemirover speech] for he had been a cantonist, that is a "Nyiklolaiyevskeh soldaht" who had been probably been kidnapped as a child and who served in the Tsarist army for twenty-five years.

Yahnkel, my grandfather, was not born in Nemirov, but in atiny village the name of which sounded like "P'tchereh" to me. Just when he came to live in Nemirov I do not know; probably as a young man after he learned his trade of carpenter, in all likelihood from his uncle Sahnyeh. That my grandfather had been a carpenter by trade, there is no doubt, despite the fact that my father, who always repeated the story time and time again, never saw his father handling tools, or doing any physical work at all.

It was my grandfather's custom to take a nap every afternoon. According to my father, "Es hawt gekehnt dihneren in blitsen, er hawt zikh shtehndik tseegeleygt." [There could be thunder and lightning, he always lay down and took a nap.]

At the time when my father was born in 1885/86, my grandfather was already working for himself as a building contractor, that is to say, he was a "podrahtshik," contractor who employed carpenters in his construction activities. Note that I do not say "construction business" in order to avoid an anachronism. Master craftsmen were not engaged in business in the same sense as are modern-day building contractors. Contracts for labor and materials were always verbal and based on the good faith of the both the craftsman and the owner. Materials, especially lumber, had to be prepared even a year or two in advance of the start of the job.

From stories told me by my father, I learned much about how the building trade operated in Nemirov and, I suppose, the rest of the Ukraine in the late nineteenth century. For example, my grandfather would buy quantities of green timber, usually as logs, which would be sawn up into usable sizes and then stacked and allowed to air dry and seasoned for a number of years before being used. In other words, the podratchik had to tie up some of his capital in lumber. The backyard of the house was used to store lumber for air drying. Most of the lumber was oak and destined to be used for finish work, trim, such as flooring, windows, doors and the like.

My father as a young boy would sometimes earn some pocket money working in lumber yards of other carpenter craftsmen by sawing logs into boards. They would pay him "finif kawpkes a shnit.," Five kopeks a cut.] It required great physical strength to saw timber by hand. This was end of the nineteenth century, before the introduction of mechanically powered saw mills in Nemirov. He would sometimes also earn some pocket money by making a "taburetkeh," tabouret, a small round or octagonal table or stool] from scraps and then sell it in the market.

My grandfather's house was on the street leading to the market. The street was full of horse-drawn peasant wagons parked there on market days. My mother always joked about this saying how the street in front of the house was always covered with manure on market days.

As I have already said before, my grandfather was a podrahtchik. He built mainly for the local gentry and sometimes even for the Christian clergy constructing small country churches which were probably of square dressed logs and roofed with typical Russian orthodox onion domes. Frequently, when he happened to be building a house for some of the local landowners, Poles in the main, he would travel to Warsaw to buy hardware: door hinges, locks, door latches and other necessary fittings.

There were two types of carpenters: "stawlyer," finish carpenter or trimmer] and "plyawtnyik," plotnick, framer who roughed out the structure. A common Russian Jewish family name is Plotnick. The plyawtnyik, called framers today, first adzed down the logs to be more or less square in section before using them to lay up the walls. The roofs of more monumental private buildings would be covered with wood shingles which had to be split from the rough logs and then dressed and applied to the framing of the roof, even on onion domes sometimes. In the case of small houses, the "vahrtsawbes," squared logs with rabbets or grooves cut on the sides, would be set upright into the ground. The spaces between were filled with thinner undressed logs horizontally inserted in the rabbets alternating with the "vahlykyehs," billets of damp clay and straw. These were then rammed down with an enormous wooden mallet, dubeenah, so that the clay was squeezed out covering the short horizontal logs. The rough carpenters also framed the roof in preparation for the laying of the thatch, in the case of humble houses. Roofs of more monumental

public buildings, especially the onion domes of churches, would be covered with sheet metal by the "blehkhers," tinsmiths, with sheets of copper or tin. Sometimes decoratively shaped shingles would be used to cover roofs, in which case these were applied by the carpenters.

The completion of the construction of a church was symbolized by the installation of the Russian cross with its extra diagonal cross bar. In Nemirov and the surrounding area, this task always fell to a Nemirover Jewish blekher whose name I no longer remember, but who worked for my grandfather Yahnkel. The priest and the village peasants would assemble in front of the church. A blanket would be spread on the ground. And then the peasants, crossing themselves and saying a prayer would throw money on the blanket. The little blehkher, as agile as a cat, would hoist the cross on his shoulders and clamber up the exterior of the building right up to the roof and to the crown of the onion dome, if there was one, and set the cross in place. Whereupon the long-bearded priest would start intoning some prayers and the peasants would cross themselves and continue to throw money on the blanket for the Jewish craftsman who installed the cross.

How many churches or how many houses my grandfather built in the district around Nemirov during the years from not long after his marriage in 1872 until my father left for America in 1905, I do not know. As a child, I never thought to ask him, nor did I ever ask my father.

The laying of oak floors was a time consuming and exacting craft. First, sleepers, that is lengths of boards about three or four inches thick and about the same wide, also of some hardwood, were laid directly on the earth of the ground floor. These rough-sawn sleepers were leveled up as much as could be done. The oak flooring, usually of short strips laid in a herring bone or some other pattern, was doweled or nailed to the sleepers. I do not remember if my father told me that nails like the modern round pointed iron nails were used. However, if nails were used, they were probably cut wrought iron flat nails not unlike those still used today to lay oak floors. But it more likely that the strips of oak were doweled or pegged to the sleepers.

When the oak flooring was in place, the whole surface of the floor in the room was planed and sanded by hand to make it level throughout. Even when I was child, floor-layers in New York did not have electric sanding machines with which to finish floors. It was one of the most time consuming, grueling and back breaking jobs to sand floors down by hand on one's knees. In order to test if the surface of the floor was really level and even throughout, my father told me that a few drops of water were dropped on the floor to check if they remained in place or to see in which directions they flowed in order to rectify any inconsistencies in level.

I have already given some account of when my grandfather Yahnkel, der ehlter zaydeh, was born, probably in the early to mid-1840's or at the latest near 1850. He had been married previously before he married my grandmother, dee ehlter bawbeh Bahsyeh, in 1872. He died in Brooklyn, in the East New York section, in

1930, just before I entered Union College in Schenectady, New York. He was probably in his mid- to late eighties when he died, not from any degenerative disease, but from pneumonia.

I still remember him on his death bed, before he was laid on the floor covered from head to toe with his feet toward the door in the traditional manner. His hair was speckled with grey as was his neatly trimmed beard. The expression on his face was not peaceful, dead or immobile. His expression was like that of someone straining or resisting some suddenly felt unexpected physical force. He did not die from inside himself, but as if his life had been cut off by some external force, as if by accident, as if the unexpected Angel of Death, der Mawlehkh ha Moovis, had surprised him while he was unaware and unprepared. Now that I think of it, Spaniards frequently refer to the deceased as "Le sorprendió la Muerte." [Death surprised him.]

Today, with antibiotics available, my grandfather would not have succumbed to pneumonia. He was a strong and healthy man who could walk faster than his sons and even some of his grandchildren. He could lift the Torah scroll after the reading on the Sabbath by a simple turn of his wrists.

How did he get sick? After my grandmother Bahsyeh died in 1922 he eventually went to live with my aunt Goldeh, she was next after my father. Goldeh's husband Zahnvil Jarmulnick,[Yahrmulnyik] a "keershner," hat maker, by trade from Berditchev, and who had a hat factory in Manhattan, died unexpectedly not long after my grandmother. So my grandfather went to live with Goldeh who had to go to work when she was widowed. I believe she continued to operate Zahnvil's hat factory. She had three children, Rookhel the eldest and about a year or so older than me, Hershel about my age perhaps a few months younger, and Ruthie. Note I do not give her name in Yiddish which I never knew. She was about five or six years younger than Hershel.

They lived in a four-family house which Zahnvil bought a few years earlier while we still lived in Essex Street near New Lots Avenue. Their house was about ten or twelve blocks west of Essex Street. We visited them quite often because they lived nearby and also because my mother bore Goldeh no rancor as she did for my father's family in general especially for his oldest sister Nekhawmeh. On a one to one basis my mother got along well withmy father's siblings, but had negative feelings for them as awhole since the incident with her mother-in-lawaw, my grandmother Bahsyeh, going back to the day I was born.

The Jarmulnick family occupied one of the flats and rented the other three, the income from which helped pay the mortgage. But the family spent most of the day in the "finished basement" where a kitchen-living room had been built. This basement room was not an ideal place, but it provided extra living space for the family of five beyond that in the two-bedroom apartment on the first floor. The story is that the basement was damp because of which my grandfather caught cold and

as a result came down with pneumonia. This was probably the first time he had ever been sick in his life, and it was also the last time.

I consider it fortunate indeed that my grandfather Yahnkel lived as long as he did and did not die while I was still a young child as happened in the case of my grandmother Bahsyeh. As a result, I have very few memories of her. Of my mother's father, Shaiyeh, and of my father's father, I have stored in my memory countless details, all important in the formation of my mind and character. So let me begin at the beginning and relate what I remember of der ehlter zaydeh in a more or less chronological order.

My grandfather Yahnkel was known during almost all of his adult life as Yahnkel Bahlaboos. The surname or qualifying epithet Bahlaboos was always referred to when identifying him so that in a sense it was part of his name. Bahlaboos a Podolian Yiddish version of the Hebrew Baal ha Bai'ith, master of the house. A Livak Yiddish version would be pronounced bahlabuhs. I do not know my grandfather's father's name and thus do not know by what name he was called up to the Torah. Yahnkel in Yiddish is Ya'acov in Hebrew, Jacob in English. Judging from the fact that my father's eldest brother was the first male child and that his name in Yiddish was Yeedl —or Yudel in Litvak Yiddish, Yehudah in Hebrew — it could very well be that he was named for my grandfather Yahnkel's father. If this is so, then my great grandfather's name must have been the same. As I have said before, my grandfather was an orphan of both mother and father. I never heard from him or anyone else what his parents' names were. I assume, therefore, that my grandfather named his first son after his father. By the same token, I conclude he named his first daughter, my father's eldest sister, after his mother, Nekhawmeh, Nekhamah in Hebrew.

But how did my grandfather Yahnkel acquire the surname Bahlaboos? Right after he married my grandmother Bahsyeh and became a householder, he decided to stock his house with a supply of staples. So he bought a sack of flour, another of sugar, a smaller one of salt and other non-perishable essentials that would keep over long periods of time. He engaged a porter, a treyger, to carry the sacks of flour, sugar and salt to his house. Somebody saw the porter loaded down with the sacks called out asking him for whom he was carrying such heavy loads of food staples. The porter yelled back, "Hawst nit gehert? Yahnkel iz gevawren a bahlaboos." [Have you not heard? Yankel has become a householder. A boss, a bahlaboos being a Yiddish version of the Hebrew baal ha bai'ith, master of the house. And from that day on, probably in 1872, my grandfather was no longer simply Yahnkel, but instead was always referred to as Yahnkel Bahlaboos. It was a positive, not a pejorative surname indicating that Yahnkel had achieved a position of some status as a family man, a master of a house. The term bahlaboos is also used for the owner of a business, the owner of property, an employer, a boss.

After my grandparents married in 1872, Yankel began to attend the same synagogue as his father-in-law, my Litvak great grandfather Doovid Krahsnyahnsky, judging from the fact that my father always said that my grandfather Yahnkel served as gabbai of "doos litvisheh sheelekhl," the little Litvak synagogue. My grandfather would rise very early every morning, even in winter when it was still dark, and take a bundle of scrap lumber with him on his way to the synagogue for morning prayers. As a carpenter bahlaboos and a pawdrahtshik who had lumber seasoning in the yard behind the house, there were always scraps available with which to get the fire started in the synagogue stove. The large Russian stove located in a corner of the room, built of clay and stone would also be heated with a bale of wheat straw. The straw burned quickly and at a very high temperature heating the clay and stone so that it radiated heat long after the fire was out.

My grandfather lived up to his surname and was a bahlaboos in every sense of the word. For example, when he married my grandmother, he ordered the town silversmith make him a set of flatware consisting of forks, knives, soup spoons and tea spoons. This flatware was distributed to the children in shares when they married. I have already mentioned the large fork which I still have and the saltcellar, the sahlyahrkeh, the remnants of my father's portion given him when he and my mother were married. My grandfather was always civic-minded not only in the little synagogue, but in the general community as well. For example, as a builder he always had supplies of lumber on hand. He set aside a number of boards or planks which were used each Pesach season for preparing matzohs. He stored them from year to year and made them available to the neighbors and others who wished to do so when it came time to bake matzohs for the eight days of Passover.

The baking of matzohs was a community endeavor. He would set the planks on supports or sawhorses on which the women would roll out the dough into individual matzohs. Others would pass the sawtooth wheels over the matzohs to make the slight perforations prior to being placed in the oven. The actual baking of the matzoh was the most crucial step because it took but a few short minutes for the matzohs to be done. After removal from the oven, the matzohs were allowed to cool and then were placed in large straw baskets covered with cloths and be kept in a safe place, usually in the attic, to avoid contamination with leaven, khoomets, until needed for the Passover holiday.

As a service to the community he also had a number of large copper cauldrons which were used to make "pawdvidleh," that is preserves from plums. Plums were grown locally or were also brought in from Bessarabia, a region to the west of Podolia noted for its fruit, especially grapes for making wine. After being washed, the plums, with the addition of sugar, were placed in the copper cauldrons over a slow fire and slowly cooked in their own juice until they disintegrated. Plum preserves, that is jam, was stored all through the winter months and was usually eaten with bread. When we lived on Essex Street, every Fall my mother made jars

and jars of pawdvidleh, but cooked on the kitchen stove. Also, in the unheated space under the front porch, both my mother and father stored pickled green tomatoes, cucumbers and cabbage, sauerkraut, which were kept in wooden barrels. In the case of the cabbage, I remember a large stone was placed on a round lid of smaller diameter than the barrel's mouth to weigh down the cabbage and vent the gases. The store room under the porch was not heated, nor did the temperature ever get down to freezing. This was a custom that harked back to their childhood in Nemirov where every householder who had the means would not only put in a store of potatoes and flour for the winter, but would also make pawdvidleh and pickle cucumbers, tomatoes and cabbage. At the time my father left Nemirov in 1905, my grandfather Yahnkel was a balaboos indeed, for he already owned two houses. I already have related how I heard from my aunt Nekhawmeh's speech at their fiftieth wedding anniversary how my grandparents built their first house. The family was a large one, seven children. Apparently my grandmother had given birth to more than seven. My father remembered that when he was still a little child, a baby boy, a younger brother, died. He must have had some kidney ailment because he could not urinate. I do not know if there was any more infant mortality in the family, probably not.

Because of hygienic health practices prescribed in the religious observances of Jews, infant mortality was far less common among them than among the non-Jewish community, especially among the lower and poorer echelons of Russian/Ukrainian society. This fact had been noted from as far back as the middle ages when plagues ravished the general population of central Europe but did not have as drastic effects on the Jews. The Jews were not as vulnerable because they subscribed to what today would be called "public health" practices: they bathed frequently, ate only fresh meat if at all, never ate animal blood (the chief ingredients of German blutwurst or certain French sausages as well), kept separate sets of dishes and cooking utensils for meat and dairy dishes, and even extra separate sets of cooking utensils, dishes and flatware during the passover holidays. I just remembered that it was my chore each year, just before the Passover holiday, to go down to basement and bring up "doos peysekhdiked gefays," the Passover dishes, pots and kitchen utensils, stored in a large wooden barrel. My mother may have had Socialist leanings and a secular view of the Bible, but she cherished the traditions and history of the Jewish people. The Passover holidays were a time for remembering who we were.

To return to the theme of my father's family. All the children, except the one little boy who did not survive, came to America, had children of the own who, in turn, had children too. When I write about my father's and my mother's siblings in a later chapter, I will try to enumerate how many individuals there were in both the Markman and Bodie families by my time, that is, the number of individuals in the third and possibly the fourth American generation.

In order to feed a family of nine, the family kept a cow and a goat too. It was my aunt Maryam's chore to care for the cow. Each day she would lead the cow to the outskirts of town to graze. I suppose in the winter, when the ground was frozen and covered with snow, the cow was kept in her stall in the backyard and fed fodder bought for the purpose. Maryam also milked the cow. My father remembered how they churned butter from the milk, and how the liquid residue was mixed with "eerzh," placed in the oven with low heat which then thickened to form "kawlahtookheh." * They ate kasha, groats, with milk, "lawkshen mit milikh," broad flat egg noodles with milk. Cottage and farmer cheese was also made from the milk. In fine, the cow made it possible for the family eat a diet of healthy and nutritious food. Maryam took care of the cow and sometimes would sell some of the surplus milk in the market and thus earn a little pocket money. As I said before, the house where they lived was near the town market place. Maryam was a very simple and uncomplicated, good-hearted and gentle soul. She had no guile in her at all and knew nothing of the world outside the family and the immediate surroundings where the family lived. Of course, she was never sent to school, neither were the other girls or even the boys who at least were taught to read Hebrew in kheyder, elementary religious school. She did not know how to distinguish the values of the various copper and silver coins, that is their denominations. So she devised system of identifying the values of the coins she earned selling the surplus milk. She would tie coins of similar denominations in separate knots in her petticoat. One knot for single kopeks, another knot for five kopek coins and so on.

The story I heard time and time again to illustrate her naivete and the mean character of her older brother Yeedel was that when he needed some money he would take a pair of scissors and cut off the knots with her coins from her petticoat when she was unaware. When she realized that her money had been filched by her older brother, she would sit for hours and hours crying and crying waiting for my grandfather to come home and give him a good hiding. Even my uncle Yeedl would tell this story to demonstrate the simple mindedness and persistence of Maryam who, when the tears stopped falling, would wet her face with spittle and keep up her moaning until my grandfather arrived even if it took hours and hours.

Yeedl had a mean streak in him it seems. He was of jealous nature, especially as regards my father when they were children and also later on in life when they were grown men with children of their own. Once my grandfather had a pair of new boots made for my father. Knee length boots rather shoes were commonly worn n Russia

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* Note on "eerzh." I once knew the name of this grain in English. It may be millet. It is not too common and for a long time it was not available in Brooklyn, as my father commented a few times. When cooked it is a pale lemon yellow in color. Each grain is spherical more or less and about the size of a whole groat, kasha. I believe I saw eerzh for sale at Wellspring Grocery on Ninth Street, Durham.

in those days. Yeedl out of spite and jealousy, because my grandfather did not have a pair made for him too at the time, took a knife and cut up my father's new boots. The truth is that my father and his older brother were never warm to each other.

My father also told me that in addition to the cow, the family also had a goat which gave excellent milk. One day Yeedl in a fit of rage threw something at the animal blinding her in one eye. My father was always wary of him and chose to be guarded and distant, even when they were partners in general contracting work in the 1920's in Brooklyn. The truth is that I hardly ever saw Yeedl, only once in a while. I will speak more about him in the chapter dealing with my father's siblings and their children, that is my paternal aunts, uncles and cousins.

Though he never had any formal secular education, nor did any Jews or most Russians in general at time he was growing up, my grandfather invented a system of arithmetic by means of which he kept the accounts of his construction jobs. The story is that he used a number of symbols, dashes and crosses and other marks to signify numbers. As was not uncommon among many of the Jews of Nemirov, he not only spoke Yiddish and knew how to read the prayer book and understand the meaning of the Hebrew. He also spoke Ukrainian, "khakhlatsky," usually called "goyish," with the peasants and local gentiles; Polish with the landowners for whom he often worked; and Russian with the government authorities. I often heard him repeat the aphorism regarding the liabilities to which Jews were subject and the negative treatment with which they were burdened. "Voos toig meer mahn Poilish reden az me lawhst mir nit in hoif arahn." [What good does it do me to speak Polish if they do not admit me to their courtyard.] This is to say that Jews were excluded from admission to primary schools and gymnasia, let alone universities. Not that there were schools, in the first place from which Jews could be excluded. The lower echelons of non-Jewish Russian and Ukrainian society did not attend schools. There were very few schools of any kind in the small towns and villages of Tsarist Russia. The Jewish boys at least got some religious education and learned to read the prayer book and also Yiddish. Jewish girls did not go to the religious schools. It was common among those families who had the means to hire a tutor to teach the girls reading of Yiddish and also some arithmetic. My mother had such a tutor when she was a child. Sometimes in the kheyder, religious elementary school, the melamed, teacher, also taught the boys arithmetic. My mother's father, my grandfather Shaiyeh, was fortunate enough to have attended the shkola, public elementary school, for a brief period of time.

There was a secondary school in Nemirov, a gymnasium, gymnazyeh in Russian, but no Jews were admitted. Also, very few Jews were ever admitted to the few Russian universities which were usually located in the principal cities. It was an accepted fact, if one wanted to enter the university it was necessary to become an apostate and convert to Christianity first, and thus not be counted in the minuscule quota alloted to Jewish students, the policy of *numerus clausus*.

There was a medical doctor in Nemirov, Shapiro by name, of whom it was always said that he was a convert. This rumor was probably not true and arose from the fact that he kept himself aloof from the Jewish community. He was probably the only university-educated Jew in the whole of Nemirov in the late nineteenth century. He did not go to the synagogue and, coupled with the fact that he was a university graduate, it followed that he was surely an apostate. It was an accepted fact that "men hawt zikh gedahfrt shmawden," one had to convert, to be admitted to the university and become a physician. My father always would comment about those educated Jews in America who soft-pedalled their Jewish origin, that they were despicable and even stupid saying, "In Amerika darf men zikh nit shmawden veren a dawkter." [In America one does not have to convert to become a doctor.] On the other hand, though Dr. Shapiro distanced himself socially from the Jews of Nemirov, he was charitable and contributed to Jewish causes. It seems that he was an enlightened secular Jew, and indeed a rarity in the small towns of Tsarist Russia in the late nineteenth century. He must have been an extremely lonely man, aloof from the Jews and hardly accepted as an equal the by non-Jewish gentry.

The non-Jewish boys of the upper classes who attended the gymnasium wore special uniforms and were addressed with the polite title of "Little Master," that is Pahnitch, a diminutive for Pahn, a title which is the equivalent of Don in Spanish. In Spain it also sometimes customary, especially for maidservants, to address young boys in the household as señorito, the diminutive of señor. In a like manner, pahnitch is used for young gentlemen. Gymnasium students were all young gentlemen whose names were usually proceeded by the polite title Pahnitch, especially when referred to by Jews.

Well, there was a young Jewish boy, Zawlmen, Zalman, by name, who somehow acquired the uniform jacket or coat from one of the gymnasium students. He probably came from a family that was not very well off, and so he wore the gymnasium uniform coat in lieu of the usual civilian garb. From the day he put that jacket on and went out into the street he was dubbed for life with the surname "Pahnitch." I knew Zawlmen Pahnitch when I was a child. He was a junk man and had a junk yard in Brownsville which I visited with my father a few times.

I remember my grandfather Yahnkel Balaboos as a man of middling height, about as tall as my father, 5'7" or 5'8". He had dark brown eyes deeply set under his overhanging brow, looking very much like the little plaster portrait statuette of the great Russian writer Leon Tolstoy which my mother put on my bedroom dresser along with another of Shakespeare in order to set examples for me to follow. I do not know what became of the Shakespeare statuette, it had a small piece missing from its circular base. The statuette of Tolstoy still looks down on me from its perch on top of the bookcase propped against the wall to my left as I write these words. Unfortunately, Mama, while cleaning, inadvertently dropped Leo Tolstoy cracking him

into two parts which I glued together. The break almost broke my heart. Tolstoy has been looking over my shoulder and I into his face for at least 75 years or more.

My grandfather always cut his hair very short, in fact the barber trimmed it down with his clippers revealing the shape of his skull. But the truth is, I rarely if ever saw my grandfather bareheaded. He very frequently kept his hat on, usually a black derby, even indoors when he visited us. Though he was an observant Jew, not a fanatic, he did not wear a yarmulke (skull cap) at home. His hair tended to a light reddish color indicating that he was probably fair haired in his youth. As a matter of fact, my uncle Moishe was very light haired, dirty blonde, and one of his children my cousin Leo I remember as having blonde curls as a child. Also one or two of my aunt Rayzyeh's children were blonde. It is, therefore, not unlikely that my grandfather Yahnkel had light hair before he turned grey. He was already in his seventies when I was a child. I still remember him striding into the house for his weekly visit wearing a long overcoat in winter, a black derby hat on his head and carrying a cane.

One of his eyes was always tearing, and he always had to keep dabbing it to keep it dry. I also remember he would sometimes cough, a deep chesty cough, for long periods of time, especially at night or after he went to bed. He never did anything about that cough and it seems it was more annoying to those who heard it than to him. The condition of the eye did bother him a great deal. He hesitated to come directly to America for fear that the immigration authorities at Ellis Island would turn him away and not let him enter because he was not healthy. The story that was constantly rumored about in Nemirov, and I suppose over the whole of the Pale of the Settlement in Russia, that one had to be healthy to be admitted to the United States.

How did he come to have a eye that was always running? The story is as follows. A neighbor had a wife, Khahntsyeh dee Roiteh, Kahntsyeh the Red Haired, who was a shrew. She was always shouting and yelling at her husband. One Friday in the late afternoon just before the beginning of the Sabbath, Khantseyeh was heard giving her husband a tongue lashing. And he apparently was defending himself by answering back in equally strident tones. My grandfather entered the house and pleaded with them to stop quarreling because it was "erev Shawbis," erev Shabat, that is the Sabbath was almost upon them and that there should be peace in the house, "shoolem bayis," shalom bai'ith. Khahntsyeh had a temper as fiery as her hair and picked up one of the large Sabbath loaves, khallah, or challah, she had baked from the table which had already been set for the Sabbath meal, and heaved it at her husband. Since my grandfather was standing between them trying to keep them from possibly assaulting each other, Khahntsyeh missed her target and the khallah hit my grandfather in the eye rupturing the tear duct.

The condition of this one eye gave rise to his concern that he would not be allowed to enter America and led him to sign on as a deck hand on a steamship sailing from Buenos Aires to New York where he jumped ship when it docked in Brooklyn. This was probably in 1906, a year or so after my father had arrived in New

York in 1905. But I am getting ahead of the story and must now relate how he came to be in Buenos Aires in the first place.

Many years ago when I was a graduate student at Columbia University, I became an "activist" of sorts and was zealous in trying to preserve the Yiddish language and its literature by making it accessible without too much effort to the vast numbers of American-born Jews of Yiddish speaking parents who understood spoken Yiddish but not could speak it, let alone read it. To facilitate the preservation and dissemination of the Yiddish language I devised a latinized orthography to replace the Hebrew alphabet in which Yiddish is written. The idea was that those who understood some spoken Yiddish would be able to read Yiddish literature quite readily because it would not be necessary to learn how to read Hebrew first. I believed the Hebrew alphabet was a barrier to those who had little, if any, religious instruction in Hebrew and were thus barred from knowing how to read Yiddish. By way of illustration how my latinized orthography for Yiddish functioned, I wrote the story of my grandfather Yahnkel Bahlaboos's odyssey from Russia to Buenos Aires to New York and called it "A Yidisher Kolumbus Endekt Amerikeh," A Jewish Columbus Discovers America.

I give the gist of the story below as he told it to me while I was still in grade school. Unlike what I have related about my forebears from others who preceded me before I was born, his experiences in Argentina and his voyage to America, I heard from him directly.

My father left Nemirov in 1905 and, after a short stay in London, arrived in New York,. Almost at once, he began to earn money working as a carpenter and was able to save enough to pay for steamship tickets and other expenses for his brothers and sisters to come to America. I know that he sent Goldeh a "shifskahrte," ship's ticket, also one for his brother Yeedl as well as for his youngest brother Moishe who celebrated his Bar Mitzvah while on the ship. Moishe was accompanied by my father's eldest sister Nekhawmeh's husband, Yoil, Joel, Cooper. I do not know if my father also paid for Yoil's passage, nor am I sure if he paid for Nekhawmeh's and her eldest child Rookhel's passage later, or for Maryam and her husband Hershel's either. But my father always said in a general way, never mentioning anyone specifically that "Ikh hawb zey awleh ahribergebrakht.," I brought them all over.

At any rate within, a year or two after my father's arrival almost all his brothers and sisters had left Nemirov. My grandfather and grandmother were left more or less alone except for Rayzeh who was a young girl still in her early teens at the time. Emigration to the United States was in the air all though the Tsarist Pale of Settlement. It was a mass movement, but imperceptible like the slow moving river in the Everglades of Florida, a steady slowly-moving current beginning in the 1880's and only coming to dead stop with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

With all the grown children in America, my grandfather decided to go there too. I do not know if he went just for the trip to see his children or because he

intended to prepare the way for himself and my grandmother to follow him to the United States. Like most Jews he had a fatalistic turn of mind and was not interested in challenging Providence. What happened, happened for a good reason that did not require any questioning. What happened in life was "bahshert," destined. And I suppose his ending up in Buenos Aires and not New York where my father and the other children were already was also bahshert and an example of unquestioned Divine Providence. He set out from Nemirov and arrived at a port city. He never related any details about this part of the journey. He mentioned no trains or stage coaches, not even the countries through which he passed to get to the port, the name of which I never found out. It may have been Trieste or Hamburg or Rotterdam, or even Le Havre in France. I suppose it would be interesting for me to study some of the schedules of the steamship lines with sailings to Argentina roughly from about 1906 to about 1908 and try to find out at which port city my grandfather arrived after he left Nemirov. I suspect it may have been Trieste for the first country that one went through bordering the Ukraine was Austria-Hungary, probably through Czernowitz in Bukovina. I am only guessing at something which was of little importance to him so he never mentioned the port city.

But more important was that he met some Nemirover lawntslait, fellow Nemirover, paisanos, there who were also awaiting a ship to the New World and a New Life. When asked where he was going, he answered "To America." And in turn he asked them where they were going to which they replied "Argentina." "In vee iz Arghenteeneh" [And where is Argentina]," he asked? "Oikh Amerikeh." [Also America], they answered. The lantlsait continued saying that in Argentina they give land to Jews. Doubtlessly attracted by the lure of free land, and because Argentina was also America, on the spot, without any hesitation whatsoever, he decided to go to Argentina. **

How my grandfather arrived in Argentina or any details of the sea voyage from Europe to Buenos, he never related. Judging from the fact that he must have made this journey sometime in 1906 or perhaps in 1907, it must have been at least a two to three week crossing even if the port he left from was on the Atlantic, Bordeaux or Le Havre in France and much longer if he left from Hamburg or Rotterdam and longer still if from Trieste. The story of the crossing from Europe must have paled into insignificance for him when compared to his adventures in Argentina and his subsequent voyage from Buenos Aires up the length of South and Central America and the eastern coast of the United States to New York.

** This was during the time when Baron Hirsch instituted a program funded personally by him to settle Jews on the land as farmers. He distributed thousands of acres, mainly in the province of Entre Rios where the Jewish town Moisesville was founded and which still exists.

When he arrived in Buenos Aires he and his travelling companions were met by some Nemirover lawntslait who had gone to Argentina before. Though I never saw it, my father says he took a picture with them. At the time, he was a man in late fifties or early sixties, yet he took a job as a carpenter, I believe, probably in the shop of a cabinet maker and not in building construction. This turn of events where he chose to become a manual worker is indeed remarkable. It reveals his practical turn of character and his lack of any pretensions of having such a high a social status that manual work would be beneath him, a general contractor, pawdrahtchik,an) and owner of two houses in Nemirov. It is even more remarkable for he probably had not used tools for many years. At least my father always said he never saw his father ever handling tools or doing any physical work on the construction jobs. Yet here in Argentina, he went to work as a carpenter.

According to the story my grandfather Yahnkel Balaboos told me and which I still remember so vividly that I almost hear his voice, his boss, a goy of course, gave him a place to live. It was a room without windows and it was dark. "Ikh hawb nisht gevist ven s'iz geveyn toog in ven s'iz geveyn nakht." [I did not know when it was day and when it was night.] The only way he knew when it was time to get up and go to work was by his watch. He worked every day, but when the Sabbath came, he did not go to work. When his boss asked him why he did not come to work on Saturday, my grandfather replied, "Ikh bin a Yeed in ikh ahrbet nit dem Shawbis." [I am a Jew and I do not work on the Sabbath.] [Note! I wonder what language he used, Yiddish, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, very likely not Spanish] He also told the boss that he would make the day up by working Sundays, and the boss agreed. My grandfather then added a moral to this story, the gist of which was "Be what you are and do not try to be what you are not. Be a Jew and the goyim will respect you for that. Do not hide the fact that you are a Jew. The gentiles will reject you if you are ashamed to be a Jew, rather than proud of what you are."

How long he worked for the gentile boss or how long he lived in that dark room without windows he never said, nor as a child did I think to ask. At some time during his stay in Buenos Aires he was given land to start a farm. He never told me the process by means of which this land was given him, or exactly where the farm was located. From other sources and reading something of the history of the Jews of Argentina, his land must have been given him by the Baron Hirsch organization and was probably located in the province of Entre Rios at some distance from Buenos Aires in the back country and far from any towns.

He spoke of this farm with a great deal of nostalgia and wished my father had heeded him and left New York and had come to join him on the farm. He described life on the farm saying, "Ikh bin geveyn vi Noiakh mit di Teyveh," It was like Noah and the Ark.] "I had pairs of animals, a rooster and a hen, a cow and a bull, a mare and a horse." But by that time my father was earning money and was able to send shifskahrtehs, ship's tickets, fares, to his brothers and sisters so that they all

eventually left Nemirov and came to New York. My grandfather realized that he could not stay in Argentina alone and so he decided to go to the America where his children were settled.

The next chapter in his story of how he finally came to America deals mainly with the long voyage from Buenos Aires to New York. His first problem was that he had an eye with what must have been a ruptured tear duct and which would certainly be considered a blemish by the immigration authorities on Ellis Island. They would surely not let him into America and would send him back to Russia, thanks to Khantsyeh di Roiteh. So he found a ship, a cargo boat sailing from Buenos Aires with its final destination New York, and he signed on as a deck hand.

As I said before, he was born in the mid 1840's or perhaps 1850 at the latest and in 1906/07 he was already a man in his late fifties or early sixties, and apparently strong enough to do the work required of him aboard the cargo vessel. But his trials and tribulations on that trip were like those of Job. He was harassed and brutally treated by the other crewmen, to say the least. Once when he was tarring the deck, that is filling the cracks between the wood planks of the deck, one of the seamen daubed his beard with tar. He explained to me that the ship put in at many ports. When goods were unloaded the ship rose higher in the water and the seamen would be let over the side on small scaffolds held by cables on deck to chip rust off the exposed sections of the sides of the ship. Once while suspended over the side, somebody loosened the cables holding his seat on the scaffold and he was thrown into the water. Despite the horrible experiences at the hands of the brutalized seamen, he preserved.

When the ship finally docked at a wharf in Brooklyn, he went ashore, circumventing the immigration officers at Ellis Island, and found his way to my father's furnished room in a flat on the lower East Side. I never learned how long he was at sea between Buenos Aires and New York – probably at least a month if not longer because the ship put in at various ports to discharge and take on cargo. This trip took place before the building of the Panama canal. Transatlantic passenger ship voyages in the early part of this century from Rotterdam or Hamburg took as much as ten days and even two weeks. The distance from Buenos Aires to New York is more than twice the distance across the north Atlantic. And I know that the Grace Line used to sail from Brooklyn to Valparaiso Chile, in the 1920's and 1930's, the trip taking two weeks in each direction with no stops in between.*** I suppose my grandfather's ship probably put in at various ports in Brazil and Central America,

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*** I wanted to sign on as a hand for at least one round trip when I was in college. My father through his close friend Mr. Fred DeHoust who ran a bonded warehouse on the docks, had connections with the man, Johnny Haze, who hired the crews. But I never was able to get a berth. It was during the depression. When a ship would come into port, everyone on the crew signed up again for the next trip. For every place left open there were a hundred experienced seamen ready to take the job.

and even Charleston and Baltimore before docking at a wharf on the waterfront in Brooklyn.

My father told me that one day when he came back to his lodging from work, there was his father sitting in the room waiting for him. When he asked him, "Tawteh, voost teest dee doo?" [Father, what are you doing here?], he answered, "Ikh bin yetst gekimen fin Arghenteeneh." [I have just come from Argentina.] So my grandfather Yankel Bahlaboos had "jumped ship" and avoided risking being sent back to Russia because of Khahntsyeh di Roite's fiery temper and bad aim; and he lived out his life in America as an "illegal immigrant," so to speak.

I often wondered how my grandfather, after the long and hard voyage at sea, was able to find his way from the wharf in Brooklyn where he jumped ship to my father's lodging on Orchard Street on the Lower East Side.

Orchard Street had become the center where the Nemirover lantslait congregated beginning in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of this century. For the greater majority, Orchard Street was the first stop in America where they went directly after leaving Ellis Island. Many continued living there in the crowded tenement houses teeming with new immigrants arriving almost daily on the many Dutch and German steamship lines engaged in the lucrative transport in steerage of the thousands and thousands of East European Jews, mainly from Russia, seeking a new and a better life in America, Nemirover lantslait included. For the uprooted immigrants, mostly young men who would soon send for their wives or for their fiancees, Orchard Street was a new home, but a new home among the same people whom they knew back home, "in der heym," as Nemirov was always referred to.

So it was natural for my still-bachelor father to be living on Orchard Street and for my grandfather to go directly from the ship to Orchard Street. But I always asked myself the question, "How did he get there on his own?" He did not know the language, yet he found his way there. My father once cleared up the mystery for me. My grandfather in all likelihood carried with him the business card of a Nemirover barber, one Doodyeh Roifeh, David the Barber, who ran a barber shop on Orchard Street. He very likely showed the card to a passerby who directed him how to get to Orchard Street and Doodyeh's shop. From there he was told how to find my father's furnished room, possibly even in the same building, where he patiently waited for my father to come home from work.

Doodyeh Roifeh was probably among of the earliest immigrants to arrive in New York from Nemirov, probably in the 1890's. Nemirover began to emigrate to America in the 1880's. I believe I already mentioned the existence of a Nemirover "landsmanshaft" (to use the German term) from as far back as 1880 or so, and which the younger immigrants of my father's day called "der awlter farai'en," the old club, society or organization. Actually my grandfather became a member of the original Nemirover society, because most of the members were of his generation.

A new farai'en was founded in 1905 by the younger immigrants, mostly bachelors, my father among them, who felt disenfranchised by the older well established family men. I still have the 1930 souvenir program of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its founding. Its name was "The Independent Nemirover Benevolent Society." My maternal grandparents and my aunt Becky are buried in the society's cemeteries in Cyprus Hills, Queens. My paternal grandparents are buried in the section of "der awlter farai'en" in George Washington Cemetery off Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn.

As a child I remember we always went to the "yahresfest" of the new society where I used to listen to, and to this day still hear, the beautiful music of Hersh Volf, der klezmer, also a Nemirover, and his band, playing "a odesar bulgar," a gedreyht sher," "a shver in shveeger tawnts," various "freylekhs," and Russian dances too, a "komariskeh," a "kozatchuk," and others which I no longer remember. I used to stand off to one side on the stage where the band performed. There were trombones, violins, a snare drum, flutes and the heart stirring music of Hersh Volf himself on the clarinet.

To return to Doodyeh Roifeh. He was a barber and his shop was the meeting place of the Nemirover. The term "roifeh" means more than a hair cutter, also somebody who practiced a type of medicine now called "primary care." I do not know if Doodyeh also did that type of work on the lower east side. In Eastern Europe, especially Russia, the roifeh frequently administered enemas, set broken bones, also applied cups, bahnykes, to the chest and back to reduce the effects of bronchitis, that is coughing that brought up phlegm. My mother was an expert at setting cups. She also could swab a throat with some liquid that was the color of iodine, argyrol (?), I believe it was called, and was effective for sore throats, which I was constantly afflicted with.

I doubt if Doodyeh did more than cut hair. His shop served as a post office or general delivery mail service for the Nemirover immigrants. In effect he was the postmaster of the community and was informed of everyone's activities and whereabouts. It was in his care that my grandmother wrote my father that the Russian military authorities came by the house looking for him to conscript him into the army when he turned twenty-one years old in 1906. It was customary for most of the immigrants in New York to send home one of Dooyeh Roifeh's business cards with his address where letters would reach them. Doodyeh, in his capacity as friend and postmaster, would then turn the letters over to the people to whom they were intended.

My father told me the amusing story that people back in Nemirov did not know English and did not understand what was written on the business card and so were very careful to copy the text in its entirety on the envelope containing the letter. Letters would come addressed to Mr. So and So, Barber Shop, Shave 10 cents,

Haircut 25 cents, shampoo, Number ZZZ Orchard Street, New York, First Class Barbershop, and the like.

And Doodyeh Roifeh in a strong sense was father figure or an advisor for the younger unmarried immigrants who were away from home for the first time in their lives and living alone in small furnished rooms of flats occupied by married couples and their children. My father told me that it was not uncommon for some housewives to rent the one and the same room to lodgers who worked during the day and slept in the beds at night and also to bakers who worked at night and slept in the very same beds during the day. This would imply that the majority of the immigrants must have been unmarried young men and that furnished rooms in flats occupied by immigrant families were in short supply.

And because so many of the immigrants were young and unmarried men who used to congregate in Doodyeh's barber shop in the evenings and on Sundays when they did not get to work, it was natural to discuss the problems they might have been having among themselves and to ask the advise and opinion of Doodyeh, a married man and one who had longer experience in adjusting to the new life so far from Nemirov. The lack of family life must have been difficult for the married men who had left their wives and children behind in Nemirov and also for the bachelors, some of whom had been engaged to be married before departing and were waiting to be earning enough to send for their fiancees. Many of my father's lantslait who had saved up some money were beginning to send for their wives and children and the bachelors for the girls to whom they had been engaged to be married before leaving Nemirov. Some even sent for girls to whom they had not been engaged, but now that they were earning enough wanted to marry girls from families they had known back home. Getting married and settling down to family life was in the air, probably because living in furnished rooms was hardly a desireable alternative way of life.

Everybody was sending for a bride, and so my father decided to do likewise since it was the thing to do. My father who had known Khaikel Bayder's, Khaikel the bath house keeper, daughter only casually in Nemirov, decided to get in touch with her father with an offer of marriage to his daughter to whom he would send a shifskarte, steamship ticket, to come to America. Doodyeh Roifeh took my father to task for this plan of his to marry saying it was impractical and thoughtless for him to send for a young girl when he was still unsettled, that is still a greenhorn. He called him "dee greener tookhes" you are already sending for a wife! Do you think you are already able to undertake the responsibility of caring for a wife in America, or words to that effect. My father listened to Doodyeh and the ticket he had bought for Khaikel Bayder's daughter he sent to his younger sister Goldeh who came in her stead to America. I have a picture given me by Jean Markman, of Silver Spring, Maryland, the wife of my cousin Irving, now deceased, and the son of my father's elder brother Yeedl, taken about 1906/07 more or less, in which Goldeh is standing right behind my father. Also in the picture are Yeedl, apparently also newly arrived

from Russia, as well as my aunt Nekhawmeh, her husband Yoil, Joel, Cooper and their daughter Rookhel who is about three of four years old. Moishe who came with Yoil curiously enough is not in the picture. He was thirteen years old at the time having celebrated his bar mitzvah while at sea.

After this long digression, I must return to my grandfather Yahnkel Balaboos. He always wore two watches, one his upper left vest pocket and the other is his upper right vest pocket, both attached to chains which met in the top button-hole of the vest. One watch and chain was gold, the other silver. He would also consult both watches when he wished to know the time.

Though already a man in his seventies when he used to come to visit us when we lived on Essex Street, he always was dissatisfied with being idle and was always looking for work of one sort or another. I do not imagine that he needed the money for I never heard him say anything which might have been taken to mean he was short of money. At one time he opened a second hand furniture with my uncle Moishe and, after a short while, also began to sell new furniture. I believe the store was somewhere on Fulton Street in downtown Brooklyn. It was natural for him to be interested in furniture, for as a carpenter and contractor he always had a feeling for wood. Even my father had this affinity for wood. My mother always remarked that one of the reasons why she and my father bought that expensive dinning room set of furniture ($1,000 in 1926) is that my father was so attracted to the beautiful grain, dee flyawderes, of the walnut wood from which it was made.

Apparently my grandfather Yahnkel had brought some capital with him from Nemirov, that is say that my grandmother Bahsyeh "liquidated their assets," to give a modern term to her sale of the two houses and household goods in Nemirov before joining my grandfather and the children in New York approximately, 1907 or perhaps earlier. The years between 1905 when my father came to America and 1907 when he and my mother were engaged to be married, witnessed the movement of the whole family from Nemirov to the lower East Side of New York. Within the space of two, perhaps three years at most, all my father's brothers and sisters left Nemirov and came to America, that is New york, including the spouses of Nekhawmeh and Maryam.

The period of time between 1917 and 1926 when we lived in Essex Street was the time when der elter zaydeh, my grandfather Yahnkel Bahlaboos, would come to visit us on almost a weekly basis. It was during this time that I remember him with the two watches in his vest, and a man who seemed comfortably well-off. I believe he also helped Maryam with whom he and my grandmother Bahsyeh lived. And it was during this period that he would also report that he was looking for work.

At last once he got a firm offer for a job, I believe it was with a baker. He knew something of the bakery business because one of his sons-in-law, Rayzeh's husband Max Bauer, a galitsiahner, was a baker and had his own bakery in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn. More about his heavenly bread when I speak of my father's

siblings. The story is that the baker agreed to hire my grandfather, but required some token or pledge that he would come to work at the time stipulated. It was customary in Europe, at least in the Ukraine, for workers to give the master craftsman who had hired them some object, or some cash, as a pledge to guarantee that they will appear for work. The baker's request seemed natural to my grandfather who as a master builder, a bahlaboos, had been accustomed to require such pledges from newly hired workers. The nearest equivalent to this practice that I know is making a "deposit" for the purchase of some goods in a store to be paid for when the goods are handed over; or a deposit on the purchase of a house, the payment of what here in the south is known as "earnest money."

Well, to demonstrate that he was "earnest" about the job and that he would show up for work, my grandfather did not hesitate to comply with the boss's request that he use his silver watch and chain as a token guaranteeing that he would come to work as he had agreed. When my grandfather appeared ready for work at the address the boss baker had given him, there was no bakery and the scoundrel who had duped him out the silver watch and chain was of course hardly in evidence. He had this silver watch and chain for many many years since he was a young man in Nemirov, and one which he probably bought long before he could afford the gold one. Fortunately, he did not give that one to the scoundrel and wore it till he died.

My grandfather was a man without guile, totally lacking in any craftiness and was incapable of deceit. Within the sphere and compass of his life experience in Nemirov, one's word was all that was necessary in making any agreement large or small. To employ the word "contract" in the modern sense would be an anachronism if applied to agreements between craftsman-builders and owners. No contracts were ever written and signed. No written specifications for the job were required. Traditional materials and methods of construction for both private houses and small village churches were all well-known and understood. All transactions were verbal and guaranteed by one's reputation. Sharp dealing, if any was practiced, was confined to the market place in petty transactions in buying and selling comestibles, clothing and goods of that nature. The landed gentry for whom my grandfather worked had a reputation to uphold, and he the craftsmen also was proud of his reputation and also took pride in his work and always strove to do a good job as agreed upon. In America my grandfather assumed that just like in Nemirov, one's word was one's bond, and so he gave his watch as a token of good
faith. His children were sorry for him yet amused at his naivete and concluding that he was a gullible and foolish and simple old man who did not know the way of the world in America.

As I mentioned so many times before, he always arrived wearing a long coat, a black derby hat and carrying a cane. In winter when the days were short and he had stayed until dusk, he would place himself facing east and using the ice box as a sort of lectern, would say minkha, afternoon prayers, followed after a short interval

by ma'ariv, evening prayers. He knew the prayers by heart, which seemed to me something of a marvel. My other grandfather, Shayeh, my mother'father, was of a later and less traditional generation. Except for Rosh ha Shonah and Yom Kippur, he never went to the synagogue, not even on the Sabbath for the simple reason that he had to work on Saturdays.

Not long after my parents hired a melamed, elementary teacher, to teach me the rudiments of reading Hebrew, the fist step of the traditional religious studies. My grandfather wanted learn what progress I had been making and asked me to read and so could "iberheren," an oral test so to speak what I had already learned. I read a passage to him out loud and he interrupted with astonishment in is voice saying, "Er dawvent'sikh vee a litfahk." [He is reading the prayers like of Litvak.] The reason for my Litvak accent was that my melamed was a Litvak.

Many of the elementary Hebrew teachers were Litvaks in my day, the reason being that, not uncommonly, Litvaks were more literate in Judaic studies than Jews from other parts of Russia. Also, many Litvaks, as well a Jews from other elsewhere too, came to this country without having a specific trade. Those that had a little more than the usual religious schooling in Europe found a ready though meager living by becoming elementary Hebrew teachers in America. My first teacher was a robust red-bearded individual. My mother would sometimes jokingly say he must have been a coachman, a bahlhagooleh, in the old country because he would always correct my punctuation saying the punctuation marks were like stops (all of this Yiddish), stops which my mother identified as the ones where coachmen would rein in their horses to take on and let off passengers.

I also mentioned previously that my grandfather Yahnkel Bahlaboos was a great story teller. Many of the stories he told us during his visits were ones he had heard many years before in Nemirov and whose origin doubtlessly went back many centuries. Some of the stories he told were of his own composition, though he had never written them down and so were part of an oral tradition. It was customary in Nemirov for the older men, especially during the long dark winter afternoons between minkha and ma'ariv prayers, to sit near the stove in the "bes medresh," beth ha midrash, synonym for synagogue and tell stories. Some were tales of adventure and romance, some were historical, and most usually ended in a moral. In other words the stories were not solely for entertainment, but also for the more important purpose of teaching by the example summarized in the moral with which the story ended.

Some of his stories he delivered in installments. I have forgotten most of the stories he told. My mother who had a love of literature and reading would encourage him and we would sit and listen to his tales. It is too bad that I was too young to record them in writing. This was the time before the invention of cassette recorders. All the tales have disappeared and only the sweet memory of their telling remains in

my being, the nostalgia of which still warms me, as sort of saudade one feels when one hears a Portuguese fado.

One almost epigrammatic tale I still remember. There was a king who had two daughters and he wished to learn how much they loved him. One said she loved her father as much as sugar. I do not remember exactly the metaphor she used. Her father was pleased. The other daughter said she loved him like salt. He was mightily upset and she left his presence crying. She went to the kitchen and cooked a borsht, but without salt. When her father tasted the borsht, he said it was bad and tasteless; whereupon the daughter who had been spurned told him she cooked it without salt to demonstrate what she meant that she loved him as much as salt.

Another story was about "der Rawmbawm." I had no idea who the Rawmbawm was, other than some sort of humble but extremely wise and intelligent Jew whose exploits were legion. I thought that perhaps he was a Russian Jew, possibly even from Nemirov and one whom my grandfather Yahnkel Bahlaboos had known personally. It was only years and years later, when I was a college student that I discovered that the hero of my grandfather's stories, der Rawmbawm, was none other than the great twelfth century Jewish physician and philosopher Maimonides, the one and the same from Córdova in Andalusia, Spain. I then realized that the word Rambam, Rawmbawm in Podolian Yiddish, was an acrostic of his name Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon in Hebrew. He was the very same philosopher whom I had heard of in philosophy classes as Maimonides, the Greek version of his name, the son of Maimon.

Who would have dreamed that it was my grey-bearded Yiddish-speaking Russiangrandfather who had introduced me to one of the greatest minds, both Jewish and gentile, of all time? And when I walked the streets of the judería of Córdova for the first time in the summer of 1959 and came upon a plaque with an inscription noting that Spain and his native city honor his memory, I was amazed that it was to my grandfather whom I owed my first introduction to the man, the mentsh, Maimonides long before I had read about him in a history of philosophy book or heard about his thought from my detached and bloodless gentile professor of philosophy at Union College.

According to my grandfather, the Rawmbawm was an extremely intelligent and practical man, a humble workman in the employ of a physician. One day a patient came to the doctor complaining of great pains in his head begging the doctor to cure him. The Rawmbawm, curious to see what was going on, kept out of sight while watching how the doctor was going about curing the sick man of his malady. The doctor decided to operate on the man's head and opened up his skull exposing the brain. Clinging to the brain was a large bug. The physician was about to take up a pair of pincers, "ooptsveynges," and pry the bug loose from its hold on the patient's brain. The Rawmbawm, very excited and fearing for the patient's life, came out of hiding and shouted to the doctor to stop because the pincers might do irreparable

damage to the man's brain and that such a procedure might cause his death. The Rawmbawm told the doctor to wait just a moment. He went out and returned in just a moment carrying "ah hiptel kroit," a head of cabbage. The Rawmbawm came up close to the patient and placed the cabbage near the exposed brain, whereupon the bug leaped from the brain and landed on the cabbage. The patient's life was saved.

In another age and in another environment, Yahnkel Balaboos might have been a writer, or even a musician. He composed songs, both words and music, sometimes extemporaneously on a moment's notice. I remember only part of a song he once made up about me. The only line I remember is

Kimt Shmeel
Fin der sheel
Mit'n lawksh'n breytl

[Here comes Shmeel (me, Shmuel) from the synagogue, with the noodle-making board, the board on which the sheets of dough are rolled out with a rolling pin and then cut into noodles of the size desired.]

The family did not stay very long on the Lower East Side but moved to Brownsville in Brooklyn. Brownsville was 100% Jewish. It was originally settled almost wholly by immigrant Yiddish-speaking Jews. The area had been farmland in the late nineteenth century and was then developed or divided into parcels of land. These were sold mainly to immigrant Jews not satisfied with life in the teeming Lower East Side and who wished for a more rural life with streets lined with trees and nearby open fields where the few Italian residents used to pasture goats.

I was born in a tenement house on the west side of Stone Avenue near Pitkin. There was a public school adjacent to the building and across the street were private houses, many of which were occupied by doctors. More about this street later, especially "der korner," the northwest corner of Stone and Pitkin Avenue which was a meeting place for men, all Jews, in the building trade – carpenters, contractors, real estate salesmen and sundry others. At any rate, the whole family lived more or less in the same neighborhood and not too distant from each other by the time I was born in 1911. Also, the same is true of my mother's family as well as many Nemirover lantslait in general.

It was only after we moved in 1926 to Empire Boulevard in the Crown Heights section, just west of Brownsville, along with all the other "awl-ahrait-niks," all-right-nicks, nouveaux riches, that my grandfather came to see us less and less often in the four remaining years of his life. His pattern of life had changed a great deal for him by then. My grandmother Bahsyeh had died in 1922; Zahnvil, Goldeh's husband also died and Goldeh needed him to stay with her to help her out with the children while she was at work. Also, our house on Empire Boulevard was not as easily accessible to him as the house on Essex Street. It had been closer to where he lived and could

be reached by the New Lots trolley car. The house on Empire Boulevard required a bus ride to the subway station; then a ride on the subway to the Kingston Avenue station; and finally, a walk of about a half a mile to the house. Hardly a comfortable journey for a man in his mid-eighties.

At any rate, life in Brownsville was a continuation of life as it had been lived in Nemirov but with the changes, modifications, transformations and adjustments made necessary in the new American environment, some of which were abrupt and shocking discontinuities hardly foreseen and thus unthinkable in the old country. The most drastic change was that it was almost impossible for workingmen, and even store keepers, to earn a livelihood and still maintain the sanctity of the Sabbath because of the six-day work week, including Saturday, with Sunday as the day of rest in America.

As much as it was possible, many of the old world customs were maintained, as the cuisine most certainly was. Therefore, it was not unexpected that my grandfather, being a bahlaboos, should have been instrumental in establishing a Nemirover synagogue in Brownsville. Congregation Anshe Nemirov, I believe, it was called. He and a number of other lantslait got together and bought a house on Sackman Street which was renovated and converted to a synagogue. I do not know what year this took place, but it must have been in the early 1920's. The synagogue remained in that location for a number of years and even after my grandfather died in 1930. The area where it was located had become quite depressed and run down and was marked for an "urban renewal" project, so popular in New York during the 1930's. The city bought the property as well as all the houses in the neighborhood which were torn down to make way for the creation of new high rise slums.

The money paid the congregation, I do not know how much, was apparently banked or invested until a new synagogue building was bought. The new location of the synagogue was in a former two family house located on a street whose name I do not remember, yet I could lead you there without difficulty. It was on the base of triangle formed where Pitkin Avenue and Eastern Parkway join to form the apex, that is come to a point. The prime movers in saving the Nemirover synagogue were my father's two brothers Yeedl the elder and Moishe the younger. My uncle Moishe told me that a Nemirover family by name Fortunoff donated a considerable sum in helping reestablish the synagogue in its new location. I remember the name Fortunoff from the advertisements I sometimes saw in the New York Times announcing the sale of "high-class" and trendy tableware, kitchen and other household electrical appliances.

The transfer of the synagogue to the new location took place in the early 1950's. My father, as the maven and the expert, made the plans for the alteration and also directed the job in which his two brothers, Yeedl and Moishe, fully participated under his direction. He was almost totally crippled with arthritis and could hardly lift a glass of water to his lips let alone use a hammer or a saw. The basement was converted to a social hall and the first floor for the synagogue proper,

or in modern parlance "the sanctuary," a term which was of course never applied here. It was always referred to as "di Nemirover sheel," and never in my father's nor his brother's dreams would it ever have been thought of as a sanctuary. Once when we came to visit my parents when they lived on St. John's Place and you children were still in grade school, probably in the mid-1950's, we all went to see the synagogue and I took a picture of you standing with my father, your grandfather, in front of the Aron ha Kodesh. It was a matter of no small satisfaction to him to have had a hand in saving the Nemirover synagogue and to have been responsible for the plan.

The building originally was a two-family house with an apartment on the first floor and another on the second. The second floor was not altered very much and was reserved for the living quarters for the rabbi. One room, the one in front and entered from the hallway and separate from the rest of the rabbi's apartment, was used as a sort of office or meeting room for the congregation.

The rabbi was a young man who had been married only a few years and had come from Europe. He was in total charge of the synagogue activities. He made sure that there was a daily minyan and saw to it that the building was kept clean and well maintained. He did not get a salary, but earned his living from contributions given him by individual congregants. It was customary to contribute something for the rabbi when one was called up for an aliyah to the Torah as well as for the benefit of the beth ha kneseth, synagogue. He also officiated at weddings and other religious ceremonies always receiving something from the participants by way of gratification which contributed to his income. He also taught children Hebrew and religious subjects for which he was paid.

Perhaps his most important obligation was to see to it that there was a minyan for daily prayers. He apparently had a following in the neighborhood and services were always held so that the synagogue was alive and functioning as is proper. To keep the services going with a daily minyan was not an easy task because the population of the neighborhood, and all of Brownsville too, was no longer 100% Jewish. Many non-Jews had moved into the private houses and tenements all of which seemed in sore need of repair. When I was there one Saturday during one of our annual trips to Brooklyn to visit my parents, I found a group of young men, students from a nearby yeshiva, serving as a minyan, leading the service and even reading the Torah. My uncle Yeedl had very little respect for them for they had literally taken over the synagogue and were being paid to come there and keep the services going each Sabbath. He called them "bahsyakes" the meaning of which I do not know but it seemed hardly complimentary. A paid minyan became necessary because the rabbi had left for another synagogue a few blocks away on Hopkinson Avenue.

The synagogue became to all intents and purposes almost a family synagogue. A number of my cousins organized a family club which they called "The

Markman Family Circle," as did many other Jewish families at the time. I learned of its existence long after it had been founded and it did not surprise me that I had not been invited to join. For one, I lived at a great distance from Brooklyn and also had very little contact with any of my cousins, both paternal and maternal too, for the long and many years since I went off to college. In a sense, I never really came back to live in New York except for short periods of time while I was a graduate student at Columbia University.

The family circle used to meet on a regular basis and have parties in the social hall in the basement. I do not know if the family circle still exists. Many of my cousins were older than me and I have lost contact with them all except for one, Jean Markman, the wife of my uncles Yeedl's son Irving, now deceased, who comes to Durham occasionally to participate in a weight reduction program.

The Nemirover synagogue no longer exists. My uncle Yeedl was probably the one most responsible for having placed it on the course of extinction. The eventual dissolution of the synagogue was inevitable and would have taken place even without his misguided intervention. It was impossible to maintain a minyan without the aid of the rabbi, hence the paid minyan of yeshiva students I found holding forth there one Sabbath morning. But even a more basic and inexorable cause for the extinction of the Nemirover synagogue was the increased migration of Jews away from Brownsville who were replaced by non-Jews, a large percentage of whom were blacks.

The first step to oblivion came with the departure of the young and enthusiastic rabbi. Why did he leave? The rabbi's wife was expecting another child and needed more space. He asked that be given the room in front of his flat facing the street and which was used only infrequently. He pointed out that with the arrival of the new child he would need an extra bedroom, which this room had in fact been in the first place. My father and my uncle Moishe agreed, especially my father who admired and respected the young man for his intelligence and piety. But Yeedl said no, and stubbornly refused to give the rabbi the use of the room upstairs.

Both my father and Moishe recognized the fact that without the rabbi to attract a minyan, the synagogue would lose its purpose and become a hollow shell. This actually happened after the rabbi left so that in desperation the group of young yeshiva students were literally hired to come and maintain the services in the synagogue.

The rabbi took this refusal very hard. He had not asked for a salary, or for any special considerations. All he wanted was to have some extra space for his growing family. The congregation of a large synagogue on Hopkinson Avenue, also doubtlessly having difficulty in maintaining service with a daily minyan, offered him their synagogue and I believe even gave him a salary. So he left, and from then on, despite the efforts of the three Markman brothers and other Nemirover who supported the synagogue, it went out of existence not long after the departure of the young rabbi.

The Torahs, I do not remember how many there were, at least four or five if not more, I believe were donated to some newly founded synagogues elsewhere. Some I heard were actually sent to Israel. I am not sure what happened to the receipts from the sale of the building. It too may have been donated to some Jewish charity, probably also in Israel. The synagogue just faded away along with the once vibrant Brownsville Jewish community with its countless synagogues, Hebrew schools, cultural community centers, hospitals, charitable organizations, bustling commercial life on Pitkin Avenue, Jewish theatres, an entire world whose children left to grow and flourish elsewhere.

My grandfather recognized early that a being a general contractor in America was a million miles away from what he had been back in Nemirov. He was always asking my father questions about construction matters. My father was a general contractor and in time later on built "on speculation," that is he bought land, built houses on it and then sold them. I suppose the magniloquent term "developer" might better characterize these activities.

My father was always polite, but even as a child I noted that he was a little patronizing to his father and had little patience to explain exactly or by analogy the construction business. I will admit that even I thought that my grandfather's questions bordered on the naive. Although my father would repeat time and time again that he never saw his father using tools, my grandfather, nevertheless, had brought many carpenter tools with him from Nemirov, many of which were kept in our basement in the house on Essex Street. I remember an enormous pair of nail cutters or pliers with handles about two feet long, also some special planes with special profiles to fashion moldings, also one enormous wood plane probably used for dressing rough boards.

These tools gradually disappeared when we moved from Essex Street to Empire Boulevard and then to East Meadow, Long Island, and then to Schenectady briefly, and back again to an apartment in Brooklyn. The Depression years were devastating to my mother and father. There was no room in their anxieties to recognize that some of these tools were museum pieces, as I know now after the fact. These tools were very important to the average carpenter in the nineteenth century who had to make doors and windows and even produce moldings and trim in general. In nineteenth-century Nemirov, just as in the United States until about the beginning of the First World War, there were no trim factories where doors, windows, moldings and the like could be bought in standard sizes. The carpenter had to make them, and my grandfather's tools were needed in order to do so.

In his own world, he was a first rate craftsman who also knew how to deal with owners be they village priests or landed gentry. In America, the New World and in the New Century, his skills were redundant, but not all. For example, he taught me how to coil rope, a skill which I still retain. He showed me how to clasp one end of the rope in my left hand, and then pass the remaining length of the rope around

my elbow and my hand, each turn being one ell long, and when nearing the end to wrap the rope a few turns around the middle of the ring to form a figure "8" and then pull the tail end through the coil to hold it together.

As I have already said before, when we moved from Essex Street in East New to Empire Boulevard in Crown Heights in 1926, we entered into a new way of life, less traditionally Old World and more attuned to contemporary conditions with fewer and fewer ties to the mores of my grandparents. I entered high school, Erasmus Hall High School in Flatbush. As the oldest of my maternal cousins, I was the first to do so and also probably one of the first among my paternal cousins many of whom were older than me.

Another great change came about in my relationship with my grandfather Yahnkel Balaboos after 1926 when we moved to the house on Empire Boulevard in Crown Heights. He was a man in his late eighties. My grandmother Bahsyeh had died in 1922. Also, he was burdened down with having to help with the care of Goldeh's children because she had to go to work after Zahnvil died. And the final difficulty was that we now lived in a neighborhood which was not as easily accessible as Essex Street had been. There he could take the New Lots Avenue trolley car at Rockaway Avenue where he lived with Maryam and after about fifteen or twenty minutes or so get off on the corner of Essex Street where we lived. As a result, in the years between 1926 and 1930 when he died I saw less and less of him.

I still remember the day, a weekday and in the early afternoon, my father coming into the house through the side door in the driveway and mounting the steps leading to the kitchen where my mother and I and Esther were waiting. He had been called to Goldeh's house because my grandfather was ill and had taken a turn for the worse. I asked him, "How is zaydeh?" Laconically as he was still mounting the steps, he said, "My father is dead." That is all he said.

Part III
Aunts, Uncles and Cousins

Both my mother and my father had six siblings, that is each was one of seven children. My father was the fourth child and my mother the eldest. Notwithstanding that both families consisted of seven offspring and shared a common heritage in Nemirov, the two were strikingly different.

For example, all my father's brothers and sisters were born in Nemirov, even the last two, Moishe and Rayzyeh, who arrived in America in their early teens. In other words, my father's brothers and sisters arrived here as adults. Their outlook on life was rooted more in the nineteenth-century traditions of Jewish life in Russian Nemirov than the new experiences in American New York. On the other hand, my mother's siblings, except for Julie and Ida, arrived here as small children, except for my mother who was in her thirteenth year when she came here in 1903.

My grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh and the rest of the children arrived in 1905. Libeh was about eleven, perhaps, twelve years old; Benny and Davey about six and five respectively; Becky was three years old. Julie and Ida were born in America: Julie in 1906/1907 and Ida, the youngest of the seven children, was born in 1909. Therefore, except for my mother and my aunt Libeh, my mother's brother's and sister's characters and point of view on life were rooted more in early twentieth-century immigrant Jewish life in New York than by the fading memories and customs of Jewish life in Russian Nemirov.

Even my mother's and Libeh's characters were formed more by their physical and cultural experiences of immigrant life in New York than by those of their childhood in Nemirov. In a classic sense of the word, they were marginal: at home in the culture of their past in the Old World and still young enough to have adapted and be at home in culture of the New World.

Thus, my mother's siblings were still small children when they arrived and so grew up in America. For this entirely fortuitous reason, they were more "Americanized" than my father's brothers and sisters who had come here as adults and were always more European. My father's sisters and brothers spoke Yiddish as a first language and English as a language they learned after their arrival in America. For my mother's siblings, except perhaps for my mother and Libeh, Yiddish was a second or house language used only when speaking with their parents. English was the language they normally spoke among themselves even at home in the presence of their parents. On the other hand, Yiddish was the language my father's brothers and sisters spoke to each other.

Some of my paternal cousins were called exclusively by their Jewish names. In some instances I never learned if they also had English names, which they probably did but which were never used at home. My father's siblings, except perhaps Rayzyeh, all read Yiddish language newspapers. My mother and father always read *Der Forvets*, The Jewish Daily Forward. But my mother's siblings could not read

Yiddish and only read English language newspapers, probably the tabloids like the *Daily News*, The *Mirror*, perhaps *The World* and possibly *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*.

As a senior in high school, at Brooklyn Academy, I had an afternoon reporter's job covering the P. S. A. L., Public School Athletic League, baseball games played at the Parade Grounds near Prospect Park. A friend at school (I am struggling to remember his name, it sounded very fancy, sort of an anglicized French – Chalfont, I just remembered his name) who also was a high school sports reporter got me the job. I shall always be grateful to him for having introduced me to the newspaper world. I still remember cutting my copy from the newspaper to give to the payroll department where I was paid by the inch.

As I have already mentioned before, my mother was estranged from my father's family as a whole, yet was warm and friendly with individuals, especially my grandfather Yahnkel, my aunt Goldeh and my uncle Moishe. The origin of the rift may have been my grandmother Bahsyeh's anxiety that she and her future daughter-in-law bore the same name she and so none of my father's female descendants would ever be named for her. Also, perhaps the most palpable cause for my mother's antipathy for my father's family and specifically her mother-in-law, was the incident I have already related regarding my grandmother's blessing, more like a curse, that my mother raise me but be absent from my wedding.

This is very painful for me to write about. To do so brings back the bewilderment and insecurity I felt as a child. I believed that filial loyalty was due my mother. Only later in life did I begin to comprehend the deep hurt my mother must have felt to have nurtured the estrangement from my father's family during all my childhood and even when I was a grown man. I was sorry for her, yet wished she would have been forgiving. My perception as a child of the situation was that I had to choose her side and was fearful of giving the impression that I was neutral or favoring my father's family. The truth is that I did not want to take sides and wished that what had caused my mother to have such negative feelings about my father's family had never come to pass. I always felt, and still do, that she had gained nothing in life by having borne rancor so long, justifiable rancor no doubt, I suppose, but still corrosive.

The end result was that we rarely if ever socialized with my father's family during my childhood, especially during the years I was in grade school between 1917 and 1926, during my most formative years. And after 1926 when we moved to Empire Boulevard and I entered high school, and especially after my grandfather Yahnkel died in 1930 and after I went off to college, I hardly remember ever seeing any members of my father's family, except Moishe. As a matter of fact, I hardly ever saw any of my mother's family either, once I went off to college.

Aside from the unfortunate circumstances which resulted in opening a gulf between my mother and her in-laws, my father's sibling were older than my mother's, except for Libeh who was about the same age as my father's younger sister Rayzyeh.

My mother was the eldest child and so I was my grandfather Shaiyeh's first grandchild, and considerably younger than many of my paternal cousins. My sister and I enjoyed the special privilege of being the first nephew and niece of my mother's brothers and sisters who were all still in their teens when we were born. Quite the contrary was the case with my father's siblings who, except for Moishe and Razyeh, were all married and had children of their own before we were born. My father was the fourth child in his family. I was the eighth grandchild on his side of the family, and nothing new or extraordinary to my paternal grandparents.