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## Rivka Woll, transcript only

Rivka Woll

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Interviewed by Lucille Brown

Q. Would you give me your name, Mrs. Woll, for the tape?

A. Rivka Woll.

Q. And the year you were born.

A. This is something I do not tell you.

Q. Then just approximately.

A. Approximately, what year did I say I was born. I think we should put it 1900 and something.

Q. About 1900, okay and where were you born?

A. It's called Russia of course. A small town in Russia.

Q. What part of Russia.

A. I think it is called ~~Belarus~~ <sup>Belarusiya</sup>.

Q. So that would be white Russia. Were you born in a ~~stachel~~ <sup>shtetel</sup>, a small town.

A. Yes.

Q. Do you remember the name of the ~~stachel~~ <sup>shtetel</sup>?

A. Yes, they called it Llecheltz in Yiddish and Llecheltze in Russian.

It's an l. See you will never be able to pronounce it. It's two soft "l's".

Elchitz. *Lyelchitz.*

Q. Your husband came from somewhere in between he said between

~~Minsk~~ <sup>Gomel</sup> and Kiev, ~~Gomel~~. Were you near there?

A. No. No. We were quite...

Q. What was the nearest city to you?

A. Well, as a matter of fact I think we were on the borderline between

~~Volhyn~~ <sup>Volhyn</sup> ~~Warlin~~ <sup>then Beloruss.</sup> is one section of Russia and ~~Belorussch~~. The biggest city, *the*

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closest to us, was called <sup>Mazir</sup> ~~Mazir~~ and that was about 80 <sup>versts</sup> ~~versts~~ (?) I don't know what <sup>a verst</sup> ~~versts~~ is actually, a mile or whatever.

Q. I think it is more than a mile. So it was 80 <sup>Versts Mazir.</sup> ~~versts~~, ~~Mizere~~ I am trying to remember whom else I interviewed that came from <sup>Mazir,</sup> ~~Mizere.~~

A. <sup>Uyeznyi gorod, if you know what it is, if you see,</sup> It's divided by certain sections, and ~~Borne~~ <sup>Gubernya</sup> - what would <sup>"gubernya be?"</sup>

Q. That would be like the province or the state.

A. State probably and the city of <sup>Mazir</sup> ~~Mizere~~ itself was also called <sup>uyezd</sup> ~~Bornier~~ because it had several small towns around it.

Q. So <sup>Mazir</sup> ~~Mizere~~ was the closest <sup>larger</sup> ~~largest~~ city and was that in the same <sup>gubernya</sup> ~~guborne~~ as ~~Gornel~~ <sup>Gornel?</sup>

A. No. We are <sup>Gornel is Mogilevska gubernya.</sup> ~~Minsch~~ <sup>Minska</sup> ~~gubernya.~~

Q. So you are further north, would that be correct?

A. I wouldn't know. I really don't know the geography. <sup>cal location,</sup> I'm very poor at certain things.

Q. Well <sup>Mogilev</sup> ~~Mogilev~~ is down here someplace and if you were in the Minska <sup>gubernya</sup> ~~gubernya~~ you had to be further north, it would seem to me.

A. What difference does it make.

Q. Oh, it might make a difference to me. In the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stachel~~ in which you were born, how many people lived, how many families, or whatever you remember.

A. You know I was thinking about it and trying to recall. First of all

I want you to know I am very poor in numbers and chronology and other

things, I simply do not remember, But I do remember that <sup>at the end of our</sup> ~~we had the~~

<sup>shtetel</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>ended and</sup> ~~stachel~~, you know, where the habitat of the people a road, <sup>started not in</sup> ~~started~~

<sup>a</sup> ~~the~~ road, a sandy expanse which divided <sup>that was</sup> ~~at~~ the end of the <sup>stachel</sup> ~~stachel~~ and from <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~

there you can go on visiting other places and so on and so forth, <sup>So</sup> I think they had a board with the number of people there and I recall I don't think there were more than 800 something, less than 1,000.

Q. People?

A. Yes, all together. I wouldn't know exactly how many Jews.

Q. You would not know, but if it was a <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stechel~~ wouldn't it be mostly Jews.

A. Why would it be mostly Jews, <sup>?</sup> ~~We~~ <sup>would be</sup> ~~were~~ peasants together, <sup>there were</sup> ~~and~~ quite a number of peasants there and I think the Jews were a minority. They had their own community of course.

Q. Well in my definition a <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stechel~~ is composed of Jews, that would be the Jewish section.

A. Jews only?

Q. Yes.

A. <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~Stechel~~ is the whole thing, the whole town is called a <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stechel~~. Well when you speak of the Jewish section then of course you call it <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stechel~~ they of course lived in their own quarters like. That's what you refer to as <sup>shtetel?</sup> ~~stechel~~.

Q. In your town, there were both Jews and non-Jews you are telling me and the total population was about 800.

A. <sup>800</sup> And something, less than 1,000.

Q. Now of the 800 could you approximate how many were Jews?

A. It would be a wild guess and I just hate to guess.

Q. Would it be 50%? Was it more than 50%. You can remember if it was more than half.

A. Why should I remember I never paid any attention to it it didn't matter

so much, we just lived in our Jewish community and that's it.

Q. I see. So you never paid any attention to the non-Jews at all then.

A. Well, we didn't mix very much. We used to meet you know, every now and then. There were certain things that they ~~had~~ <sup>we</sup> contact with but otherwise, socially, hardly ever.

Q. How did you have contact with them?

A. Well they would come to the house sometimes and do some work for us or <sup>if</sup> we would go out to them to try and get something from them.

Q. What kinds of things would you get from them?

A. Like eggs, chickens, something like that even though we raised our own chickens and we used to have the young peasant girls, <sup>for</sup> we used to have a garden of our own in a field outside <sup>the place where we lived.</sup> And harvest time we used to hire these girls and they used to come and work for us in the fields. *And that was about the contact we had.*

Q. Were these people ~~the~~ Russians, the non-Jews?

A. Yes.

Q. Were they white Russians?

A. White Russians. *They called them muzhiki. They were only peasants.*

Q. How many people were in your immediate family that lived in your home?

A. Well before we dispersed, I think we had five sisters and three brothers.

Q. So there were eight children and your mother and father, <sup>A</sup> and could you tell me something about the house you lived in, <sup>W</sup> what kind of a house it was.

A. Well, it was a very spacious home and we had a tremendous dining room and a kitchen and then we had something like a parlor we used to call it a <sup>Zoll</sup>~~sal~~(?), three bedrooms and also you see, our home, <sup>we</sup> they didn't have a hotel in our place or anything like that. Sometimes merchants would come. *who are the merchants who would come*  
 A to our ~~stechel~~ <sup>shtetel</sup> and they probably also had a great contact with the peasants and <sup>through them</sup> we had peasants in our home also. They were usually hiring woods, forest, for wood-so they would come to the ~~stechel~~ <sup>shtetel</sup> and see when the time of chopping of wood would come and then they had to tie the logs and <sup>these</sup> ~~this~~ log they used to export through the river.

Q. What river was that?

A. The name of our river was ~~Eubertz~~. *Ubertz.*

Q. Now did you have a ~~kretchen~~ <sup>Kretchmer</sup> in there?

A. We had no ~~kretchen~~ <sup>Kretchmer</sup> at all but because we had a spacious home and because we had spare rooms so those people who had to come for business, big merchants, not everybody, just big merchants, they have to stop for a while, they used to stop in our place, and we would accommodate them and give them a bedroom to sleep in and I think mother would also give them meals but that was just as an accommodation it was not a livelihood.

Q. What did your father do?

A. My father was a rabbi, that's his picture over there by the way.

Q. *On the wall? He's a very handsome man.*

A. And he was also what they call in Yiddish a ~~schaker~~ <sup>Schochet</sup> and that was his occupation. *He was a slaughterer.*

Q. For the ~~stechel~~ <sup>shtetel</sup> then?

A. For the ~~stechel~~ <sup>shtetel</sup>. Sometimes he would go out to the neighboring villages where they couldn't have a ruv for instance, and they ~~didn't~~ <sup>couldn't</sup> have

*a slaughterer. them*  
and he would pay <sup>them</sup> regular visits and when somebody had to get married, they would invite my father to come and perform the wedding ceremony and so on and so forth. *So* that was my father, his profession. My mother, besides that, we had a big store. We had a manufacturing place.

Q. Your family did, you are talking about what your family did.

A. My mother, yeah.

Q. You had a store?

A. We had a store also attached to the house, *It was just like one unit.* and we had yard goods there, of the best possible kind, and it was rather a general store because you could find anything there.

Q. Did you say something about manufacturing.

A. *No,* No, I made a mistake. We didn't manufacture anything, I just used the wrong expression.

Q. So what you had was a yard goods store.

A. Yeah, a general store.

Q. And your mother ran that part of it did she?

A. Yes and we girls used to help out especially *after* ~~the~~ father was gone, ~~and~~ that was the main livelihood.

Q. Was your house large? *You said that* You said that <sup>your</sup> house was large. How about the girls. How many rooms did the girls occupy for example, there were five girls?

A. Yes but then you see after I was, let's say, when I became older my sisters were married and not at home anymore.

Q. You were number what in the sisters, number, three, number four, number five?

A. Let me think, number four. I have a younger sister, she is the fifth girl.

Q. And how about the brothers, where <sup>how</sup> were they, <sup>?</sup> Were they mixed in, were they older or ~~younger~~ <sup>younger?</sup>

A. They were <sup>mostly</sup> older.

Q. So you were pretty near the youngest <sup>member</sup> of the family.

A. Yes, next to.

Q. Next to the youngest. So the older ones would move out ~~as~~ they married or whatever.

A. And then it is very interesting that the rooms were still called by the name of the occupant. My older brother for instance had a room in back of the parlor you know so that was called Moyne's room because his name in short was Moyne and that was <sup>Hannah's</sup> ~~Heness~~ room my older sister. We called that and even after she was gone and married and had a home of her own. So I suppose the girls shared the room. <sup>We had,</sup> As I said only four bedrooms. The parents of course had a room of their own and the girls used to share

a room and I don't know how they managed, but they had plenty of room. <sup>and we also had a side room, a long, long room, occupied by some of us.</sup>

Q. Did your mother have help?

A. <sup>Oh yes.</sup> Yes, I remember several of them. One of them was very interesting.

She was mute and a Jewish woman and she was wonderful. She was so great and we loved her because she couldn't speak <sup>and</sup> yet we communicated, <sup>and each one she called</sup> and in her own way, she was very, very wonderful. And then if we didn't have steady help we used to <sup>get</sup> help now and then, <sup>somebody to help us out.</sup>

Q. The reason I asked was that if your mother was working in the store...

A. Now you must understand it was not the kind of store you were busy

day and night working <sup>in</sup> it. The store was attached to the place you see and you hardly stayed in the store at all. The outside door was open. If somebody came in you would hear the ring on the bell, so somebody would come into the store and help the person with whatever they wanted to get. However there were some holidays, they called the peasants holidays, when they all used to come. It was bazaar day, so to speak, but all the peasants from the vicinity used to come to the ~~store~~ <sup>shetel</sup>, then it was busy and everybody the whole house almost would be in the store. Some watching and others selling and so on. So that's the kind of store we had.

Q. Did you have to go through the store to get to the house.

A. Through the house to get to the store.

Q. The other way around. Was the store in back of the house?

A. No, it was like a ranch house you know, like what do you call a fleegle, a wing attached to it. <sup>Like a wing attached to it.</sup> Like a ranch house. One room that I mentioned to you, was right next to the store, so all you had to do is just get up even when you were at the ~~table~~ <sup>meal</sup> sometimes, in the dining room, you heard the ring, you just got up and you went <sup>through</sup> to that room and there you were in the store, no problem.

Q. In the <sup>ukraine</sup> ~~akrania~~ the store very often would be in front of the house so that in order to get to the apartment you had to go through the store.

A. No, not this.

Q. If your father was the <sup>ruv</sup> ~~ruv~~ (2) in the town, I don't remember anyone else I've spoken to had a <sup>ruv</sup> ~~ruv~~ for a father who was practicing, there were a couple that had fathers who had the <sup>smicha</sup> ~~sniffa~~, but they didn't actually use it. They preferred to be employed in some other capacity.

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A. No, my father was the <sup>ruv</sup> ~~high~~ of the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~steckel~~.

Q. Where was he educated?

A. This I couldn't tell you. I really don't remember. I probably never inquired about it, <sup>I would say</sup> but he was one of the prominent rabbis, <sup>he was notorious</sup> why notorious? because there is such a thing as a correspondence between <sup>rabbis</sup> ~~rabi~~ and there is a problem that people are taking up and they like to hear opinions about it so they used to correspond with each other and think up these problems. <sup>And</sup> my father was one of those who used to get letters and respond to them and answer questions. <sup>I</sup> In other words he was <sup>an erudite</sup> ~~paradox~~ man. The correspondence between the rabbis they used to call chivas or chivas that means questions and answers. My maiden name was Zensen. Here you would say ~~Seldin~~, Seldin.

Q. So he was an <sup>erudite</sup> ~~erudite~~ man how did he find life in the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~steckel~~ for him. How would you describe his function in a <sup>shtetel?</sup> ~~steckel~~.

A. He was the spiritual leader of the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~steckel~~. He seemed to be very happy. What do you mean by this question, <sup>how</sup> ~~what~~ was life in the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~steckel~~ for him. Well, first of all he used to study a lot like any <sup>ruv</sup> ~~high~~ would you know, and then everytime there was anything happening in the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~steckel~~ between people, have disputes, have business to settle, sometimes they used to come to the rabbi to straighten them out instead of going to the court and I remember in my very young days we even had a get <sup>It's a divorce.</sup> in our home. I was terribly impressed by that. <sup>The whole procedure of it.</sup> My father was very much <sup>revered</sup> ~~loved~~ in the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~steckel~~, very much loved and respected. As a matter of fact, the year when he passed away...

Q. What year was that, do you remember?

A. No, I couldn't exactly say, <sup>So</sup> all the new born boys were named after him. We had so many young men who bore his name, called after him, <sup>So</sup> I think he had plenty to do and what a rabbi has to do is just lead. Be a spiritual leader, <sup>Of course</sup> ~~because~~ the synagogue was <sup>under</sup> ~~over~~ his jurisdiction.

Q. What kind of a synagogue was it, was it a big one?

A. Well it was adequate. It served the needs of the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~street~~ very well. It wasn't too small, no. They had an upper story for women, <sup>that's the way it is,</sup> And they had one floor downstairs which was quite adequate and my father also used to fulfill the function not of a Chazan, he was never a cantor, but he was a baaqqila ~~baqqila~~ and he was the one that would officiate at the pulpit during services. I still remember the way he conducted <sup>Simchas Torah</sup> ~~synagogic~~ (?) services.

Q. How was that?

A. How was that. Well I would say great, <sup>Because</sup> there was a lot, I need not tell you, you know perfectly well the meaning of everything that he was doing, <sup>But</sup> there was so much, how should I say, sincerity and integrity in everything he said and he sounded so wonderful. The prayer that he used to pronounce <sup>sounded</sup> ~~was~~ so great you could not help but be moved by it and so on. In other words he was able to convey to you the solemnity of the prayers and what it stands for.

Q. The reason I am asking is I would like to know if there is any, that's what this whole thing is about, to find out what life was like, not to put a <sup>h</sup> smeer over the whole thing but for you to tell me what specific incidents that you remember, which will lend, what can I say, meaning, give meaning to the bare bones of the facts-but personal meaning. In other words, here's a woman whose father was a rabbi, <sup>Well,</sup> what was life like for you. What

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was it like for your father. You read Isaac Baashevis Singer, you have all kinds of rabbis and you know that yourself. You have good ones, you had had ones you had some who were not so good and some were fair to middling. You had some who hated their work and some who loved it. Did you ever read <sup>his</sup> ~~the~~ story, <sup>"S"</sup> ~~the~~ slaughterer. "

A. No, I didn't. *this is one story I missed.*

Q. That's too bad. It's a fantastic story, and if your father was a ~~shochet~~ <sup>shochet</sup> in addition to being a ~~rough~~ <sup>ruv</sup>, then you should read a story. It's a story that I have never forgotten that story. That's what I am asking you for.

A. *Do you remember Baashevis Singer, "Das Bes Din Shtiebel"?*  
A. My father's court that's where he really gives you the life of the ~~shochet~~. *Shtetel.*

Q. But I want yours. I have read his. What I am asking you for is from your experience, what you remember, that happened.

A. *I know* <sup>ing</sup> *you asked me, how did he feel being a ruv in a small shtetel?*  
A. <sup>an</sup> So I just tell you what I remember about my father. <sup>^</sup> I think he felt <sup>revered</sup> ~~rough~~ *and loved* very much at home, because as I mentioned before he was very much ~~rough~~ <sup>revered</sup> and respected. <sup>S</sup> So he probably didn't have all these bickerings and things and

that other people sometimes have in these position, he didn't.

Q. Tell me, did the family as a rule sit down to supper together or were you not able to, because in some families it was impossible. Life with school and this one doing this thing and this one doing that, they could not sit down at supper together. How was it in your family?

A. Well as I told you when I was growing up my family was not in tact the way it was before, because the older sisters and brothers married off and <sup>lived</sup> ~~went~~ separately.

Q. How many were living in the house when you were growing up as your remember it.

A. As a matter of fact one of my married brothers, the youngest married brother, lived in our house, with his wife and children for quite a number of years. Well there was at least one meal that the family would <sup>always</sup> have together.

Q. When would that be?

A. In the evening <sup>mostly</sup> and of course on Friday night and Saturday and I and my younger sister always used to sing <sup>Zmires</sup> ~~amores~~ with my father. <sup>Oh yes! and how,</sup> We participated. I participated as a very young girl in making matzo's for instance <sup>Now do</sup> you know there is such a thing as matzo <sup>Shmurer?</sup> ~~schmurer~~.

Q. I don't know what ~~smore~~ <sup>Shmurer</sup> is.

A. <sup>Shmurer</sup> ~~Smore~~ is those Jews who are very, very Orthodox and very observant

will not eat regular matzo because they are suspicious that it might have been baked not according to law. Matzo <sup>Shmurer</sup> ~~schmure~~ means the specially supervised matzo and they are perfectly certain that the everything was done according to their demands, their requirements. My father used to

bake his, the baking of the matzo <sup>in the shtetel</sup> ~~and speechel~~ was a very interesting thing by itself. But my father used to have a number of people, Jewish people, <sup>a minyan</sup>

<sup>or something</sup> especially for baking the matzo <sup>shmurer</sup> ~~schmure~~ because my father didn't eat anything

but matzo <sup>shmurer</sup> ~~schmure~~. Our whole family during the holiday <sup>Pesach</sup> ~~pasach~~ never

tasted any of the <sup>Pesach</sup> ~~pasach~~ delicacies, because there must have been a suspicion

of <sup>chumetz</sup> ~~something~~ in there you see. So <sup>only</sup> the very last day of the holiday we used

to have a <sup>chremsel</sup> ~~cransel~~ <sup>if</sup> if you know what it is.

Q. Is that like a candy of some kind?

A. <sup>No, No.</sup> No, it's baked, matzo <sup>meal</sup> and eggs <sup>and other things.</sup>

Q. Like a light pastry but it's very light, airy.

A. <sup>That's right. Chremsel</sup> And all these delicacies we never tasted it until the very last day we didn't even eat <sup>Knidlach</sup> ~~canaloch~~ until the last day. <sup>You know about Knidlach? Matzoh balls.</sup> So this stays in my memory

very vividly. Of course we were still young enough to allow our participation because otherwise I think if father would think that we were ready reached maturity and got menstruation period he probably would not have allowed us. But my sister and I were the two youngest, We sang very nicely even though we didn't participate, <sup>It consisted all of men.</sup> and Bearded men so that they were doing the matzo, and you know, <sup>what consists of doing</sup> ~~the feast of the~~ matzo, <sup>you have to</sup> you have to make the dough and use a rolling pin to roll it out and put it in the stove on white paper; everything was covered with white paper and while they were rolling the matzos the Jews were singing <sup>Hallel (?)</sup> ~~hallel~~, it's a special prayer on thanksgiving day and it's a praise to God. You don't know much about that.

Q. <sup>Hallel</sup> ~~Halle~~ sounds like an abbreviation for <sup>Hallelu.</sup> ~~Hallugh.~~

A. It's the same origin of the word. I was terribly impressed by that, <sup>sharing matzohs</sup> all these people, and singing the Hallu, I mean it was such a solemn moment; full of holiness, <sup>and awe.</sup> and then during the <sup>Passach</sup> week, <sup>Shmuror.</sup> the father used to eat matzo ~~schmore~~. We ate regular matzo all of us but he himself ate matzo <sup>Shmuror</sup> ~~schmore~~ because it was impossible to make it for the whole family.

Q. So that was baked especially for him then.

A. Yes, but for other people also. <sup>I don't know whether they ate the matzohs</sup> ~~Maybe the men too~~ and then the <sup>Shmuror.</sup> way my father officiated at the ~~se~~der he, or it also stays with me my entire life. One of my youngest brothers used to be at the ~~se~~der with us, I told you, the one that lived with us, otherwise my father was the one. I remember as a young girl, my sisters felt that I should be given an opportunity to get out of the <sup>shfetes</sup> ~~stochel~~ you know because they thought I might make something of myself and then I had an opportunity to study and go to school. My older brother lived in <sup>Vilna</sup> ~~Vilna~~ at that time, so they send me there. I should live with my

older brother and maybe through him I somehow would be able to do something to find some occupation, but unfortunately it didn't work out.

Q. What year was that, that you were sent to Vilna. Was it before the first War.

A. Yes I think so, 1914 the first War was 1914, *It must have been,* possibly *Yes.* I don't remember really. I warned you about chronology. I couldn't remember.

Q. So what happened in Vilna?

A. So I was going to tell you that the father-in-law of my brother, you know the family, they lived (END OF SIDE ONE).

Q. So you went to Vilna.

A. So we lived with her parents and they were wonderful Jewish people, *they were* just great, the father and the mother of my sister-in-law, and naturally I was with them, *so the first seder we had with them.* And the father of the family officiated at the seder the way I did, but the difference was so tremendous that *while* I was sitting at the seder and listening to this man, I was swallowing tears all the time, missing my father so badly, because as I told you he was able to put into anything he does so much meaning and so much beauty. It just meant a great deal to *every one* of us and when we missed it or compared it with others, then it was a gap, a great gap.

Q. Do you feel as the next to youngest daughter and the two last children were daughters, were you in any specially favored position or did all of the children have this feeling towards your father?

A. *We all had a feeling of awe towards our father. Oh yes, the greatest* ~~They all had a feeling for father great affection~~ And father was treated *respect.* exclusively you know. You know we didn't have all the fine accommodations *for instance,* as we do in this country, there were no toilets inside. The toilets were

supposed to be outside and sometimes we didn't even have a toilet, But my father had a specially built toilet for him alone, that he was the one to occupy and nobody else, And nobody in the afternoon, for instance, we had tea time the big samovar <sup>on the</sup> table, you know, and we all sat around the table and drank tea, But nobody would ever take the first sip, We waited for our father to start <sup>the tea. We never started to drink the tea when father was not at the table.</sup> so he was treated not only by the people of the steche with great respect <sup>and awe</sup> but by his own family as well. <sup>Shte tel,</sup>

Q. Now how did your mother, what was your mother's role here?

A. Well she was like any woman in a household like this. In Hebrew you say it ha keret ba bait.

Q. Something about the house I don't know what <sup>ha keret...</sup> ~~my karak~~, the keeper of the house.

A. Yeah, the <sup>ruler</sup> ~~keeper~~ of the family, <sup>in other words.</sup> She would have the family under her <sup>responsibility, or her</sup> supervision, everything like that. I don't know how to put it in English.

Q. But would she have to consult with <sup>your</sup> ~~her~~ father on all matters or could she make her own decisions or...

A. Well, it's the kind of life really that I don't know whether she had to ask permission for things to do, they probably would <sup>or</sup> ~~consult~~ <sup>consult</sup> but not <sup>in our</sup> ~~in our~~ children's hearing. <sup>We never knew about it.</sup> ~~very loud for children to hear~~ or anything like that. She was quite free

and independent. She was conducting her business, in a way, and she showed <sup>the</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>greatest</sup> ~~great deal~~ of respect for my father.

Q. Did he show the greatest respect to her?

A. Yes, I think so, yes. I wouldn't say the greatest respect, not in the same way naturally, Because their roles were different, But I don't think my mother felt intimidated in any way, <sup>By far.</sup> ~~No~~ If that's what you are driving at. <sup>Not in</sup> ~~our house.~~

Q. I'm not driving at anything. Sometimes I think back after I have spoken to someone and I realize that the mother wasn't mentioned.

A. Not at all?

Q. Just today I thought this. A couple of times, in a couple of families, the mother wasn't mentioned at all.

A. Amazing, rather amazing.

Q. Yes and I got so caught up in listening that I forgot to ask which was an oversight on my part, <sup>Who is this shadowy person,</sup> There was a mother in the family, see?

A. Shadowy?

Q. Well she's not mentioned and in this instance she becomes a shadowy presence, <sup>She doesn't have any reality in the present narrative.</sup> Would you say was there a sense of <sup>a</sup> good feeling in the family?

A. Oh yes, oh yes. There was a sense of devotion to each other, <sup>Very</sup> closely knit and we just lived like I said brothers and sisters we felt very close to each other, <sup>whatever happened to one concerned,</sup> ~~but I happened to work but so did everybody else.~~ We always used to sing together in the family too, because two of my brothers loved to sing.

Q. So singing played an important part <sup>in your fam...</sup>

A. Well no, not formally but just to spend the time together. I mentioned <sup>used to sing zmiras</sup> that I ~~did~~ <sup>So</sup> ~~smores~~ with my father, that was two young<sup>er</sup> girls growing up and

you can see the way of life we had in our home. On Saturday, the Shalohudas, <sup>you know, the shen</sup> third meal and before Sabbath is going <sup>out</sup> ~~on~~ ~~at~~ before the ~~reader~~ <sup>?</sup> comes in.

<sup>^</sup> So there were zmiras then.  
<sup>^</sup> We were, ~~sitting~~ <sup>singing</sup> with our father.  
singing zmiras

Q. That's what I say, <sup>it's</sup> music and religion combined in this case but <sup>well</sup>

it is still music.

A. We didn't look at it as music. <sup>It's ritual, ritual</sup> The ~~ritual~~, the ~~ritual~~ is a tradition and we participated in it <sup>wholly</sup>.

Q. Now, did you have any schooling, formal schooling in your <sup>shtetel?</sup> ~~shtetel~~.

A. It's very interesting. I mentioned before, I said that there was hardly any schooling. That will give you an idea of our <sup>shtetel, even if</sup> ~~shtetel~~ <sup>in that I didn't</sup> mention the number of inhabitants <sup>there;</sup> the population. I think all we had was just, sort of a public school, <sup>I think</sup> which consisted of four grades or something like that.

Q. Now this is a Russian public school.

A. A Russian public school. So that was the first time I was in contact with the youth, the peasant youth, or the Christian youth in our <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~. There was no one else so I was sent to that school.

Q. Now your father allowed you to go.

A. Yes and my mother. My father was a very liberal man.

Q. He was, <sup>?</sup> okay.

A. But then I went through school very quickly and everybody was amazed that I was grasping, I didn't stay there very long.

Q. In the public school.

A. In the public school, <sup>I tell you it's not even a public school.</sup> but it's about four grades or something like that.

And then we used to have state examinations and this was something very, very peculiar too. <sup>AT</sup> The graduation when you went through the school you are supposed to go through exams, <sup>the</sup> examinations <sup>they would...</sup> who did they send, I really don't know exactly who these people were, <sup>they must have</sup> but it ~~wasn't~~ come from the state, especially <sup>to examine</sup> ~~for examining~~ so instead of coming to the place where

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the school was, and this is in our <sup>shtetel, Lyelchitz,</sup> ~~shtetel~~ there was, I suppose they had to accommodate all the vicinity, and of course I was completely ignorant of the fact, I didn't know why they did it. But there was a little village, not far from us, I don't know how many miles. So they stopped over there and we had to go to that village, you know, in order to go through the exams. I remember when I came there I found two or three people, you know, very, very impressive, broad shoulders and they were wearing medals galore. I was a little girl I don't know I was 12 maybe younger. I remember I was trembling <sup>in my boots, I got so...</sup> but all they asked me was to recite a poem which was called "Borodino" ~~Brodovich~~ in Russian and of course I did it with flying colors and so that was my schooling. After that we had private teachers.

Q. To the home.

A. To the home, no, yes, <sup>shetel</sup> they would come to the ~~shtetel~~ too, you know.

Not just to our home alone, but they would give lessons to others and have private lessons, and then of course a great deal was self tutoring, learning by one's self. We had a cultural home. I don't know really how, <sup>Maybe</sup> because of the fact that people, as I told you before, used to stop in our house. So we had all kinds of people, sometimes intelligent young men and my sister used to read a great deal, used to get books, I don't know how, where we got the books from, <sup>shetel.</sup> because we didn't have a library to speak of in our ~~shtetel~~.

Later on when I become already a young lady, you know, and I started taking part, <sup>before</sup> that was shortly before the Revolution, the communist revolution.

We tried to establish a library of our own. <sup>Otherwise</sup> we had no library, but my other sister always managed to get books and the best Russian writers and we always discussed books. We did a lot of reading and a lot of studying

on our own.

Q. Whom did you read?

A. Well I couldn't remember them all, <sup>Dostoevsky</sup> but ~~Stevsky~~ at that time, *Lermontov*. Tolstoy naturally, even a very controversial book <sup>named (?)</sup> ~~by Maissan~~ and I don't remember who wrote it and even that book reached us.

Q. Tanyon? *Was it Chekhov?*

A. *No it was not by Chekhov.* So all these classics, the Russian classics we used to read a great deal and also Hebrew books, believe it or not. We used to take up Hebrew at the same time. As a matter of fact I learned my Hebrew at home.

Q. Now was there someone to teach you.

A. A private teacher. And then as I said <sup>(?)</sup> ~~the fielding~~ I was always a book worm I just loved to read and to study and to learn. I remembered I happened to get hold of a German textbook and I learned German. I knew how to read and write German for a while. I didn't study it for very long. Anything I could get hold of you know, I would look into it and that somehow gave me a chance to get some sort of education.

Q. Now your father didn't object to all of those secular learnings.

A. No, no, no.

Q. But you were not sent to gymnasium.

A. We didn't have a gymnasium. I was going to tell you since I showed some sort of promise, my sister was always very much interested to give me a chance. <sup>My older sister.</sup> I had another sister, an older one, who lived in <sup>Mazir</sup> ~~Medzier~~ and that was I told you, <sup>Ujezdnyi gorod,</sup> ~~near Zogoran~~ <sup>Mazir</sup> so they sent me to ~~Medzier~~ which was wonderful, <sup>W</sup> ~~Would~~ have been wonderful, but instead of putting me in a school with other children, my sister had a stepson who was a very nice young man

and all that, he was supposed to be my teacher. I was very young at that time. I missed my home <sup>and</sup> and even though I didn't complain or anything like that my sister saw how unhappy I was, she <sup>sent me</sup> ~~said~~ go back home.

Q. She sent you to <sup>Mazir</sup> Mazier and where <sup>were you supposed to...</sup>

A. <sup>No</sup> My family sent me to <sup>Mazir</sup> Mazier, to my sister, because it was 80 miles from our <sup>shtetel</sup> shtetel and after she saw how unhappy I was there, and I missed

my home so much, she decided that it's no good for me to be there. She sent me back home, you understand. <sup>If had</sup> They ~~were going~~ to put me in a school <sup>then,</sup>

there they had a gymnasium, but maybe they had to prepare me for it but <sup>nothing came of it,</sup> ~~not~~ unfortunately. The purpose of my going to Vilna was also something like that for the same purpose and that didn't work out either, because they just didn't know how to go about it. But that was already, I was already a young lady and when I came back from Vilna, my father was gone.

Q. He had died?

A. Yes. So, that's it, my biography.

Q. Was your father <sup>a Mitnagid?</sup> ~~magnatic~~?

A. Yes he was a <sup>Mitnagid</sup> ~~magnatic~~, he was not a <sup>Hasidim</sup> ~~hussel~~ (?), it was interesting

that he did not believe in the <sup>Hasidim,</sup> ~~hussel~~ but my mother was a <sup>Hasid</sup> ~~hussel~~, yes and she was following the <sup>Stoliner rebbe, you know?</sup> ~~Stalin~~ So I do remember in spite of the fact maybe

he was gone already at that time, but I don't think he would interfere with my mother. So this <sup>rebbe</sup> ~~rebel~~ sometimes used to come to the <sup>Shtetel</sup> ~~stetel~~ to visit.

This is also something to behold and one of the <sup>rebbes</sup> ~~rebels~~ stopped in our house because my mother <sup>a Hasid</sup> and...

Q. So even though your father was a <sup>Mitnagid</sup> ~~magnatic~~ rabbi, the <sup>rebbe</sup> ~~rebel~~ did come.

A. The <sup>rebbe</sup> ~~rebel~~ came to the <sup>Hasidim in Shtetel</sup> ~~stetel~~ but he ~~did~~ was not a believer in Hasidim

and his station was in our home because as I said we had this spacious home and somehow it was considered the first home in the <sup>shetel</sup> ~~steche~~, you know so anything of significance or importance was taking place there.

Q. So did he hold his court there. His Bet Din?

A. Yes.

Q. He did.

A. Oh yes, I remember <sup>standing</sup> ~~spending~~ as a little girl by the door. First of all you know at dinner <sup>Freitag tau nacht, I</sup> Friday night the ~~schuler~~ <sup>schuler</sup> didn't go at that time, but then the Hasidim <sup>the zoll, our parlo ~~was~~ large with</sup> ~~used to come and sit at that table~~ <sup>it's a long, long story and sit at that</sup> ~~table~~ the dinner was served. Two instances.

Q. Who served the dinner?

A. Well I don't remember, <sup>Somebody prepared it.</sup> ~~Somebody did~~, I'm sure. To me it wasn't significant. But then everytime the <sup>rebbe</sup> ~~rebbe~~ would touch something and move it away the Hasidim <sup>would just go one</sup> ~~would just go one~~ over each other's head to try and get a morsel of what the <sup>rebbe</sup> ~~rebbe~~ has left. That's what they call <sup>(?)</sup> ~~chirade~~. So naturally I was very much taken aback to see that and I remember the <sup>rebbe</sup> ~~rebbe~~ happened to be a very young man. I suppose it was one of the rabbi's children.

Your ...

Q. Your father was a rabbi.

A. Right.

Q. But a <sup>Hasid</sup> ~~cousin~~ would be a <sup>rebbe</sup> ~~rabbi~~.

A. <sup>So</sup> ~~He~~ was a young man and he had to deliver a piece of <sup>Torah</sup> ~~torah~~, so I remember the <sup>sing</sup> ~~theme~~ <sup>voice in</sup> ~~song~~ which he delivered, I didn't understand anything. I didn't even listen to it, <sup>just</sup> ~~But~~ the whole set up the whole ritual <sup>to witness</sup> ~~to witness~~ this thing was a tremendous experience for me.

*Qided(?) the Hasidim myself*

Q. Did you find it positive?

A. Very interesting, <sup>de qes</sup> positive, ~~but~~ I probably ~~didn't consider myself.~~  
<sup>on my feelings,</sup> I read a lot about <sup>rebbin</sup> rabbin later on of course but that was at the time when  
<sup>also, the following morning...</sup> I was quite young, and then of course the ~~dinner~~ <sup>women</sup> would come and bring in  
the ~~fatel~~ <sup>(?)</sup> a quidel Kvittel.

Q. What's a quidel Kvittel?

A. A quidel means that we would write out in that quidel the needs and ask  
<sup>Not only advice.</sup> <sup>Kvittel if</sup> advice. He would not advise <sup>them</sup> directly. He should intercede, <sup>I don't know. They had a gabbai. The gabbai</sup> He should <sup>with the Rebbe and Shil Olam.</sup>  
<sup>his</sup> ~~would give the Kvittel to~~ him and ~~all that,~~ pray for her and see that this desire or wish whatever should be fulfilled.  
And he was sitting in <sup>Moine's</sup> the room as I told you before, <sup>that was</sup> the very first room the

parlor, secluded completely, the door was closed and people were just  
coming in by permission, <sup>the gabbai would let them</sup> and he had them in for a few minutes. The only  
<sup>could</sup> time we ~~should~~ see him was when he was sitting at a public function, the

dinner you know Friday night, and then the following morning, Saturday  
morning, the <sup>rebbe</sup> ~~rabbi~~ had to go to <sup>shul</sup> ~~school~~ and this was also something that  
impressed me very much. First of all the women were very much interested,  
women, girls anybody to see, but ~~women~~ <sup>were</sup> would not allow ~~it~~ <sup>ed</sup> in his presence,

Besides a rabbi, or any orthodox Jew, will not go by with the two eyes of  
women, so the women have to be standing one line you know in one row, the  
men were standing in the other row, and the rabbi <sup>passed</sup> ~~went~~ by to <sup>to shul</sup> ~~go~~ the school.

Q. Now your own father, would he walk between two rows of women if  
the occasion ...

A. You know something, I really don't know. I never came across  
that. I was never confronted with that problem.

Q. Now your father was an orthodox rabbi.

A. Well you could see the way he was making <sup>de shmurah</sup> ~~smura~~ for himself and how very strict observant he was in every detail, so he was an orthodox rabbi but at the same time he had an open mind.

Q. You said that and I was wondering if you could illustrate it. You said he was liberal. For one thing in the matter of your education I think <sup>that</sup> ~~that~~ <sup>certainly is an illustration.</sup> Now what else? How about the boys. How were they educated?

A. Well I mentioned my <sup>Hebrew</sup> education, private teachers and we also had a teachers there in <sup>shtetel himself</sup> ~~stetel~~ who was a modern teacher.

Q. Modern Hebrew teacher.

A. Modern Hebrew teacher and he would teach us Hebrew. The secular education I suppose <sup>did not matter</sup> ~~never~~ so much at that time. My brothers got their education privately. I remember now one of my teachers, I even remember his name, he was thinking very highly of me you know, so I remember one Saturday afternoon he came to the house, ~~of~~ <sup>of</sup> course he was one of us, <sup>In a</sup> ~~in a~~ <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stetel~~ everybody felt very, not only at home, but an affinity to each other.

So he used to come in the afternoon we used to sit and have tea and all that <sup>he started</sup> ~~and his father talking about me;~~ <sup>Zie hat a nicer betfiser(?) Betfiser means</sup> ~~perception.~~ I suppose being able to perceive things <sup>to get things, and so on. So that's how - by snatches.</sup> ~~so that's how.~~ However it was a pretty fundamental too. When we had these private teachers we used to take it up in the fundamental manner.

Q. I <sup>expect</sup> ~~suspect~~ you probably got a very good education. Now how else could you ~~illustrate~~ <sup>illustrate</sup>, for me, what was sort of a <sup>dichotomy</sup> ~~dye-enemy~~ you know, in your father, that he was a very orthodox rabbi on the one hand and yet this liberalism. Now the fact that you were allowed to study modern Hebrew would probably be another example. Was he a Zionist?

A. Well I don't know really, the question of Zionism ~~really~~ didn't come up at that time, <sup>but</sup> I do remember, as a young girl I used to have disputes with my father. He used to tease me a lot and I was always a feminist and I was always trying to stand up for women's rights and I felt the women are being discriminated against you know and <sup>there is (?)</sup> a noveling, you know <sup>what</sup> a noveling (?) <sup>the way women were treated, wasn't right, and it was an offense to them or something like that, so I remember arguing with my father and he used to tease me about it. The fact that he allowed it</sup>

Q. Even permit it.

A. I think he was quite a liberal person.

Q. That's what I said the fact that he would even permit you to raise the subject.

A. <sup>No, he never said, "No"...</sup>  
 But only one thing he did tell me and which I do remember and this is not his own, it comes from the <sup>admonition</sup> ~~admonition~~ in the <sup>Torah</sup> ~~Tora~~ where they tell people not to try to understand everything and not to try to get <sup>so deep into</sup> ~~into~~ <sup>different</sup> things and <sup>saying</sup> ~~things~~, you know you must never try to think, mola mona, mola monta what is above you, what is underneath you and all that, don't try to delve too deeply into problems because you can never grasp them all.

Q. I remember my father saying that to me.

A. There you are.

Q. I do remember it. That's very interesting, which probably means that he saw that you were trying to understand.

A. Oh yeah, there is no question about it of course, <sup>but</sup> he ~~was~~ always tried to tell me, there are some things that are above human understanding and so on and I suppose he tried to leave me with the idea <sup>now at least I think so,</sup> ~~that~~ a person should not <sup>what</sup>

only try to investigate things but he should also have his own perception about or concept and his part in the world or in the general set up. In other words he should have a certain amount of trust and faith and goodwill and things like that. Excuse me I'm not in good shape. ~~Would~~

Q. Would you like to terminate this interview?

A. No, it's not that bad if you want to go on.

Q. This is still turning and I have another tape if you want to continue.

A. Well I don't know it all depend what you want to know.

Q. I think we are getting to the point. Whatever you tell me is what I want to know.

A. But this is only personal things.

Q. That's what I want to know. If you add up ~~with~~ all the personal things then you ~~end~~ <sup>wind</sup> up with a picture of what happened. In fact when <sup>Baashevis Singer</sup> Bachevosky came to talk, he said, I forget what the question was, but his answer-<sup>oh yes,</sup> we asked him, I did not interview him at that time I don't think I was working on this yet, But I came to listen to him talk, And we were talking about, he was most interesting. I don't know if he is always such a lovely man, but he's a very interesting man. I like his writing very much. How would you say, <sup>from an economic ... no. Yichus,</sup> ~~let's say~~ your family must have had, how were they placed or didn't it matter, how were they placed on a scale of like a socio-economic scale. Were you comfortably situated with respect to food and clothing. I mean your house was already taken care of, ~~you~~ <sup>you</sup> Apparently had a beautiful home.

A. <sup>Beautiful, not in the sense we understand beautiful home.</sup> ~~But~~ We lived very comfortably and according to the standards at that time, <sup>But</sup> we never considered ourselves prosperous people, We never

considered ourselves poor people. There wasn't ever a question that we should feel any ~~more~~ want. We had plenty of food and clothing and some <sup>thing</sup> how we didn't pay so much attention to this material. We were satisfied, we were quite content with what we had.

Q. Were there poor Jews in your <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~, very poor?

A. Very poor I wouldn't say, but there was a certain scale there. We had for instance one Jew was considered the <sup>gevir in shtetel</sup> ~~gener(?)~~ the rich man. His house was the finest, the greatest, he was conducting big business and all that, and then there were some people who were better off and some people not so. Mostly there <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ quite a few store keepers there, that made a living by having a store and selling goods, making out very well, otherwise I don't think we had very many workers there. We had a shoemaker, we had, what you call them, tailors, a carpenter, people like this.

Q. Did they have their own schul or did they go to your father's.

A. No we had only one schul.

Q. Only one, you were lucky. There were <sup>small shtetelach</sup> some ~~shtetelach~~ that had four schuls.

A. Not us. What I wanted to tell you, in order to get an idea what our <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~ was like, we didn't have a post office for instance, we didn't get any mail. I remember already when I was a young lady, at that time when the post office was introduced to our <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~. And how, we used to have the post, <sup>?</sup> No, they had a post office opened at that ~~that~~ time. They probably, I say probably <sup>because</sup> I don't remember well, selling stamps and things like that, but the actual mail used to come to the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~ three times a week and that was a great event, <sup>so</sup> they used to come from <sup>Mazir</sup> ~~Mazir~~ which is 80 miles from us and that is the <sup>Uyezdni gorod</sup> ~~Uyezdni gorod~~ and then they used to bring it by <sup>coach</sup> ~~coach~~. (END OF TAPE).

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At the time the mail was supposed to come to the <sup>when</sup> ~~stechel~~ <sup>shtetel</sup>, everybody was just going up to the post office to wait for the mail to come in and then we had a clerk <sup>there</sup> ~~ing~~ I think that's all they had one clerk taking care of the postage. He used to bring out the mail. He used to come out on the porch, standing there on the highest step and calling out the names, a letter for this one, a letter for that one, a great event. So you see the kind of <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stechel~~ I came from. It's amazing and yet I don't think we felt confined too much.

Well, I speak of myself. I don't know how the others felt about it but different people have different, for instance I loved to—we had a river, I told you. We used to go boating on the river. Beyond that river was a mountain which was called <sup>Weise bar</sup> ~~bisard~~ (?) the white mountain, <sup>Why</sup> was it white, I don't know. So they used to first boat across and then go off to the amountain and walk for hours there. It was so beautiful, so peaceful and I think that's where I got my love for nature from there, from our <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stechel~~, and on the other side of the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stechel~~ there was another mountain to which you could walk. You didn't have to cross the river <sup>but</sup> to walk up through fields and all that. We had plenty, <sup>time,</sup> but I remember <sup>going</sup> ~~doing it well~~ boating I used to go with others. <sup>But</sup> to pay a visit to the other mountain I used to go by myself. I

would walk up to that mountain and we used to pick those little mushrooms, a certain kind of mushroom I don't remember what you call it, <sup>leshitzkes</sup> ~~lechekeetz~~ here we don't have it.

Q. My mother would probably know.

A. And the beauty of it you know, <sup>And</sup> then they had a pond in that mountain they had a pond so we used to go there during the winter too and skate, <sup>Not</sup> very often, without skates, just sliding on the ice but we had lots of fun and

I remember once walking to the mountain all by myself and admiring the beauty all around and the snow became so deep that I really sank up to my knees, But I did <sup>extract</sup> ~~track~~ myself and came back home and was very, very happy.

Q. Your husband grew up in a big city and you came . . .

A. How big it is I don't know. I've never been to <sup>Gomel</sup> ~~Gommel~~ but compared to Lyelchitz it must have been a big city, right.

Q. How did the two of you meet?

A. Well that's very strange, through a friend. They used to correspond, <sup>where did she meet him? I'll have to ask my husband.</sup> before we met. A friend of mine, she talked to him about me and she talked to me about him and we started corresponding you know we were writing letters to each other for a long, long time. <sup>A</sup> And then he, as the students used to do, they would come for the summer in a small town to teach.

Q. That's right, you still don't remember a year because that was a special movement.

A. The year would have been probably 1920/1921.

Q. Already after the revolution.

A. Yes.

Q. We got through an awful lot of years. <sup>A</sup> Okay.

A. When I met my husband it was, when did I meet my husband, 1921 .

Q. The two of you were leaving together, it seems to me it was earlier but I could be wrong from his recollection.

A. <sup>It could have been.</sup> You see he came to visit me in <sup>Lyelchitz</sup> ~~Vechetz~~ and what's how we met, maybe we met before in <sup>Mazir</sup> ~~Madzier~~ when I went to visit my sister at that time <sup>we</sup> ~~I~~ spend the summer there and then he came to <sup>Lyelchitz</sup> ~~Vechetz~~ to visit me

and then the war started and he couldn't get home.

Q. What did you do during the war? Did the war affect your <sup>Shtetel</sup> ~~stachel~~ at all?

A. Not really very much.

Q. The Russians didn't come. There was no exchange, you didn't see any troops or bombardments or shelling there was nothing.

A. Slight, not in our <sup>Shtetel</sup> ~~stachel~~ itself. When I was visiting my sister in <sup>Petrokov</sup> ~~Bedricoff~~ I remember there was some sort of shelling and we, in order to have some sort of security and protection, sat on the floor near the stove, the big oven, because what you shoot with should not penetrate the bullets would not be able to penetrate because there was a thick wall and sure enough one of the bullets did come and stopped right short next to me. So we did have some experiences of that sort. We were bombed once also from the air.

Q. By whom. A. Who was the war with?

Q. Unless I know the year, you were in Russia.

A. That was already after, we were occupied later on by the Poles. My husband told you the story about the arrest and all that and then when the Polish occupation, I suppose ended that's when we started for America.

Q. But during the war in your <sup>Shtetel</sup> ~~stachel~~ was there a food problem, ever?

A. No not to such an extent.

Q. Was there disease, did the epidemics hit you?

A. Well there was a typhoid, quite a few <sup>victims of the typhoid</sup> ~~weeks~~ and also cholera, cholera was also there too but otherwise there wasn't any dire need.

Q. Had your father died before the war, Rivka, can you remember now?

A. My father died when I was in <sup>Vilna</sup> ~~Wilna~~ I guess it must have been

before the war.

Q. And then your mother carried on with the store.

A. Right and I do remember the the Mashochunki for instance.

You see there was, at that time of the war, there wasn't enough food in the

big cities and people, young people, used to go out trying to get food, *Peddling*,

bringing some stuff to the villages and taking grain from the villages and

bringing it home in order to have some bread. So they used to be called

*meshotakinis,*  
~~mechotsheta~~ it's <sup>a</sup> bag and they used to carry it on their backs, so they

were known by the bags they were carrying it on their <sup>backs</sup> ~~bags~~ filling it up

with grain, potatoes, anything they could get and they used to come to us -

We used to see them, <sup>but</sup> we ourselves never experienced *any want*.

Q. Did you ever do any exchanging with them?

A. We personally no, <sup>Most</sup> was done by the peasants.

Q. So you got through the war period all right. Now after the war was

over and even before the war there was <sup>the</sup> a revolution in Russia. Now, you

were living in the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~ most of this time, except for an expedition to

<sup>Mazir</sup> ~~Mazir~~ for schooling and then one to Vilna, I mean you never really

lived anywhere else did you?

A. No, no not really.

Q. Did you follow political events at home, were you following what

was happening?

A. With great difficulty. Even newspapers wouldn't come very

regularly in our <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~ <sup>Somehow</sup> how they reached us I don't know <sup>It</sup> was a miracle.

But there were some people that were very much alert and then those who

used to travel you know and go from one place to the other to bring the <sup>used</sup>

news.

Q. For example did you know about the <sup>Beilis ?</sup> Bales trial.

A. Oh yes.

Q. Oh you did, see without a newspaper, but you knew. How did you know.

A. At that time we did have...

Q. <sup>the Beilis, that was before the first World War... that was before the war started.</sup> Was your father still living during the <sup>Beilis</sup> Bales trial do you remember that.

A. *We were very much taken up with the Beilis trial.*

A. I don't know. Maybe not, do you remember the year.

Q. 1913.

*then he did not live anymore.*

A. 1913, then he must have not. Because in 1914 the war started and the Russian revolution also happened in 1914.

Q. No, 1917.

A. <sup>1917,</sup> I want to tell you the episode for instance how we knew that there was a revolution and that the Czar taken. All of a sudden people filed out into the streets, <sup>shtetel,</sup> they didn't know what, in the <sup>stetel,</sup> something of great significance had taken place and nobody knew what, <sup>A</sup> and I was among them, going to ~~be~~ in the street to find out what's there and would you believe it or not we had the strazhnits, the gendarmes so the <sup>strazhnik</sup> strazhnik told us, he said that the Czar was thrown off his throne. That's how I knew it, <sup>understand that?</sup> otherwise it didn't even reach us. We knew something great was happening, but we didn't exactly know what. Later on the newspapers used to come but not in a regular way, but some people used to get newspapers and used to pass it around, I don't know how.

Q. So did you stay, actually then if news did come to you it would be

already old news anyway by the time it got there, is that correct?

A. Yeah but I think the overthrow of the czar really reached us almost the same day. <sup>I don't know how in the world</sup> At came about that everybody in the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~ should be alarmed as you knew something tremendous has happened, <sup>But</sup> it was in the air.

Q. Well had there been any forewarnings, had there been any talk in your <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~ before hand of what was going on.

A. There was always talk, <sup>As</sup> I told you people would go from place to place and they would come back and bring you news and tell you stories.

Q. What was the feeling about the czar?

A. The feeling about the czar in the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~ itself, Well you know the Jewish people used to accept it as being inevitable or something like this.

This is the regime under which you lived and that's all. I mean they hardly had a <sup>not</sup> ~~revolution~~ <sup>miles there,</sup> except perhaps a few young people who <sup>used</sup> ~~wished~~ to go to the big city to work they already got a little bit involved, <sup>But</sup> otherwise in our <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~ there wasn't.

Q. If it had not been for the war and the revolution was it your feeling that you would have stayed there the rest of your life? Or did you already think about leaving?

A. Well that's a very difficult question, whether I would stay there or whether I would...

Q. At least in Europe, had you any thoughts of ~~emigrating~~.

A. Well yes because our older brother was <sup>here.</sup> ~~there.~~

Q. So one had already gone.

A. And he was gone because I suppose the military service, <sup>he did not want to enter</sup> ~~so~~ he left.

This is the brother who was a <sup>journalist with the Tag</sup> ~~generalist~~. He was working with the Tag

for many, many years.

Q. So this already was the first break in a sense, so that it wasn't such a completely...

A. Yes and don't forget the town in which we lived was so uncertain so we just felt that we probably *have to...*

Q. Before the war in other words. See if there had been no war if it's a game you play what if, what if there had been no war and no revolution would you have been content to stay there?

A. I don't know, I didn't think about it the future or anything like that. Would I have been content to stay there, I couldn't answer that question, probably not. I probably would have been very unhappy later on.

Q. Why?

A. Because as I told you before I felt perfectly happy in my *shetel* ~~stetel~~ why? Because I could indulge in the things that I loved, you see I could read as much as I wanted to, I could go boating, I could go for walks, I could admire nature which I loved and all that and that gave me satisfaction, that was my inner life. The rest of the things didn't matter so much. We didn't miss whatever social life we had we had very small group of people who used to be together and that's about it, but, if let's say, I would have ~~to~~ stay in the *shetel* ~~stetel~~ after I got married and build my own life there I probably would be very unhappy there because then I would have to take on responsibilities and certain chores which were not so gratifying to me, and wouldn't mean a lot, so I don't think I would be happy there, but then again it's speculation.

Q. Then you would have to become the matron and live within a certain

code.

A. Of course.

Q. A restrictive code, especially if you were <sup>a</sup> feminind. <sup>ST</sup>

A. Yes, always.

Q. That would have made a big difference.

A. I should say.

Q. So now if you don't mind going back to your meeting with your husband, I think somehow, no he didn't talk about that, so the two of you met through correspondence.

A. Then we met personally.

Q. Did that take place before the war, during the war, do you remember when that took place.

A. That's what I am trying to think and I cannot just think about it now. I don't know. Before the war, no. The fact that he wasn't able to go back home means that we were probably at war already you see and you could not travel freely, so it must have been during the war.

Q. After the first of all where there any anti-<sup>semitic</sup> incidents in your area before the war? What was your feeling about being a Jew for instance then.

A. Well at <sup>that shtetel</sup> the ~~shtetel~~ in which we lived we hardly felt any anti-semitism. Because as I told you we did not have too much contact, but at the same time we used to meet, you know, everybody knew us, we knew almost everyone in the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~shtetel~~, of the peasants, and we just accepted each other, there wasn't any dead blood or anything like that, however, to say that we felt perfectly secure would be too much. For instance I remember a certain holiday

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Christian holiday I think they called it ~~christian change baptism~~ <sup>Khresdenye. It's the baptism after the New Year</sup> There is a certain holiday they call christiana.

Q. Well Easter they say Khristos Voskresenye.

A. No something else. <sup>Khresdenye</sup> ~~Christiana~~ means when Christos was baptised into christianity by Johnathan. You remember St. John, well he's a Johnathan. So they celebrate that, they celebrate that with very great pomp. Also during when he was put on the cross, the crucifixion, during the crucifixion holiday the Jewish people felt very unsafe.

Q. That's near Easter.

A. They used to he was crucified on Easter right?

Q. No, he was crucified on Good Friday and then three days later he was resurrected, which is Easter Sunday.

A. <sup>right,</sup> So the Jewish people usually would stay locked in the doors and windows locked, because then they would come in great mobs from all over the place and you never trusted, you know, what wild fire could break out at that time against Jews, because after all they killed their God you know.

Q. Now the mobs would come in to go to church though is that right?

A. Yeah, but that's <sup>why I</sup> ~~how~~ it started <sup>with Khresdenye, Khresdenye</sup> ~~christiana christiana~~ was the baptism.

They used to go to the river to have a certain ritual even though the river was frozen I think it was so, <sup>low</sup> they used to come I don't know many hundreds, walk through the streets so the whole place down to the river in order to go the ritual to baptise. At that time the Jews were very, very uncertain, very insecure. Another instance I remember is there were rumors there was going to be a <sup>pogrom in our shtetl.</sup> ~~prahromester~~ (?) this is something that must have been earlier, <sup>It's</sup> not important really.

Q. It is important when it took place because there were several waves

of <sup>pogroms</sup> ~~plabemester~~ and they came at different times.

A. I know but as far as the insecurity of the Jewish people is concerned, I said it is not important when, because <sup>at that time</sup> I remember <sup>this incident</sup> at that ~~time~~ <sup>what I'm telling you</sup> ~~an instance~~ that occurred probably a few years before the other that I am telling you and I was already grown up and more conscious of what was going on, but there was a rumor about a <sup>pogrom</sup> ~~problem~~ and my mother, and I suppose my father I don't know I am all confused now ...

Q. Take time and don't worry about it.

A. My mother got very worried about <sup>pogrom</sup> ~~problem~~ and all that. So she sent us away, the two younger ones, to a sister of hers who lived quite a number of miles away from us, not far from <sup>Mazin or Petrakov. Not far from Petrakov</sup> Brechov to stay there a week until the danger of the <sup>pogrom</sup> ~~problem~~ would be over. <sup>But we didn't have any pogrom</sup> They were talking about a <sup>pogrom</sup> ~~problem~~ in the particular <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stetel~~ where we lived.

Q. That was the word.

A. Right, there was a rumor there, so we never really felt very much secure there was always that danger that something may break out at the most unexpected moments. But otherwise, I don't think there was a lot of anti-semitism in our place at all.

Q. Once the revolution started, did it affect your <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stetel~~? The Revolution and the Bolsheviks took power, let's take that point when the Bolsheviks took power.

A. In our <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stetel~~ at that time I think we were already thinking about going-leaving the <sup>shtetel</sup> ~~stetel~~ all together, because all these particular <sup>bands</sup> ~~bands~~ <sup>my husband and I and the others that I told you about.</sup> ~~bands~~ like Petlura, Milakovich <sup>Milkovatz</sup> that grew out that started growing up at that time.

Q. Now he was I think just in the white Russian area because I never

heard of him from anyone else but a white Russian. <sup>Pitura</sup> ~~Pecura~~ wasn't,  
Malochovs<sup>ki</sup>.

A. And there were others as well, <sup>And</sup> there was always a strike going  
<sup>on between</sup> down ~~within~~ the communists and the Poles you see and that's why that was  
the time when we were occupied by Polish and then I suppose the communists  
got the upper hand and that's how we were able to get out or something like  
that. But otherwise I don't know whether we really had a communistic  
regime in our <sup>shetel. There were a</sup> ~~stechel.~~ The word commissar or something like this but  
there wasn't an actual government.

Q. There was a commissar that came in.

A. Yes, I think so.

Q. Did life change at all, as far as you remember?

A. As far as I remember, I don't recall any particular <sup>of</sup> ~~in~~ that period.  
I wonder why.

Q. There were programs all over the ~~Ukraine~~. Were there any programs  
in your area.

A. No. Of course we knew what was going on.

Q. Yes, I am sure.

A. But in our area there was nothing.

Q. And how about the food situation and so on.

A. It wasn't too bad, it wasn't too bad. Of course there was trouble  
you know, <sup>but</sup> we sort of ~~weathered~~ <sup>led an affluent life</sup> it because we had plenty of potatoes and  
we had plenty of sugar and plenty of flour and all these things, <sup>which</sup> were stored <sup>to last</sup>  
through the winter and all that but then I suppose after the communist regime  
<sup>and</sup> they started looking for things and they started making revision in all the

Jewish homes and see where they had things put away, <sup>so</sup> it was only an unpleasant moment but I don't think it affected us very much. I <sup>had</sup> have a very bad encounter with one of them who came <sup>into</sup> search our house or something like that and I told him that we hadn't done anything or something like that. <sup>"</sup> and he told me, <sup>"</sup> young lady my husband was there at that time <sup>with us</sup> and I think he tried to save me he said, <sup>"</sup> young lady you better tell the truth and I <sup>scared up</sup> slammed out <sup>"</sup> what do you mean I wouldn't tell the truth, <sup>"</sup> so I answered very sharply and he got terribly angry, <sup>"</sup> He was ready to, I don't know what. <sup>To beat me up.</sup> But then my husband interfered and straightened him out. But I think I was wrong because I didn't even know probably <sup>where</sup> it was something <sup>probably</sup> there that they probably could have found and just imagine what I would look like if they would have found an extra bag of sugar or whatever it was.

Q. You know, Rivka, I think I am going to say thank you. We are nearing the end and it will be an hour and a half and I am going to say thank you very much.

A. As I told you you couldn't get too much out of this.

Q. No, I think you did very well.