

# THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF SAM EFFRON

## PART I

### My Early Remembrances

My memory begins in the year 1881. On March 13, 1881, the Czar of Russia, Alexander 2nd, was assassinated. My father was living for a short time in a town called Amdur. In the month of March, on the Purim festival, father took me to a place where the Megillah (Book of Esther) was read in the evening. It is customary while reading the Megillah, when the name Haman is read, then the boys with rattlers and the men stamp their feet for joy that Haman did not succeed to destroy the Jews of Persia. But at that night of March 1881 the congregation disallowed to use that kind of joy. That is where or when my first memory begins.

I suppose, I was about 5 years old. I didn't go to cheder (school) yet. My mother told me that I was born the 10th day of the Jewish calendar month of Tevet. That comes about December, but in what year I do not know. I imagine about the year 1876. There are a few more incidents that I remember as early as 1882. A brother of my father by the name Shmeril, the father of Morris Efron, died that year. I still remember his appearance. He was short and stocky, just like Morris. Also the grandfather of Sadie Efron, wife of William Efron, died. He was a young man, also a sage. The old Rabbi of the town of Amdur passed away that year, and the whole community of Amdur mourned after him for a long time. Many male children that were born after a long period after his death were named after him. His name was Abraham Ezra. Another incident I remember of 1882 is that in the summer of that year the town of Amdur was destroyed by a great fire in the month of June. So all this remembrance was the beginning of my successful struggle of the future of my life.

### About My Family

My father's name was Israel, and my grandfather's name was Jacob. My grandfather married Taibe. All together he begat 6 children – 2 sons and 1 daughter from his first wife, and 2 sons and 1 daughter with his second. The sons from his first wife was Israel and Mordecai and the daughter was Chana. The sons with his second wife was Chatskel and Shmuel, and the daughter was Anna.

My grandfather was a baker. My grandfather was born in Amdur and so was all his children born there. He had a bakeshop and only one of his sons learned the baker trade after finishing his religious education. That was when a boy was 16-18 or 20 years old. Up to that time the young man was studying the religious books of learning. At the age of 18 or 20 the young man was ready to get married. So the shotchen (matchmaker) got busy introducing a girl with a dowry that her father promised, sometimes never paid. After they got married their struggle for life began. That was the case with 90 percent of all the Jewish young man and women all over Eastern Europe. My father was one of them. He was born in the town of Amdur and when he was 6 years old he went to cheder, as all boys did, to pray with the rabbi and learn the Hebrew literature. First, how to read, and when this was accomplished, he began to learn the five books of Moses, reading, and at the same time, translating into "jargon." That was the Jewish language which is called Yiddish in all Eastern Europe. Each and every word was translated and memorized, and besides there were many commentaries on the 5 books of Moses that the pupil had to learn by heart. And when the boy was approaching the age of the Bar Mitzvah he was supposed to know the "Mishna" and the "Talmud" as well as all the commentaries to them. And from 13 to 18 years he was suppose to go to different Yeshivas for study. 18 years old was the time to get married. The scholar was in line for a nice girl of a good family and a good dowry and 5 or 10 years board in her fathers house. Just as in the U.S., certain concerns of industry are having their choice of the best students from college after the graduation for managing the business; so it was that if a father had girl, he was looking for a learned young man as a mate, and he went to Yeshivas to get one, and he did everything in his power to make them comfortable.

My father did not go to Yeshiva College, but he was a well learned man. He knew translation of the Hebrew literature. I suppose after he stopped receiving instruction from teachers he studied by himself with the help of his father until he was 18 years. What he did from 18 until 22 when he got married, I suppose he helped in the bakery. But he was no baker. Then somehow a shotchen or match maker brought him together with my mother – through what recommendation I do not know. She was living in a town near the city of Bialystok, a distance from Amdur of about 75 miles. My father was not a traveling man to go such a distance, but the shotchen did bring them together for a marriage. The shotchenim performed great miracles in their profession. Mother was a young girl. She had no mother, so her father and the brother got together for her a small dowry, and the shotchen did the rest. The dowry was just enough for a young couple to begin the struggle of their future. As to my best calculation, it was in the year of about 1855. How they came to one another, whether by road which was quite a distance from either one, or possibly by horse and wagon, which took nearly one day and a half one way, this I cannot say, but they got together all right.

So it began the life struggle for a young couple just married. They didn't have 2 or 3 years free board by the parents of the bride, but they got a small dowry in cash just to attach themselves to something and to begin life, which was the custom all over. He belonged to the town of Amdur, there he was born and lived for 22 or 23 years. To start something to make a living there, I suppose, was out of the question, as there were 100 others like him walking around like shadows without doing anything.

So he began to look to get away from Amdur and get amongst the peasantry, into the village amongst farmers. There the life was not as hard as among Jews in the towns. But still there was certain unpleasant circumstances to live in a village amongst farmers. First there was no synagogue to say to go to pray 3 times daily as they do in town.

But at least on Saturday or holidays a Jew must pray with a minion of 10 grownup men. Another thing is the Hebrew education of the children. There is no cheder or Rabbi where the boys can go to. But my father and mother just newly wed didn't take them things into consideration. As it is said, they didn't cross the bridge until they got there. My father began to look for a place in one of the villages and to establish themselves.

### **The Village of Lasha**

There was a village about 6 miles west from Amdur. It was called Lasha. It was considered a large village, about 60 farmers. It was situated in a center or circle of highways. About 6 or 7 roads came in through that village from different sections of the surroundings. It was considered a very good spot for an innkeeper. It had a Russian Orthodox church, 2 priests officiated. One by the name Parchevsky, a very strict Russian priest. The second was called Sokolow. But he was always drunk. He liked to drink whisky like most of the Russians. There was a public school and the town clerk of all the surrounding villages. That village was divided into 2 parts. There was a creek running between. In the summer that creek was nearly dry, but in the Spring in April when the snow melted, it became a real river ¼ mile wide. The same happened in July or August when heavy rains came down. That creek overflowed the bank and it was a danger to pass over as there was no bridge across.

So my father and mother established themselves in that village Lasha. There was a big house near the square of the highway and a large barn attached to the house for accommodation for wayfarers or travelers. It was a regular inn with accommodations for many teams of horses overnight. This inn or building belonged to a large land owner not far from there. I will describe the land owners of the large estates in a later chapter. My father didn't go there by himself, but he had another young couple as a partner. Possibly he was afraid to live there by himself or for other reasons. The name of his partner was Moshe Berman. Sam Berman in New York, Sadie Bill's cousin, was his son, and he seems to be my age, and he was born in that village Lasha at the same time as me.

Moshe Berman was a great Hebrew scholar. He was considered one in the town of Amdur. But in Amdur he had nothing to occupy himself with as there were too many high-grade Hebraic scholars in the town of Amdur. So he took a proposition to go in partners with my father to become a part inn keeper.

There wasn't much that business. If a farmer or wayfarer came for a drink the women filled the glass or bottle of whisky from behind the counter. My father and his partner was doing their prayers in the morning and having their breakfast. I suppose they surrounded themselves with religious books and studied the Torah. All this I am describing is what took place before I was born, as my father and mother begat 3 boys and 2 girls before me, and they were all born in that village of Lasha.

### **The Effron Family**

As to the genealogy of my father, as follows. As I described before, he was the 2nd son of Jacob my grandfather. All together there was 4 sons, and each one received a good education in the Hebrew liturgy. But when they came of age, to say about 18 or 20 years old, each one started to look for his future. They all got married with a dowry of course. The only son that was left with his father in the bakery was the first son, Mordecai.

There was Chatskel and Shmeril, the 2 sons of the second wife of the grandfather. Chatskel was a shrewd businessman, a promoter, or what is called a "plunger." He undertook big undertakings, especially in the agriculture. He acquired a small estate, buildings with tillable land and pasture, that was about 10 miles from Amdur. And there is where he began his successful struggle after he got married.

I suppose he got a small dowry, but that was not enough for his undertaking. So he got a partner. So both of them moved in on the small estate and worked the land and raised their families which as a rule were quite large. Chatskel had 4 sons, namely Shevach, Nosen, Mote, and Jacob, and they had 3 daughters, all born on the small estate called Odle.

He gave to all his sons a good education in Hebrew. First he sent them to cheder in Amdur, then he used to have a rabbi on the place together with a couple of neighboring Jews, and seen to it that the family tradition shall be kept up. So it was with all the Jews of a certain class.

The 2nd son of the 2nd wife of my grandfather was Shmeril. He married a girl by the name of Hester Rachel. She lived with her parents about 25 miles west of the city of Grodno. Her father had a small estate of land and building which he operated. The place was called Bartniki, near the city of Suvalky. Her father didn't have much of a Hebrew education, so he was looking for a young man for his daughter with a good education. So Shmeril was recommended, I suppose by a shotchen, as Shmeril was known to be a Grade A scholar. So he got married to Hester Rachel, and he went to live with his bride in her father's house, and there they raised their family, 2 sons and 2 daughters, namely the oldest, was Anna Chaie, then a son Jacob, a son Morris, and a daughter Eva. But Shmeril died very young, possibly not older than 32 years. So Hester Rachel was left I suppose in her fathers house, and the 2 boys didn't receive a good Hebrew education, under such circumstances. Their father passed away in the year 1882, in the summer.

There is where my first remembrance starts. I was 5 years old in the spring of the year. He visited my father that spring, as my father was living again in the town of Amdur for a very short period. How it happened, I don't know. I remember Shmeril and my father came in the morning from the synagogue, and he carried his tallit and tefillin under his arm. He was bald man with a round yellow beard. Morris Effron is the picture of his father, but he carries no beard. That summer we were living again in the village Lasha, and my father got the news that Shmeril, his brother passed away. My father observed 7 days of mourning according to the ritual.

Mordecai, the first son of my grandfather remained in Amdur, and got married to a girl by the name Chaie. She came from somewhere near the city of Bialystok. Whether it had any connection as to mother's mishpocha I don't know, as my mother also came from that section. All I know is that his wife Chaie became the boss of the household. My uncle Mordecai was a simple man, and was well learned in Hebrew as the rest of grandfather's sons.

When grandfather got old, his son Mordecai with young wife took over the bakeshop. All uncle Mordecai did was to put flour, water and salt in the dough trough, and make bread and rolls and bagel, and put them into a hot oven, and out came fresh products. And beside he gave his young wife a good opportunity to raise a large family – 5 sons and 3 daughters, and she was in charge of everything. She was

the buyer of the raw materials, and she disposed of the finished products. She looked after the growth of the children, their clothes, their food, and their education. And she had a job on her hands the first 20 years until the children began to mature, one after another. She was known in the town of Amdur for a capable woman, to do things in a right way. But she was a queer person. She was tall, dark complected, and always mad at somebody. In Amdur every person had a nickname. So she was called "Cike the Leach" or the snot, as her nose was most of the time running down. But she didn't pay attention to anyone and she was running the business to suit herself.

The names of her children were as follows: Isaac, Israel, Victor, Jacob, and Louis. The daughters, Sonya, Chana, and Rebecca.

### **The Jewish Innkeeper**

The large estates of the Pans and most villages where the individual farmers or peasants lived were as follows. Beginning somewhere north of Vilna was Latvia, then Lithuania, and Poland. Latvia and Lithuania were bordering on the Baltic Sea. Poland was bordering Austria and East Prussia. All this stretch running from the north southward, about 1500 miles, and from the west of East Prussia, Austria, and the Baltic to about say 500 miles toward the East, there were cities of considerable size. For instance, beginning from Vilna on the north there was Kovno, Libau, Mitau, Riga, Grodno, Suwalky, Lagostora, Fomra, Ostrolenk, Bobroisk, Pinsk, Minsk, Chelm, Lublin, and Warsaw. In all of those cities, the population was anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000, except the city of Warsaw, the old Polish capital, which was possibly 500,000. Most of those cities were the seat of the Gubernia, that the state offices were there, and the majority of the people were Jews, conducting all kinds of business. Surrounding these cities there were thousands of small towns, also populated by mostly Jews, tradesmen and professionals. Then there were the large estates, big land owners with large out buildings for the cattle and horses, and a large mansion where the owner or the Pan was living. Then came the villages. They were by the hundreds of thousands. Some villages had 30 farmers, and some 40 or 50. It depended on the distance from one estate to the next. These large estates were in existence since Catherine the Great. But a lot of them were done away with by the Russian Government in the year 1863, when the Polish resurrection broke out. The only ones that were left were the ones that were loyal to the government during the resurrection, and many of their lands were divided amongst single farmers. In all the villages, a farmer got about 10 acres of land. About 3½ acres for winter grain, 3½ for spring sowing, some pasture land, and some meadow for hay. Each farmer had a house (a log cabin most of them), one large room and a large vestibule. The roof was thatch, most of them hand made with heavy straw mats of rye straw. The barns for the cattle and horses and for hay and grain and the threshing floor were all under one thatched roof, and each farmer had a small garden near the house for vegetables. Also, a few trees for fruit: cherries, pears, apples and plums, just for their own use. In all these villages there was an inn or what they called a "kerchma." They were all operated by Jews. The inns were for the convenience of the farmers, as they were all selling whisky, and the farmers liked very much the strong drinks. Most of the inns belonged to the big land owners not far from the village. The Jewish innkeepers paid a yearly rental for the inn and the privilege of running it to suit himself. Then the inn keeper paid a fee to the government for a license to sell whisky and beer in that place. So the land owner and the government and the innkeeper milked the farmer by keeping him very poor for many years.

As I said before, the farmer liked to drink, and many of them drank away everything they had. Even the rye that they kept for bread they brought to the innkeeper to drink away for weeks at a time. So the government began to take notice of these things. In the year of 1804 the government promulgated a law to dispossess all the innkeepers from the villages in much of the government (State). Many of the innkeepers went to the towns and townlets with their families and became paupers as they had nothing to make a living from. The townlets became overcrowded.

The government after 10 or 20 years, watching the effect of the villagers without an innkeeper, came to the conclusion that the farmer's situation did not improve by removing the innkeepers. So the law

was not enforced any more. Some Jews began to go again to the village. That was after the Napoleon march to Moscow.

In one way the farmers benefitted much by having a Jew at the inn. If the farmer had some trouble he came to the Jew for advice. If he needed money the Jew got it for him. Of course he paid well for it in interest. The farmer was a good cow and gave the milk. But he got service. So many of the innkeepers made a very good living in the villages. That was in the earlier years. But while time was marching on, 25, 30, 40 years, the situation changed with the farmers as well as with the innkeeper.

For the most part, the life of the village Jew was a hard life. By the Jews of the towns and townlets he was considered ignorant. He was called a "yeshuvnick" because he dwelt in a village and he was not educated in the Hebrew literature. He couldn't go to the synagogue each day for prayers with a minion (10 Jews), and even on Saturdays or holidays he was compelled to pray by himself. On the high holidays, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, they always came to town. When the father came to the synagogue with his boys on those days they were pointed out by the town boys: "they are yeshuvniks." And many a time the town boys got into a fight with them. Then the town boys learned it was better not to aggravate them, because the boys from the village were strong and tough. They always had plenty of both rough food and fresh air. Always playing with the farmers' boys, they learned the ignorance and the common ways of the farmer's life. The city or town boys were a different type. They went to cheder and to the synagogue on Saturdays and holidays, and they learned one from the other the good way of life.

But still there were many accomplished Jewish men like poets, orators, and big writers that were raised in the villages amongst farmers. One of them was Chaim Nachman Bialik. He was one of the greatest poets in modern Hebrew that the Jews ever had. His father was an innkeeper somewhere in the Ukraine while he was a boy.

There were many Jews in the cities and towns that were ignorant and didn't know much of the Hebrew learning, as there were many professional tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, blacksmiths and others, and they began to learn the trade while they were young, say about 12 or 13 years old. As soon as he knew how to read the prayerbook, not knowing the meaning of the words that he was saying, that was sufficient for him. Some of the parents used to say "not all of the boys is going to become Rabbonim, so he might as well go to work." So he went apprenticing for a term of 3 to 4 years in some trade. All he got was bored. No cash pay during his term. Some of them became proficient and they learned a good trade. And some when finished with the term knew as much as when they came in. It was just as in any nation. Some people learn whether it is a trade or a profession or literature, and some don't take to it, and go through life without all this.

As I described my father, the 2nd son of Jacob, his place of domicile was Lasha. It was 6 miles from the town of Amdur, his place of birth. It was in the government of Grodno. The city of Grodno was situated on the river Neiman that was flowing from the east to the west and emptied into the Baltic Sea at Konigsborg, East Prussia. It passed through Kovno on its way. The length of the Neiman was from beginning to end possibly about 150 miles. The width in Grodno was about 200 to 300 feet. There was a lot of business done on that river, especially in the summer, which I will describe later. But I will describe my father's struggles after starting in Lasha.

Father and mother observed the old tradition to raise a family. After being married about 2 years came the first child, a girl, and she was named Chaie. Then they waited 3 years, had a boy, he was named Mote. Again they waited 3 years, a boy again. He was named David. They waited again 3 years, then came another boy. He was named Tanchun. Then 3 years more came a girl. She was named Yitke. 3 more years, I came, and I was named Shevach. All of the 6 names were of close, deceased relatives. After I came, the production stopped. My father and mother were about between 40 to 45 years old.

After moving to Lasha it took a couple of years for him and his partner to get oriented with the farmers and begin to deal, and then they were making a good living. It was hard work and they were able to do the studying of their holy books, of which they had a considerable amount. My oldest sister, Chaie, when she was 6 or 7 years old, my mother began to teach her to read in the prayerbook. My mother was quite a scholar herself. She didn't know how to write, but reading she knew well, especially the Hebrew prayerbooks. Most of the women folks knew how to read. My sisters knew how to write Yiddish. Mote,

the oldest brother, until he was 6 years old, played with the farmer boys. Then he was taken to Amdur to a cheder. He was a strong boy. But he didn't, right from the beginning, care to be a rav or even a good scholar. His mind was more for farming, and when he came back from Amdur for the holiday or vacation he was always with the farmer boys around the farm and learned how they did the farming. He followed the agricultural trade all his life. As soon as he finished school when he was 15 years old he got a job on a small estate as a foreman. The small estate where he got his first employment belonged to a relative of ours by the name of Leiser Effron. It was located on the outskirts of Amdur.

There was a large estate near Amdur that used to belong to a Polish nobleman. There were many buildings and a large mansion as living quarters for the owner. Years after the Polish insurrection against the Russian government the Russian government placed heavy taxes on their estates. The Polish owners could not keep it up. They were falling into debt, year after year, and they borrowed money from the Jews around. There was a man by the name Shmuel Close. He was lending money to the estate owner on promissory notes. The debt got bigger year after year, and Close took over the estate from the owner, Kozlovsky. Shmuel Close had 3 daughters and one son, and he was crippled. It seems like he had infantile paralysis, and he wasn't able to walk. Leiser Shael Effron, he was called Leiser Shael because his father's name was Shael, he was nice looking and well-educated in Hebrew and also in the Polish and Russian languages. He was proposed by a shotchen to Shmuel Close for his daughter, and as a dowry he gave him a small part from the big estate, close to Amdur, and he took my brother Mote to help manage, as he himself didn't know much about farming. All his young years he devoted to schooling and studying.

My brother's pay was very small. He had his board and lodging in their large house. When I was 6 years old, when my father and mother took me to Amdur and gave me over to a rebbe, which I will describe in a later chapter, and on Saturday afternoons my brother Mote came and took me with him to that place where he stayed. The lady of the house gave me challah with butter. I remember how good it tasted. They also had a boy of my age. We used to play together. Toward evening my brother took me back to the rebbe, but I didn't like to go there for reasons which I will describe later.

When my brother Mote was about 18 years old he was recommended to a larger estate than the one he was with. There were many such estates scattered about throughout that area, and many of them were owned or run by Jews. That estate where Mote went to was 20 miles west of Grodno. The name was Slinkowsky. That place had many helpers for tilling the ground. So Mote was the foreman. He received a certain salary and room and board. The owners, or the rendars, as some were called, were 2 brothers. He liked that place and they liked him. Once or twice a year he used to come to Lasha to visit us, driving a nice team of horses that belonged to the estate. The distance to us was about 40 miles. He would stay 2 days and then go back.

My brother David was a different type than Mote. He was more of a studious boy. First father sent him to different rebbes. First to a rebbe for beginners, then as he advanced he was sent to a higher grade rebbe. He was a good student and a good looking boy. He always kept himself neatly dressed, and everybody liked him. He was taking lessons from rebbes until he was about 15 years old. Then he was studying for himself in the beit midrash (the study house) in Amdur. In that period, about 1870-6, it developed among the young Jews what was called Haskala (Enlightenment). The young men began to learn the Hebrew literature in a modern way. Also they begun to learn some foreign languages, reading and writing the Russian, Polish, and German languages. But the Rabbis of the communities and the elder generation, the strictly orthodox Jews, forbade their sons to study that kind of literature. All they wanted them to study was the Mishna and the Talmud and the Commentaries. And some fanatics forbade them even to study the Books of the Prophets. So some of the young men rebelled against their fathers, and studied the books which they liked. But some boys or young men hid themselves and studied those books in secret so their fanatic fathers should not know, and they hid away the books. If the father found the books, he would put them right in the oven.

So my brother David, he began to look in the books of enlightenment without the knowledge of my father, and when he came home he brought some of the books with him. But he kept them away from father's sight. Father suspected him, and made threats that he will drive him out of the house if he will continue to read them, but David didn't get scared of father's threats and continued to look into them. So

as time passed on father got tired of arguing with him and let him go his way. And he did go his own way all his life, and didn't listen to the advise of anyone. When he became 18 17 he got in his mind to go to the city of Warsaw as there were living there some relatives on my mother's side. He was a good scholar, so he expected to get a job as a teacher either in a school or to give private lessons. But his first plans right from the start were not successful. He couldn't get a job as a teacher nor could he find pupils to give private lessons. So he took the train and came back to Lasha where he remained at home for several years helping around the inn. But his mind was working scheming for business.

In the meantime, time was going as usual. My father and his partner were making a good living in the village of Lasha. When it came Sunday or a church holiday there were busy days in the inn as all the surrounding villages came to Lasha to church, as that was the only church for miles around. When the services in the church were over, that was about 12 noon or 1 o'clock, all the farmers with their wives and children came to the kerchma to have their meal which they brought with them. A meal on Sunday or holiday without whisky or wine or beer wouldn't do, so they came to the inn. There was a big room where the boys and girls of the village had their dances on a Sunday or holiday. Tables were put up with benches, and the farmers were eating their dinner there. Of course they bought whisky, beer, or wine, and some of them didn't know the limit of their capacity and kept on drinking – the women as well as the men. And it was a great day for the inn keeper. It was a busy day and everyone in the family helped to fill bottles and take it over to anyone that wanted, and collected the money. The inn keeper knew what was coming and they were prepared for it. That was the business when they came out from church. Then, late in the afternoon the boys from the village announced that there is going to be a dance at the kerchma inn. So they hired a fiddler and they had a drum and the dance went on. The young men bought whiskey and drank without a limit, and kept on dancing with girls sometimes as late as 2 o'clock in the morning.

Of course some of the young women, when they were getting hot from dancing, they went with the man to cool off somewhere outside. But it always ended with a big fight amongst the young men, many times over a girl because the other fellow was dancing with who he considered his girl, and went with her to cool off. And both of them had friends so when the fight started by the 2, then there fell in the friends on each side, and there was a real fight, 8 or 10 men. Not only did they fight with fists, but with anything they were able to get hold of. A stone, a stick or a bench, even breaking the inn keeper's table and using it to fight with. Some of them nearly bled to death. Sometimes even the young women got into it. In a day or two they came together again and made peace and drank vodka again. Then everything was quiet until the next dance.

The innkeeper always had his troubles of course. He had a license to sell vodka from the government. The rule was that anyone that was selling the drink, it must be 41% proof. The government had revenue officers always on the go. He comes in with an instrument and draws some vodka from the barrel. If it did not come up to standard, the innkeeper got a summons to appear before a magistrate, and there was a heavy fine for the offense. In many cases the license was revoked and then the innkeeper was selling on the QT. So he was always in danger of prosecution.

Then there was another thing that was up against the innkeeper. The Jews of the town always envied the Jew in the village as a man of leisure and wealth. Of course, not all of them, but a certain low class. The result was quite often some of them would come to the village, hire a barn or a house if it was vacant, move in with his wife and family, and run in competition with the innkeeper by selling vodka to the villagers. The innkeeper to avoid competition would approach the man and make a deal with him, give him 50 or 100 rubles, and he moved out as quick as he came in. As when he came in, his intention was just to get a few rubles and then go back to town.

It happened such a case which I remember well. I was then not quite 5 years old. There was in the village where my father and his partner were an old empty house, not far away from their place. There was in Amdur a man by the nickname of Shmuel Am Suf. He was a young man, an expressman. He had a horse and wagon and carried certain freight from Amdur to Grodno. He had a wife and quite a few children and a mother-in-law, but in very poor circumstances like most of the Jews of Amdur. So he decided to get some easy money. He came to Lasha, hired the empty house of a farmer and put all of his family in his big wagon, including his mother-in-law – as it is said, lock, stock and barrel – and "here I

am." My father and his partner saw a light in the old house at night. So they knew immediately a new competition. So my father and partner and older brother Mote went there to investigate and when they saw who it was, they began to curse him. So a word followed and they came to blows. And a big fight followed. My father's partner carried a cane and hit the mother-in-law over her head with that cane and knocked out one of her eyes. Then they somehow separated. A couple of days later, my father and partner found themselves with a criminal case on their hands: falling on people in their home at night to fight and knocking a woman's eye out. The police of the district came and investigated the whole case and made out charges against my father and his partner. But my father saw to it that the paper and the charge shall not go further than the local police. The man they fought, they gave him a good sum of money, and he went back where he came from, as he came for the purpose just to get money. About 1888 that man came to Kingston and established himself there, then sent for his family. They became successful in business, him and his sons were leading merchants in Kingston at one time in a certain business.

Here is a story. I came to Argentina in 1895 with our family. Of course we went there to till the soil with the help of the Jewish Colonization Association. There were 5 families from Amdur that went there on the same steamer. There they were located on farms not far from one another. Many times the younger people used to come together for a little recreation. Then they used to relate stories from the old home, Amdur, and its people. There was amongst them a man by the name Eshel Annes and he used to relate a story about the man I described as an expressman as follows. Most of the expressmen were poor, and to knock out a living one bought a horse and a used old wagon and harness. Then he was ready for business carrying some freight, mostly grain, to Grodno, and if he was lucky, to get something to bring on his return to Amdur. This man which I described in the above paragraph was of this class of expressman that the wheels of his wagon nearly fell apart from old age and usage. One day he was driving to Grodno. They used to start out in the evening and arrive there very early in the morning. The distance was about 25 miles. Just half way between there was an inn on the main highway. There were big barns that travelers drove into, fed their horses for an hour or two, and then proceeded with the journey to Grodno. When this expressman arrived at the midway inn he found 15 or more farmers' rigs as a unit delivering grain from a large estate to Grodno. And when he walked in the inn he saw all the farmers spread on the floor and benches and tables and taking a deep snooze. While he was in the barn he noticed a new pair of wheels on one of the farmers' wagons. So he decided to make a swap. Him and another friend of his did the job, and they left for Grodno. When the farmers awoke from their snooze and went to the barn to their wagons, one of them noticed that the rear of his wagon was taller than before. The wheels of the express wagon were taller than the farmers'. And he noticed that his new wheels were gone. So the men got together, unhitched 3 horses and pursued the expressman on horseback and overtook him, made him turn around and brought him back to the inn. And he got what was coming to him. They nearly killed him, and then let him go. And that is the story of the expressman. The man who was telling the story was a good friend of the expressman and knew him well.

That was the way my father and his partner were struggling for existence from year to year. As the years were advancing so were the children. My older sister Chaie was 18 or 19 years old and father began to think about her future. A shotchen was always on the job. So he proposed a young man a distance away from Lasha as a mate for my sister. The young man was well learned in Hebrew and that was sufficient for my father. I suppose he came to meet her once. And the shidach was agreed, and an engagement was made right then that same day and the wedding set for a later date. Of course my father agreed to give a sum of money when the wedding will take place, and that was put in the contract of the engagement. He also agreed to give the young couple room and board for one year.

When they got married, my father fulfilled his promise. He kept them for one year and also gave them the dowry which he had promised. During the year, my father and sister they realized he was a nice man, a good student, well-educated, but how to make a living for a family he didn't know, nor did he care to know about such things. At the end of the year my father told him I have done what I agreed to do for you. Now you will have to go to your father and he will have to do for you as much. So they engaged a farmer with a horse and wagon and picked up their belongings, and they went. His father was also an innkeeper, about 25 miles east of Lasha. On arriving there, his father took them in, gave them room and

board, and the young man was at his books. My sister, she was of the Efron type, and she began to look ahead, and she realized that he wasn't a type for making a living for a family, so she took the initiative and began to talk what is going to be the future. We must begin to do something for ourselves. (33) But all her talk to him was in vain. All he knew was to read his books and have his convenience with her. Otherwise he didn't care about the future, so she decided to become the provider. In the meantime, she became pregnant. So she waited until her confinement was over and a girl was born. She was named Rebecca. Then she began to do something to provide for a family. They still had the money of the dowry that my father gave them. I don't know the exact amount, but it was enough to start something.

There was a village not far from where his father's village was. They rented, or better to say, she did, a place, and fixed in a bar to sell drinks to farmers. It was a very hard struggle for her as he didn't even know how to fill a glass of vodka for a farmer if one came in. After a year or so another child came, a boy. But she became a wreck and became sick. So they decided to give up their establishment and go back to his father. She became very ill in the meantime, and the girl she gave to a woman to take care of her, and she came back to my father and mother. He remained with his father. It took about a year that my sister was again brought to her health. (34) But she had no use for him any more, and decided to separate from him. So, he remained with his father and she stayed with us.

All this which I described, this is history before my remembrance, up to the years of 1881-1882. From then on, I was on the surface. Now in our house in the village we had quite a family. The only one missing was Mote. He was on his job and made a living for himself. The rest of the family was together. The 3rd brother, Tanchun, was in cheder in Amdur. He was about 11 years old. My sister Itke was 3 years older than me, and we played together. David was in the house, and so was my sister Chaie. They helped along with the house management, and also with the business, although there wasn't much work to be done. But there were some books to read. Dave was a good scholar, and he used to go to town to get some books. There was a place where they hired out books by the week or month for a certain fee, and he used to get them there. Most of the time he was reading. But in time, he used to go out to the farmers and tried to do a little business with them by buying from them some grain, a calf, eggs or flax. Little by little he was breaking into business. (35) But his business career was not successful right from the beginning, and that kept on through his entire life. He always figured, when he bought grain or anything else, that he bought a bargain. But when he sold the grain he was just as poor. He always figured he bought for a certain price in the market it is worth so much more. But he never figured the expense of bringing the grain to the market. Also, many times he paid the farmer the price above the market price.

The farmers were hard people to do business with. They didn't know the market but they tried to squeeze out every kopek from the dealer. Otherwise, they wouldn't sell. Dave was falling for them in order to do the buying, and so a competitor shall not get in, he paid the price. My father used to argue with him and called his attention to the fact that he is fooling himself. Business cannot be done that way. But he was going his way and didn't listen to no one. He always kept himself respectable. He was good looking and wore nice clothes. Of course, he needed money for his dealings, so he approached people that he suspected had cash, and asked them for a loan. He was considered a businessman and they could not refuse him. (36) And sometimes they had a job getting their money back, and some never got it back.

At that time my father was living in that village Lasha about 25 years, and the chances of making a living from the glass of vodka, which the farmer was drinking sometimes, was getting worse from year to year. His old partner decided that he wouldn't stay in that village any longer. He found a man in Amdur, and he bought his partner out. So my father had a new partner to divide the income if there was any. The new partner was a young man, with a wife, and both of them were intelligent. They spoke the Russian language well. They had a small boy 3 years old. The name of the man was Shloma Nachem. He took over the rooms from the first partner.

In Amdur, every week on Tuesday was the market day. All the farmers from the surroundings, whether they had something to sell or to buy, it was on that day in town in Amdur. All the Jews of the town were looking for Tuesday and made preparations because from that day they got the substance for the whole week to live on, as all the farmers brought everything they had to sell, and some came to buy horses, cows, oxen, pigs, sheep, chicken and geese. Also, there was all kinds of produce, grain, and all

kinds of vegetables. The town was crowded with teams and wagons and people, both buyers and sellers, from about 9 in the morning until dark. (37) There were many saloons, and they did a rushing business. The custom was, if a deal was consummated between buyer and seller, they went in the saloon to have a drink. And many times they got so involved that they slept on the floor until the next morning.

It happened that Shloma Nachem was in the market that day and he bought something from a farmer who was considered a wealthy farmer. When the deal was made they went into a saloon to have a drink. The farmer had a glass of beer and as soon as he drank that glass of beer he got very sick. A doctor came and declared that he was poisoned, that the beer contained poison. The police began investigating. The saloon keeper declared that Shloma Nachem and the farmer drank at the bar, and that was all he knew. Shloma Nachem came home that evening. The next day the police came and took him with them. First they searched his living rooms every closet and bureau. Then they went with him to Grodno where he was put in prison until a trial. His wife and the child were left in Lasha. He remained in prison for several months, and had a trial in a Criminal Supreme Court with a jury of 12 farmers. He was declared guilty and the judge gave him 5 years(38) hard labor in Irkutsk, Siberia. He was put in chains and sent away *Pa Atapom*. This means that they got together so many prisoners at Moscow. Then they are sent on foot from district to district, accompanied by guards, each one with chains on his hands and feet. In that way they got to Irkutsk, Siberia. But his wife was not asleep. She got a lawyer or 2 and they appealed. Of course the farmer did not die from the poisoned beer but he was sick for a long time. Shloma Nachem's wife went to St. Petersburg. While the Tzarina was out riding in her carriage, the wife fell in front of the carriage, and the carriage stopped to investigate. Then she got up and gave the Tzarina a petition to pardon her husband. The Tzarina told her that it will be investigated, and it was. In a short time he was released from Siberia.

After that, they didn't stay very long in Lasha. They sold their part to a Jew by the name Guse. He had a family and he was a blacksmith. That was what the farmers needed. His wife was taking care of the business part, and he was doing the blacksmithing for the farmers. My father began to realize that there is trouble ahead, because he knew that the farmer is always friendly with the blacksmith. All this happened in the year 1884 or 1885 of my remembrance. So I am a few years ahead of my life story.

## **Amdur**

Now I will describe the town of Amdur and the buildings in which I was brought up until I was 18 years old. The town of Amdur with a population of about 2000 people was an old town. There was an old synagogue about 400 years old. That is what the people claimed. This town was situated 25 miles southeast from Grodno, the capitol of the state. The people of Amdur were, as it is said, God fearing people. They knew to be in the synagogue 3 times a day, morning, noon, and evening. And some of them remained until 10 or 12 midnight to study the Torah. Among them there were different classes and types

There were about 4 or 5 houses of prayer or study. There was a steam bath house that was a building belonging to the Kahll municipality. There was a rev (rabbi), a shochet to kill cattle or chickens, a cantor, and a bookkeeper or recorder to keep records of children born and people dying. There was a big cemetery and big mountain near the city. There was a Catholic church with a small estate for the priest near the town. In about 1890 the government built a Russian Orthodox church for the convenience of the farmers. In all of the surroundings, possible 10 or 15 miles around, there was no Orthodox church except in the village of Lasha where we lived. There were stores of different kinds. One drug store on a corner. There was no doctor that learned medicine or surgery, but only one what was called a fieldsher who learned a little about medicine to take care of a cold or sometimes a small injury. For a real case of sickness there were good doctors in Grodno. There were 2 wholesale vodka establishments. There were a few saloons. A brewery was making beer. There were some bakeries. Some tradesmen were going out with horse and wagon amongst the villagers, buying everything from a pig to an ox. There were shoemakers, tailors, both men's and women's, cap makers, masons and carpenters, horse dealers and cattle dealers, and butcher shops. And there were horse thieves, pick pockets, and plain ordinary thieves who would steal anything from anybody.

There were 3 main thoroughfares: Grodno Street, Berstivit Street, and Krynki Street, and a large square in the center of town, and stores and shops around them. The streets weren't paved. The rest of the town was grouped together without form, each building close on to the others. All of them were frame with thatched roofs made out of straw mats. There was no sanitation. No toilets of any kind in the houses as there was no public water supply. If nature called to relieve themselves, anybody found a place convenient behind a fence, a wall, or near somebody's window if it was dark. There were quite a few gentiles around town, and they raised pigs. They roamed around town and cleaned up the droppings.

There were several wells situated around town where the people got their water. Each family had a barrel in the house. They would go to the well with pails, bring the water and fill the barrel and this lasted a couple of days.

Then there were water carriers, men or women with a pole on the shoulder and a pail on each end, and that was their style of making a living. There was no sewage of any kind. If there was any slops or garbage that accumulated it was dumped in a heap near the house. They used to call it a Smetnik or a dump. In the spring of the year, a farmer came and took it away for manure on his field. In the fall he gave them some potatoes for it. There used to be a lot of Jewish drunks always around the saloons, especially the horse dealers and thieves. And they had many fights amongst themselves.

## **The Great Fire**

It was in the spring of 1882 in the month of June. A fellow went to make chicory (a coffee-like substitute) for breakfast. That was in the congested section of town, and a small fire started. There was a good breeze and house after house began to go up in flames. The wind carried the sparks and ignited half a dozen houses at a time. Farmers from all over the neighborhood came to help, but they were useless. There was no fire fighting instruments or water to fight with. All they were able to do to help was to take out the furniture from the houses before they burned. So the farmers put them in their wagons and placed them outside of the town in the fields, along with the women and children. The conflagration lasted all day, and nearly the whole town was destroyed including the old synagogue, and the rest of the prayer houses and the bath house. Everything was consumed by the flames. A very few houses were left standing.

The big question was how to feed the hungry in the fields as there was nothing to eat. So the Rav (rabbi) made an appeal to the Jews of the villages that they shall bring immediately anything they have as food for the hungry. And they did. As I remember, my father and mother got busy. First, they cooked a very large pot or kettle of potatoes, and went around to the farmers and got milk in large pitchers and all the bread that was in the house. They started a new trough of bread for the next day, and took it to the committee which was organized for the emergency to feed the hungry. Then the community awoke like from a dream, and began to return to town with the few belongings which were saved, and each one began to look to start over again. So the few houses that were left standing took in 3, 4 or 5 families. There was standing on the square a large brick building with red tile roof. It was vacant for many years. It looked like a large factory. Many families were placed in there by arranging cooking and sleeping quarters. They remained there for quite a while, about 2 years, until the town was slowly rebuilt. Some of them had some insurance and they started to rebuild in a short time.

## **Going to Cheder**

I was about 6 years young and it was time to send me to a rebbe, to cheder in Amdur. Until now I was roaming about with the farmer boys in the village and playing with them. From now on a new period began for me. The custom was as follows. In town, a young man got married, but had no trade. But he knew a little Hebrew, so he let grow a beard and hairlocks on each side and he became a rebbe, a teacher to instruct children to read. There were many of them in Amdur, as in any small community. The young man lived in two rooms. That is, a bedroom and what was called a living room. In the living room he put in a long table and benches around, made by a local carpenter. This served as a classroom. The time of

class was from about 9 in the morning until 6 in the afternoon with of course time for lunch. Every 6 months either at Passover or after Rosh Hashanah, during the holidays, while the cheder was not in operation, the rebbe went around to see friends to solicit their children as pupils for a 6 month period. In that way he got together his class of about 12 or 15 pupils. The fee was about 6 or 8 rubles for the period of 6 months, depending on the ability of the rebbe. Some of them were well known in the community as good rebbes and the children gained much during the 6 months, so they had no difficulty in getting their pupils.

The method of teaching was as follows. They had no curriculum what to teach; first they taught the ABCs of Hebrew, and then reading. There was no such a thing as grammar, as the rebbe didn't know of grammar. Neither did his rebbe know. In this way they were teaching from generation to generation. When the pupil was a little proficient in reading, then he started at the Chumash, the five books of Moses, beginning at Genesis, translating every word into Jargon of Yiddish, which was the language that the Jewish people spoke. Some rebbes had 3 or 4 classes of different pupils – beginners, slow readers, and beginners of translation. Some of the better rebbes had no beginners, only students for translation.

When my time came to go to cheder, my father went to Amdur and he made arrangements to give me lodging, feed me, and teach me. I still remember the looks of my first rebbe. A tall man between 25 or 30. A long thin face with a long nose, a long beard, long hairlocks on each side, and a skull cap on his head. Of course he had a wife and as far I can remember 4 kids. (46) The oldest was a boy of my age. He had 2 rooms, one for cheder and a room to sleep in. It was so small that there was no place for all the children to sleep in, so they slept in the Cheder room on the floor. When my father left me there one day, I shared with them the same bed. But don't be surprised, for that was the year after, as it was referred to, the Big Fire. People got along as well as they were able to. And so was my teacher.

One Tuesday morning when the farmers were going to the market to Amdur my father put me in one of the wagons with straw on the bottom to sit on. He got on and the farmer drove off toward Amdur. I was crying when mother kissed me goodbye, and so did she. And I cried all the way. On arriving at Amdur my father took me to my place of torture. The room was filled with children all about my age. All boys. And they all were looking at me. The rebbe pinched my cheek in a sort of friendly way. I was still in a stupor from crying on the way and I began to cry again. All the children gave me my nickname, "Yeshuvnick," a boy from the country or a villager. I wore a small sheepskin coat and shoes and a whole suit pants with an "Arba Konfers," an apron with 4 fringes on each end, a religious garment that every Jew was supposed to wear. I knew as much about religion as my rebbe knew about grammar.

My father stayed there for a while, then he left. I suppose that he didn't ask the rebbe where he is going to put me to sleep, and what food he is going to feed me. As long as the rebbe is going to teach me to read and the beginning of how to be a Jew he was satisfied. It was a cruel action of a father to take a 6 year old country boy and put him among strange people, and not to think how he is going to be treated in such an environment. But that was the way that they did things. I suppose my older brothers received the same treatment. As soon as my father left, the friendly face of the rebbe disappeared. While I was crying aloud when my father left, he looked at me with a stern face and sharp look, and said "keep quiet" – and I did. All that day I was crying on the quiet, inside of me. I saw what was going on. If a child didn't behave or didn't pay attention to the reading, he put him on the bench with the buttocks up and counted 10 with a small leather strap. That gave a warning to the rest of the children.

When it came toward evening all the children were discharged and went home to their parents. I stayed there. When I left home, my mother provided for me certain food. She put in a whole challah and goose fats, and small rolls. She knew that the rebbe wouldn't have these things. So when the cheder went home, he took the food, gave me some, and divided some among his children. Some was left for the next day. Afterwards he put me to sleep on the floor with 2 of his children. After all day of crying I fell asleep on a straw mattress and covered with my sheepskin coat. The next day the food that my mother gave me nearly disappeared. I had very little of it.

The rebbe went to the synagogue for morning prayers and when he returned with his tallit (prayer shawl) under his arm the children began to come in to cheder. The next day, Wednesday, I was half over my crying and began to get accustomed to my environment. His wife was supposed to take care of me, to

wash me and comb my hair. But she had enough to do with her own 4 children so she didn't pay any attention to me. His children were full of lice so I became the same way. I was scratching, and some of the children called me Yeshuvnick and I became the tough kid from the village. Two kids had a scrap with me and I scratched their faces. The next day their mothers came "what happened here? You have a boy here, a Yeshuvnick, and he is fighting our children." I got eight strappings on my buttocks. But I didn't scratch any more their faces. If they went after me, I kicked them with my feet. Friday came, and there was cheder only a half day until 12 noon, to prepare for the Sabbath. My food, what mother gave me, was gone long ago. So they fed me whatever they ate. I don't remember what it was, just enough to keep one alive, as it is said. Saturday was over and Sunday was cheder. So it was every day. Tuesday, my mother walked in and I fell in her arms and cried. And so did she. She examined my head. It was full of vermin from head to foot. She began to wash me and combed my head. She cleaned me up from the vermin, and left me some food which she brought for me with her. Late in the afternoon she left with the same farmer from the village as she came with. Then I cried again until the next day and the lice crawled over me again. I caught a bad cold on the floor at night, and I became very sick. My mother came and took me away from there to my uncle's house, the baker. She called the doctor, the "fieldsher," and he said that it was scarlet fever. So my mother stayed with me 2 weeks and brought me back to health. She took me back with her to the village, and I stayed home all winter. But she gave me instruction on how to read. I began to read slowly, every week a little better. When Passover came I asked my father the 4 questions.

After the Pesach Holiday my father took me to Amdur again. This time he placed me with a rebbe by the name of Shleme Kasid. This word means cross eyed, as he was such. Of course he had a wife, and a boy my age. He was a Hasid. He belonged to the Hasidic society. In English it is called The Pious. They had a prayer house for themselves. They were happy while at prayer, singing and sometimes dancing while praying. He was a rebbe not for beginners, but for translation. As I was already able to read, he took me in as a pupil although my father was not a Hasid. Possibly, he thought he might bring my father in as one.

His wife was a good natured woman. She cleaned me, washed me and fed me just like her own boy. When I got used to her, I liked her like my mother. He was a strict rebbe. He wanted his pupils should know their lessons every week. He took the first 2 paragraphs of the portion of the week beginning on Sunday. He read for them the translation of every word that was in the Chumash (the 5 books of Moses). He told every boy that got the lesson that he must memorize the translation in Yiddish by Thursday afternoon. There was an examination, and the boy that didn't know his lesson he put him on the bench and put him to straps. But his wife was good natured and she couldn't see the boy crying. She would stay there and prevent him from beating or strapping the pupil. So many times they had a fight among themselves. He knew that it was his livelihood. The father that placed his son in his hands expected that he must see to it that the boy shall know the translation of the first paragraph of the portion that was read in the synagogue Saturday morning. If the boy did not make progress, possibly next year he would not get him as a pupil. Therefore he tried his best that the boys shall know their lessons.

In the meantime, my 3rd brother was also to a rebbe in town. He was 6 years older than me. I was 7 and he was 13. On Saturday afternoon he used to come and take me to our uncle Mordecai the baker. He had children the same ages as we were, so we played together all day. My uncle had a big house with large barns on the main thoroughfare. The bakery was there. They also had a bar for selling vodka and beer. On Tuesday on market day it was a very busy place. Farmers from a distance of 15 or 20 miles around knew Mordecai the baker, and when they came to town they drew their rigs into the barn. They knew they were safe and nothing would be stolen. My 3rd brother Tanchun didn't stay in cheder very long. When he was 14 years old he stayed with the uncle the baker as a helper.

When it came the holidays like Chanukah or Purim they always brought me home to Lasha. How great was the feeling to go back to mother and stay home for a week. But when it came time to return to cheder, I cried all the way. One time when I was 9 years old I was very homesick. I left the cheder and walked all the way home, a distance of 7 miles. They kept me a couple of days and took me back to the cheder. In the summer during July, August and September I was home. But my father was after me every

day. Prayers in the morning, and during the day he took me to the book, reading and translation. But most of the day I roamed around. I watched the blacksmith the way he worked, and played with his children. I'd go swimming with them in the creek. I learned how to fish with a line and hook fish with a worm.

### **The Move to the Village of Kosly**

With my father the innkeeping at Lasha was getting from bad to worse. Before the partner, the blacksmith, came, my father was in favor with the farmers. If they needed something they came to my father. But since the blacksmith came, they turned to him. He was a young man and strong. The farmers needed him. He fixed their plows and wagons and shod their horses. When it came time before the harvest he sharpened their sickles. For 2 weeks he was busy day and night.

When he finished a job, the farmer after paying him took him in and they had a drink together. They were in favor with him for he was a hard worker. He was a tall man with a small beard. He had a peculiar cough and sometimes when he gave that cough you could hear him a far distance. That was the beginning of T.B. In a couple of years he went to his grave and the widow with 3 or 4 children was left struggling. When my father saw that he cannot exist there any more, he began to talk to the blacksmith that he shall buy out father's share of the inn and remain in the village by himself. So he gave my father a certain sum of money, and my father after living there about 30 years left Lasha.

We were at that time a family of six: father, mother, David, my 2 sisters, and me. When we left that village of Lasha, we came to live in town, Amdur, only for a short time, as he found another village 5 miles from Amdur that one of the partners wanted to sell his part. There were always 2 partners in a village. So my father bought the half interest from that man. There was a house just on the end of the village. 2 rooms on one end of the house, and 2 on the other side. Then there was a large room in the center for the farmers to drink, and for the farmers' boys and girls to dance on Sundays or holidays. The house belonged to the 2 innkeepers. But the ground, or the plot where the house stood belonged to a farmer because it was his portion of land on the end of the village. He was paid rent for the ground, 3 rubles a year. So my father figured he will own half the house and he wouldn't have to pay the rent like he paid in Lasha to the estate that owned the inn. So he will be able to make a living with less worry.

It was about the end of the winter and we moved into the village of Kosly. That was the name of the village. Coming from Amdur, on the road, there were 3 villages. The first was called Malian, the next Kosly, then Knuchy. In those 3 villages the farmers were using peat for fuel in the winter. They dug it out from a swampy land early in the spring, and dried it all summer in the place where it was dug. They burned it in the ovens in the winter. We used the same as the farmers because wood was a far distance away and very scarce and expensive. Even in the town of Amdur many people burned this "torp," or peat as it was called.

My father's new partner was called Shimen Abramovitz. He and his wife, they were about 45 years old and had a family of four boys, the oldest 18, then 14, 11, and 7. I was 10 years old at that time we moved there. So the 11 year old and myself, we became pals as soon as we moved in. The village Kosly was not as big as Lasha. There were only about 30 farmers. There was no church or a center of highways or roads. The only road lead to the next village of Konola. Otherwise, there was nothing of importance to attract travelers.

My brother David, as soon as we settled down, he began to get acquainted with the farmers, and began to do business with them, buying their grain. If the farmer refused to sell to him because the price wasn't good, he swore to the farmer that he offered him a price that even if he, the farmer, shall take the grain to the market in Grodno he couldn't get as much as he was paying. And if he still refused, David gave him 5 kopeks on the price and as he said, David paid the full price of what one could get in Grodno. On Tuesday morning he was very busy. The farmers from the next village were going to town to the market, and anyone that had any grain to sell took it with him to sell it in town. They were all passing our house, and he stopped every one, asking what they have to sell. "I will give you a better price than you can get in town. Some farmers took him up on the offer and sold it to him. As a rule, the farmer, if he had

anything to sell, he squeezed out of the dealer every kopek of profit there was in it. It was hard to do business with the farmers as they were very suspicious that the Jew got the better of him.

## **Grodno**

After a while David bought a horse and wagon and was going around the villages to buy grain. When he had a load, he used to take it down to Grodno and sold it as there was the market for everything. There were many big dealers. They had connections with Prussia through the river Neiman.

Grodno was a commercial center of about 50 or 60 thousand people, about 40 thousand were Jews, in all walks of life. There were all the State and some Federal offices and a large military center. The 26th infantry and a lot of artillery was stationed there all year. The military induction center was there. The yearly state fair was held there. It was a very busy city. The railway between St. Petersburg and Warsaw stopped there, and there was a railroad bridge over the river Neiman. There was a large lumber traffic on the river during the summer. There were great forests to the east where the river began. All winter, while the river was frozen, from about November 15 until April 15, all the lumber was accumulated on the shore of the river. In the summer it was sent down in floats to East Prussia. At Grodno there was a pontoon bridge for the crossing of the vehicles and pedestrians. The floats used to stop east of the bridge and waited for when the bridge opened at a certain hour in the morning, when all the floats passed down stream. There used to be also barges carrying grain. They were called Berlines, and when they reached Konigsborg the grain was sold. How did they get the barge back to where she came from upstream? There was a method for that. On the lumber floats they employed men to steer or guide the floats to keep them going down the middle of the stream. There were four men on each float with long poles, front and rear to steer it. These men, for a certain fee, brought that barge upstream back to where she came from by walking on one side on shore with long ropes attached to the barge and to themselves, and pulling the barge upstream. Their food they cooked on the barge, the same as on the float.

These men came from the eastern woods. They were called Pinchuks. Their origin was Pinsk. There were many rivers and marshes. The distance pulling the barge was possibly 150 miles. It took them many weeks, possibly for 25 kopeks a day and their grub. About the 1st of November, that bridge which floated in the middle of the city was taken apart, and some kind of ferry was used for crossing. A platform was laid on a barge to accommodate 5 or 6 rigs drawn by horses. On the platform in the center, like a door jamb of heavy planks, there a heavy rope run through that sort of jamb and was tied up to both shores. So to cross, every able bodied man put his hand to the rope and pulled themselves to cross the stream. On the return they used the same method. It happened once, I was told, the rope broke and the barge with all her cargo floated down the stream about 15 miles until it was stopped somehow. About December 1st they managed to stop the floating ice and the river froze from shore to shore. Everyone was driving free of charge then until about April 15 when the river was in motion again.

The 26th Infantry Division stationed in Grodno didn't have enough barracks for the whole 4 regiments. So, for the winter months they scattered many companies in the surrounding towns. Amdur had 2 companies for the winter. In the summer, they went back to Grodno. There they had a very large summer camp on the banks of the river. It took in all the Infantry, Cavalry, artillery and the sappers for the entire summer. The army brought a lot of business to Grodno. The city had a municipal water supply. It was pumped from the river, but I doubt whether it was purified. There was a paid fire department. About 1890 there was a big fire in the city. It took the firemen 2 days to get it under control. There were many frame dwellings covered with shingles, not straw. There was no sewage because they had privy vaults. There was a certain class of people, for whom it was their job, for a certain fee, to clean them out once or twice a year. Not all the dwellings had city water. Some of them had wells in certain sections and they carried it in pails to their houses.

## **Life in Kosly**

The life in the village Kosly was a simple life. One got up in the morning, washed, said the prayers, and got a simple breakfast. There was bread, of course pumpernickel, with all the rye ground up and the bran not separated, and it was baked in this way. We had challah only for Saturday. There was plenty of milk as we always had a cow, sometimes 2. We had cheese and butter, and potatoes and herring. Meat we had very little of in the summer, only on Saturdays, but in the winter we had meat 3 or 4 times a week. In November father used to get about 5 or 6 geese. He kept them 1 month in a cage. He fed them cooked potatoes for about 2 weeks and then oats, all they could eat. That made them fat. They were killed then. The feathers were plucked out and they were hung by their necks in a cold place overnight. Then the fat was taken off from all around. The rest of the goose was cut up in quarters or eights and put in a small barrel salted and placed where it was cold. It froze and it was used during the winter. Also, a barrel of sauerkraut was put away in October, the same, in a cold place. In the sauerkraut they put cranberries and wild, sour little pears. The farmers used to grow them, and dried them in the hot oven, and that was for winter use. Then there was plenty of potatoes, herring, milk, cheese and butter. That was the principle food.

I was about 10 years old when we moved to Kosly. The first 2 winters I was in cheder in Amdur, one pupil amongst 15 or 18 boys. Each time at the end of the term my father would examine me to see what progress I have made. But he used to say to mother, "I am afraid that he will remain a Jew that doesn't learn much." So, in the summer months, that is, from Pesach until New Years (Rosh Hashanah), he took me in hand. During the summer I gained considerable in reading and translation. The work was as follows. In the morning as soon as I got up I washed and said the morning prayers, and that took 1½ hours. Of course father was also praying at the same time. He was watching me close so I shall not fool away my time. And I was told to read aloud. Then we had breakfast. Then prayers after breakfast, that didn't take long, ¼ of an hour. Then play about 2 hours, then back to the book, reading and translation in the 5 books of Moses, especially the portion of the week. In the afternoon, again, reading and translation. But I had plenty of time to play with the farmer boys and the partner's boy.

He was always with me. We were pals together as we lived in the same house. He was also going to cheder in the winter to the same rebbe. He didn't learn any more than I did. His father wasn't much of a scholar so he remained uneducated throughout his life. The second we had a chance, we went to play with the farm boys all kinds of rough games. We used to go with them on the pasture lots where their horses were on pasture. We learned to ride on horseback and we would go swimming with them. When my father, some days, went to Amdur for the day, then I had the day to myself and I was over with all my pals. In the meantime, we had our cows in pasture. Toward evening it was the job for me and my pal to go and bring the cows for milking. After milking we took them down to the barn which was a distance away.

Every Saturday morning my father and his partner, me and his boy went to the next village to pray, a distance about 2 miles. There were three families of Jews living there in that village. So we had a minyan there. There was a blacksmith by the name of Shimon Sokolsky and he had a Sefer Torah. So the prayers were in his house. My father was reading in the Torah as he was the only one who knew how to read it. This Shimon, the blacksmith, looked to be an old man, but he had young children. He had a boy by the name of Sholom, about 3 years older than me. He was mechanically inclined. He used to make locks, his own invention, and sell them to the farmers. He liked to study reading and translation. He was taking lessons from my father. He was also a good penman. He learned to write all by himself. He was always working at the exercise at writing. I always envied him how nice his writing was. I was training to imitate him and I used to exercise my handwriting always. Since then I always admired good penmanship.

There was a number of Jewish boys and girls of the ages of about 15 or 16 years in the 3 villages. Also there were some more villages in the surrounding area, a further distance. On Saturdays or holidays, especially in the summer, they used to come together and arrange dances. They used to get permission from some farmer to use his threshing floor and have dances. There the music was performed by anyone that was able to carry a tune. And they danced by it. At the beginning I was not in it. First, I was too young, and another thing was that on Saturday or holiday my father kept me close to him by the books. But when I became 13 and 14 years old, I already was indulging in that kind of pleasure, especially coming toward 16 when nature began to call to be in company with girls. On Saturday afternoon when I

knew that my father, after his nap, would call me to the book, I sneaked away before he was up although I knew that on my return I would have to stand before him and give an account of myself as to where I was, and why I left without his permission. Sometimes I got a slap in the face. That was only before I was 16. (65)

When my older brother Mote was about 19 years old father and mother began to worry that he would be called for military service for 4 years. In those days a father would do anything to keep his son out of military duty. Many things were taken into consideration. First, a soldier must desecrate the Sabbath. He must do everything that he is told to do. And he must eat the unkosher food. So most of the Jewish young men managed to keep out of service if possible. Some of them nearly starved themselves to death. Some injured themselves so as to be rejected by the examining doctor.

In the years of 1880 to about 1884, there appeared in our section in the Government of Grodno a promoter by the name of Yankel Knishwitzer with a proposition that any father that wants to keep his son out of the service, he will arrange it with a certain high official for the amount of 500 rubles. There were many fathers who took up the proposition. So my father fell in line and he paid the 500 rubles and my brother Mote didn't have to go to military service. He was given a red certificate signed by a certain military high officer, or official, that Mote, the son of Israel, from a certain district, is exempt from military duty. And many of the young men that were able to pay that sum received that certificate in the Grodno district. This scheme lasted about three years until the government got on to it. Then began an investigation of the whole thing. Of course the promoters became very wealthy in a short time as there were so many fathers that fell in line to save their sons. So the whole gang was put in jail as soon as the investigation began, including the officials. After a couple of years the whole gang went to Siberia. The young men that had the certificate, some were recognized by the government, especially those that were signed by the government official. But some of them were signed by some of the promoters. The government did not recognize those. My brother's certificate was signed by the official, so he didn't have to go into the service.

He was working on the estate as foreman for several years. Then he decided to get married. Our Aunt Chaie, the wife of our uncle Mordecai the baker in Amdur, had a niece somewhere near Bialystok. She proposed the shidach. But she was near Bialystok and he was 30 miles in the other direction from Grodno. All together between him and her was possibly 100 miles. But it was arranged they shall meet in a city near the railway station half way between. And there is where they met. On the first look it was gefan the shidach. So they decided to get married. My brother Mote saw her only once for a short time, possibly for two hours. It was decided the wedding would be in Amdur, in her aunt's house on a certain date. He was promised a dowry of 300 rubles, to be paid before the wedding day. So when the time that the day of the wedding came all the machitonim came to the wedding. Her father did not have the 300 rubles which he promised. All he had was 200 rubles. So my brother said, if the full amount is not paid, the deal is off. When he came to the wedding and when he saw the bride again, he found that she was a very homely looking girl and he wanted to back out of the shidach, and he thought that this was a good excuse. The father hasn't the money which he promised, so he will not get married. But her aunt Chaie, the bride's father's sister, came to the rescue. She gave the 100 rubles that was short, and the wedding took place as planned.

To the wedding were invited all the relatives from all over a distance from Grodno. In the same section where Mote was working there was living the widow of my uncle Shmeril, the one that died in 1882. She had four children. The oldest was a girl about 17 by the name of Anna Chaie. The mother sent her to the wedding. (68) She was a very nice girl, intelligent and well behaved. Of course my brother David was also to the wedding. He was also a good looking boy about 20 years old. They fell in love, and their love affair I will describe later.

My brother Mote, after a week of the wedding celebration, he took the bride with him and went back to his job. While he was single, he boarded and lodged with the owners of the estate. But when he got married, they gave him rooms for the couple. Also, his pay was increased to enable them to make a living. So I am going to leave Mote with the young wife for the time being, and I will describe his unsuccessful struggles later on.

The village Kosly was the type like all the rest of the villages. There was a long street, about a half a mile long. The houses were on one side of the street and the barns for the cattle and horses on the other side of the street. Also there was a grain and threshing floor. All the houses, also the barns, were of log cabin construction with thatched roofs which the farmers made straw mats for that purpose. The houses were one story in height with a gabled straw roof. The inside was composed of one large room and a large vestibule. In the large room there were two or three windows, very small, with four small panes of glass in each window, about eight by eight inches. In one corner of the room was a large brick oven, about five feet wide and eight feet long, and a brick chimney, of course. From the oven to a wall was a space of about ten feet. A platform of heavy planks was built. That was for the family to sleep on, on straw mattresses. This platform was close to the oven. In the winter, when the weather was very cold, many of the family slept right on top of the oven, which was flat. The oven served for cooking, baking the bread, heating the room in the winter, and to sleep on. In the summer, some of the family slept in the vestibule. In one corner of the room stood a large, rough wooden table with two or three benches around it. It was the dining table. A large loaf of black rye bread, sour, that weighed about 25 or 30 pounds was always on the table.

Each farmer had a hand-operated grinding mill in the vestibule. The farmer with one of his sons got up about 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning to do the grinding. It was a small grist mill with a lower stone and upper stone. One of them stood with one hand on the turning handle, and the other hand was feeding handfuls of grain. In this way they did their own grinding. It was very hard work. The grist or flour came out very rough. Some of the grain was broken up in two or three pieces. From this the farmer baked his bread. They had a round dough trough and they mixed flour with warm water, a small amount. They let it ferment for about 12 or 15 hours, then they added more flour and water and let it stay again for about 6 or 8 hours, and it began to work in the trough. They made the oven good and hot, and when it was ready the women got busy making up the heavy brown dough into large loafs. They were the size of a bushel basket. Five round loaves like them made a full oven. Then the mouth of the oven was sealed with clay and the bread remained in there for 5 or 6 hours and it was baked through. The batch of bread lasted sometimes for 10 days or 2 weeks, it all depended on how many mouths there were to feed and the size of the people.

The father was always at the head of the table, and he did the bread cutting with a knife about 15 inches long, and he knew how to cut it that bread should not be wasted. In the winter the chickens had their places also in the large room, right under the platform where the people slept, as it was too cold to keep them outside. In the summer they were around the house. Beginning in the fall of the year, the women prepared the flax or wool for spinning. Then they did the spinning on a spinning wheel beginning at 4 o'clock in the morning. The light was from a small kerosene lamp. Some primitive farmers still used very thin wooden slats, lit it and put it into a holder and it burned. The flame gave them enough light to do the work, and when it burned out, they lit another one. They didn't buy kerosene, as it was too expensive for them. The spinning was going on until after Christmas. Then a loom, made by a local carpenter was put in that room. The women began to do the weaving. Linen of all kinds, weights very fine, medium, and coarse. All this work was done by the women folk during the winter. In the summer they busied themselves with the outside work, taking care of the garden, looking after the chickens and pigs, and the cooking and baking and washing. In June, when they started to cut the hay, the women helped with raking it and drying and taking it into the mow. Then, to harvest the grain, they were all day in the field. They used the sickle as well as the men. I heard that in some places the women gave birth to a baby, rested for a while right in the field, and went to work again harvesting the grain. The women were as tough as the men. Their day of rest was Sunday, the man as well as the woman.

Their clothing was simple. In the summer they wore linen. Some white and some colored. They all were barefoot all summer until real cold weather set in. That was in November. Each one had a pair of shoes or boots to go to church if one went. Otherwise they wore what they called "lapches," a certain homemade look-a-like shoe. They wound around their feet a lot of rags with many strings. On the bottom of the lapches were wooden soles which they made themselves. Their winter clothes were heavy. A large sheepskin coat, with the wool on the inside and the leather out. No cloth on top of it. Then they had what

they called a "swita," a heavy coat (72) made of homespun wool. It was white, thick, heavy cloth. In the winter they went to town and arranged with a Jewish tailor to come to them in the village and make their garments. Many of the tailors came out Sunday and stayed at the farmer's until Friday noon time. Then he went back to town to his family for the Sabbath. Sunday he went back to the village carrying his sewing machine, which was operated by hand, on his shoulder or his back, and he also brought his pressing iron.

While at the farmer's house, the tailor didn't eat, to say, indulge in the farmer's food. As a rule, he had with him a couple of pots and cooked for himself. The farmer gave all the potatoes he was able to eat, some eggs, possibly the farmer's cheese, milk, cereals and some vegetables, some carrots, beets and turnips. Green vegetables the farmers didn't have in the winter. Many of the Jewish tailors were making a living from the village farmers. Those tailors were called village tailors as they were not good technicians, only good enough for the rough garments.

For the Jewish people there were good tailors in town who knew how to make a good garment. There were men's and lady's tailors with good names. There was no ready-made clothing like in the U.S. If a person wanted a suit, he went to a store that was selling garment material and picked the kind that he liked. They took it to the tailor, and he made the garment. The tailor told them how many yards they needed. The people over there didn't wear out the clothes as quick as we do in the U.S. They were very careful with their clothes. The farmers were the same way because money was scarce for them. (73)

Most of the farmers were as poor as the church mouse. They didn't have much to sell or any surplus grain, except a few. If the portion of land remained in one hand as the family did not increase from the previous generation, the farmer was able to live good off the land. But most of them, in the later generations, had three or four sons. They had no place to go to make a living for themselves so they remained on the portion of land which their father had. Each one got married and then they couldn't live together any more. Then they begun to divide the portion of 10 or 15 acres. Each one a piece for himself. And it was a very poor living.

When the father got old there was no place for him, even in his house. I have seen this amongst many farmers. The old man put on a small linen bag and walked from village to village begging for bread to keep himself alive. On Sunday, many of them were sitting near the entrance to the church and did some singing of certain hymns. The people who came to the church didn't understand what kind of prayers they sang as those farmers didn't know any prayers. Nevertheless, some people gave them some coins.

Most farmers in the villages, they were called "mushiks," or peasants, were uneducated. They had no schooling of any kind. They spoke a language, neither Russian nor Polish. They had a dialect, a certain expression or slang made up by themselves with no grammar or logic. And in this way they were going from generation to generation. Yes, the young boys of my time, when they became 21, they went into the army. There, some of them learned to read and write and some became non-commissioned officers. When they returned to the village after serving their term they had a little more intelligence then when they went there. One thing for sure, he spoke Russian with a different accent, because in the army the majority are Russians and all they spoke was pure Russian. But the ones that returned from the army, after staying in the village about a year, they spoke with the same expressions again as the rest of the villagers.

So far, I described the women folks and their work in general. Now we will see what the mushik – the farmer – was doing in the days of their year-to-year life. Early in the spring of the year to about April 15, in the villages I have mentioned above, all the men got busy to provide fuel for next winter as they had no woodland to cut trees for fuel. All three of these villages had marshy land, something like swamps, where under the surface was a soft substance which they called torp. It was very soft and when they dug it out, water would run out from it. It took three men to dig it out and place it on the side of the ditch for drying. Each man had a tool. One man had a shovel, the blade was twelve inches long and eight inches wide and flat, with a handle, of course. Another man had something like an ice chopper, twelve inches long and eight inches high fitted on a pole of eight or ten feet length. the third man had a pitchfork with a long handle. First they removed the topsoil as that was crumbly, not sticky. When they came to the real torp the man with the chopper began chopping from left to right or sometimes from right to left. It depended on how it was situated. He made ten or twelve cuts about eight inches apart and across in the rear. The man with the shovel, standing in front of the chopper, cut with his shovel under the place and

brought out each chopped piece, and put it on the side. The man standing with the pitchfork picked it up, kept putting them together just as they came out from the ditch. While they began to dig it from below the surface, gradually they went down to a depth of six or seven feet. The man with the shovel stood always in water at that depth. Sometimes they worked two or three days to dig enough for one family to last for the winter. When the digging was finished, it was laying in a pile for ten days or more until the water ran out of it. Then the farmer came and arranged them in a way so that the air could circulate around. And in this way it laid there all summer until fall. Then it was good and dry and it burned like wood, although it had a funny smell. Some of the farmers, if they had more than they could use, used to take down a wagon load to Amdur and sold it for a ruble, sometimes more, all depending on supply and demand.

That was the first spring work for the farmer, a supply of fuel. Next, what he did was to take out the manure from the barns of the cows, horses, and sheep. That manure was accumulating under the cattle all winter. In the spring it was put in an open wagon and taken to his portion of the land and spread over the field. That was a nasty job as they spread it with their bare hands. When that was done they started to plow, and then began sowing the different cereals. Winter grain, like rye and wheat, was planted in September. In the spring was planted barley, oats, buckwheat, peas, lentil, flax and potatoes. They were busy with the planting until about June 15th. Then the hay was getting ready to cut. And when that was taken to the mow, the rye and wheat was ready to be harvested. It was all hand work, no machinery of any kind. The only thing that they had was a plow, pulled by horses, or a yoke of oxen. The hay was cut with scythes and the grain with a sickle. The whole family was in the field, including the children. By the middle of August all the grain was in the barns. The flax they didn't cut but they pulled it out with the roots, made it up in bundles and let it stay in the field until it got good and dry. Then it was taken in the barn for threshing. That was the first thing they threshed was the flax, to get the seed out first. Then the straw or stock was put into a pond or lake to lay in water two or three weeks. Then it became soft and the linen came off better from the straw.

The buckwheat was the last of the grain to be harvested. Then came the potatoes about the last of September. Each farmer raised a lot of potatoes as that was the most staple food. Bread and potatoes. When they had those two staples they never went hungry. At our house it was the same. Especially when there was milk added to it. The farmers didn't do their threshing until the winter set in. They had no cellars under their houses to keep the potatoes from freezing. They dug a round pit in the ground, about ten feet deep, like a large tank, about five feet in diameter. There they put the potatoes in there until spring, left some around the house for winter use, and kept them away from the frost. For meat they raised pigs. During September they fed them the small potatoes. In October they fed them grain, and they grew big and fat. They did the butchering late in November and they had meat for the winter. The threshing of the grain was done in the winter. They had no threshing machines of any kind. What they used were flails. The long rye straw was spread on the floor of the barn. It was a hard clay floor. The top of the straw which contained the grain was laid in a straight line and they went over it with a flail several times. Then he picked up the long straw, making sure that not a grain was left in it.

The straw they made into a large bundle. It was used for many things. First, it made mats to cover the house or barns. Then it was cut up into very small pieces about a half of an inch long. That was mixed with some oats or barley and the horses were fed with it. Though it had no food value, it made the horses feel that they had a lot to eat. We were feeding our cattle the same cut straw, but we mixed it with wheat bran. That was only in the winter. In the summer they were on pasture.

When I was twelve years old it was my job to get up early in the morning in the summer and take out the cow on a rope a distance from the village where there was good pasture. I took her over there for 2 or 3 hours and she filled up. During the day the cow was on pasture with all the cattle of the village and none of them had much to eat.

My description of the farmer's life in the village is from my remembrance when I was 13 or 14 years old. Then I was among them, played with their boys certain games, and I knew all what was going on in their houses. When I was younger, I was in cheder in Amdur, at least during the winter months. In the summer I was home, but my father didn't let me rest or fool away my time in playing with the boys. All day long, different books. I cried many times, but my father didn't pay any attention to my crying and

kept me right at it. The only time I had a rest was when he went to Amdur with a goy (non Jew) on Tuesday, the market day. And if he returned early enough, I got some of the portion read that day. That way we were living, days into weeks, weeks into months, and the years were passing on.

My brother David became 21 and he was called up to appear before the induction committee at Grodno to be examined to see if he is fit for service in the army. He was a tall boy, but he didn't have sufficient measure in his chest according to his height. So he was postponed for one year. The next year, 2 months before the date for him to appear for examination, he began to torture himself by not sleeping at night and eating very little food. He used to make balls of mashed potatoes, put inside castor oil, and swallowed it. That gave him diarrhea, and that reduced his weight and shrunk his chest. When he was examined, he was postponed again for one year. In this way he was postponed 4 times. Then the officials saw they could do nothing with him so they gave him a free certificate. Most of the Jewish young men dreaded the Russian army service and every one tried to do something not to be accepted.

When my brother Dave became free from army service, he began to increase his activities. Tuesday, market day, he was at home and tried to stop the farmers that were going toward Amdur to the market and if they carried any grain, he was trying to buy it from them. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday he was going around to different villages to buy grain. But he found it hard to do business with the farmers. Any price that he offered them they always thought that he was cheating them, as they were ignorant and didn't know the market value. So he got disgusted. But his mind was working for new schemes.

### **Moonshining**

David got acquainted with a man who knew how to make moonshine. So he talked it over with my father and his partner. On the face, it looked very good. The village of Kosly is off the main highways and not many strangers are passing by. According to their figuring whatever will be made can be sold right over the counter to the local farmers and it was a good chance to make money. So David went to Amdur to a coppersmith and gave him a specification which he got from the man. He made him a copper still with all the tubes and pipes according to the plan and specification. He went to Grodno with his horse and wagon and bought some barrels of syrup and hops and brought it all to Kosly. The next question was where to place the still. It had to be connected to a chimney. Brother Dave became the architect to build or make a place for the still, to be hidden away, and it would do the work and no one shall detect it. In the inn there was a large room where the farmers used to assemble when they had a drinking party, or the peasant boys and girls had their dances on Sundays or holidays. In that room stood a large brick oven where our family and the partner did the baking and cooking and it kept the room warm in the winter. Under that oven was a dugout or small cellar. So Dave decided to place the still in that dugout and connect the flue of the still to the chimney of the oven. It was too big of a job for himself, so he brought my brother Tanchun from Amdur where he was working for my uncle the baker. Of course from my uncle the baker he didn't get any pay, only he got his board. There was plenty of bread and rolls, fresh every day, and a place to sleep, whatever place he found around the house. None of the family had appointed places where to sleep. On the large oven, on the floor, on a bench, wherever one found a place, they laid down in their clothes and slept. They were a large family altogether, seven children and the parents. So when Dave told him to come home that he has a job for him there, he was glad to get home.

So he became the mechanic, first to make the room for the still, and then to put it in place and make the connection to the chimney. All of this was done under the personal supervision of brother Dave. The mash was put in large barrels. Syrup, hops and yeast. That was in a separate room. Then the barrel was filled with water. It stood 3 or 4 days until it fermented. Then it was ready to go into the still. There was a lot of work to it. The water was carried from a well inside the village, possibly 300 feet distance, in pails. Brother Tanchun worked hard. He was a young boy, about 16. So he became the distiller. That copper kettle held about 25 gallons of mash. Out of this would come out about 2 gallons of whiskey. The shape of the still was just like a Russian samovar. The fire was in the center of the still. It used for fuel

wood or charcoal. There was an opening on the bottom for the ashes to drop and air from the fire on top came out of the chimney that was connected with a flue into the large oven above in the big room.

When the still began to operate, with brother Tanchun in charge as the distiller, he started the fire in the still, it made a terrible noise, just like a railroad locomotive. Sparks were shooting into the large oven from the still, underneath it. So it was decided that a fire must be kept steady in the oven while the still was operating, but they weren't able to find a solution to the noise that it was making. Most of the time they would operate at night, when everyone was asleep and couldn't hear the noise. The finished product they began to sell over the counter to the farmers around the village. Of course they didn't know that it was moonshine, but they weren't satisfied with the drinks as they had a peculiar taste. First it was made from syrup and it was not distilled, just as it was made here in the U.S. during the prohibition days. Brother Dave began to realize this thing isn't working as good as he expected. There was a tremendous lot of work to it and a great danger of being caught by the government. He came to the conclusion that there was not much money in it. The still was operated for about a month with no satisfaction.

It happened one day that two Jewish men were passing through the village. They were going to an estate about five miles past the village. They were roofers so they were going there to cover a roof on a building. Passing by the Jewish inn they walked into the large room to rest for a while before going further. The still was in operation. One of them took out his pipe and filled it with tobacco. In order to save a match he walked over to the oven to light his pipe. Standing in front of the fire in the oven he noticed smoke and fire coming up from the bottom. He called his partner, his name was Moishe. "Look, there is fire coming from under the oven." But Moishe was a smart Jew. He told him not to be nosey. "Come, let us go on our way," and both of them left. The wife of the partner was in the room and saw what had transpired. So she told this to my father and got very scared about it. First thing possible, that still was dismantled. The mash that was in the barrel was taken out and dumped out in the fields. The next day Mr. still was put on brother Dave's wagon and covered up good so no one should suspect such a thing. Father took it down to the same coppersmith in Amdur and got rid of it while the going was still good and before being caught by the government.

So brother Dave began again to deal with the farmers as before and brother Tanchun went back to the uncle to help bake bread, rolls and bagels. There were no other jobs to be gotten anywhere, so he had some occupation for the time being. That was about the year of 1887 when brother Dave had the distillery.

### **The Fire at the Inn**

Sometime late in the summer, just before fall, one Friday late in the afternoon our partner's son and myself went to get our cows, way over on the other end of the village from the pasture, in order to be milked before the Sabbath set in. While we were driving the two cows through the village some one hollered at us that our house is on fire. We left the cows and ran toward home. We saw many villagers running toward the inn. When we came there the whole building was enveloped in flames. The building, a log cabin with a thatched roof, when this got on fire she was gone. My father, Dave, and the partner with his boys and the villagers saved some of the furniture, whatever was possible. The house was standing about 150 feet from the village. The older men and women used witchcraft to divert the fire from the village because the flames and sparks of the straw roof were floating high towards the sky and some of it was going toward the village. They brought out their icons with the picture of Mary and Joseph. They walked around the burning building 5 times. Then they went with their pictures in the opposite direction from the village and sat there on the ground, the pictures facing the fire until the flames were way down. That was about 9 or 10 o'clock at night. That night we all slept in a barn of one of the farmers, on hay. The next day was Saturday. My father would not do anything to find a place to live for the time being. He managed to save all his books out of the fire, and all he did that day was just sitting and reading. We didn't have much to eat that Saturday as the food for Saturday was prepared on Friday before mother lit the candles. The food was put in the large oven while it was hot and the mouth was sealed with clay to keep the potatoes and meat and beans and barley groats hot until Saturday noontime. So the whole thing

went with the flames, and we remained hungry all day Saturday. No one in the family would dare to kindle a fire and do some cooking because that would desecrate the Sabbath. Saturday night when the stars appeared in the sky, mother prepared a pot of potatoes which she got from a farmer. Dave took it over to one of the farmers and cooked it there. That was the first hot food we had since Friday noon. Sunday we all went to see our ruins but the only thing standing was the brick chimney.

It was quite a blow to my father and his partner. Now they began to make arrangements to find temporary places where to live for the time being, until they were able to rebuild the inn. Father and mother slept in the vestibule of a farmer. Dave and me slept in another farmer's house. My sisters were in another place. My father and his partner began to look to see what they could do to rebuild the place. They were told that in a distant village about six miles from our village there was a house for sale. So they went out to look at it. Brother Dave went with them with his horse and wagon and they bought the house. But how will the house come over a distance of six miles? So my father and his partner talked to a few of the leading men of the village that they shall be instrumental to induce all the villagers to help to go with their horse and wagons, take apart the material and bring it over to their village. So they called a meeting of the farmers and they all agreed to help bring the material.

About 25 farmers with their rigs went over there. They dismantled the walls and brought them over to the place where the fire was. My father and his partner saw to it that the farmers shall not go dry while they were at work, and the partner didn't neglect himself, as he liked the bitter drops as well as the farmers, especially when his wife didn't see. My father got two men who were supposed to be carpenters to assemble the house back again as it was. It took them nearly two months to do it. What price they agreed to pay for their services, I do not know.

The house consisted of two rooms on one side, two on the other side, and a large room in the center. In the large room the floor was about 2 inches thick, as that was for dancing for the farmer boys and girls. It needed a very strong floor. There was a large oven. The mouth of it was in the big room. The oven itself was in the two rooms where our partner lived. In our two rooms there was a small oven for cooking and warming in the winter. There was no cellar in the house. There was a thatched roof like all the rest of the village houses, as that was the cheapest. There was a garret above the ceiling. In the summer, we boys used to sleep there. There was a large vestibule. In the winter we kept the torp (peat) there for burning. The walls were plastered with common clay and then white washed. So was the ceiling. Each room had one window, not too large. But the large room had two windows, and when the boys were having their dances and got drunk, not a pane of glass was left in the windows, sometimes in January in below zero weather. After the fight was over, the next day they would come with swollen bodies and bloody faces, make peace and pay glass damages and drink again, and be friendly until the next dance.

So we moved back in our house together about November 15th. It began to get cold. All during the time since the fire my father had no chance to teach me as everything was topsy-turvy. As we had no house, he let me bum around with the village boys. But as soon as we settled in the new place he got after me with different books. Not only reading, but translation as well. He didn't give me any rest, as soon as I was up in the morning until about 8 or 9 in the evening, with of course a few recesses during the day. But most of the day he was after me, saying he wouldn't bring me up a "goy" or "shegutz." I was then ten years old. All during the long winters he kept me occupied with the books. Of course I couldn't go out and play games with the boys as the snow was heavy outside, and the farmer boys didn't go out. But when it came spring and summer, then I had my time to play. After saying my prayers and so many chapters of the psalms and I got my breakfast and off I went, sometimes for all day. When I came back, hungry and tired, I used to sneak in so he would not see because I knew that he was looking for me. So mother, first of all, gave me something to eat and then cleaned me up as I was dirty and sometimes my pants or the jacket was torn as I used to wrestle with the boys. Then father got after me, his shegutz, where I was all day. "Not a Yiddish word all day, only going around with shegutzim. If I let you go in this way, you will be the same as the farmer boys, ignorant without knowing anything that a Jewish boy should know." Many times I got slapped in the face.

On Saturday morning we used to go to prayers, to the next village where the old blacksmith had the scroll of the law. The distance was about 1½ miles, just the right distance a Jew may walk on the

Sabbath. When we came back we had our hot meal, taken out of the large oven, which was put in on Friday before sundown. It didn't taste bad when you were hungry. After lunch, father took a nap for a couple of hours and then to the book. Every one was reading, even mother. She had her book to read. They were in Yiddish, not Hebrew. In this way we passed all day Saturday until in the evening when the stars appeared in the sky. Then the Sabbath was out. Then there were songs in the evening pertaining to the going out of the Sabbath. All the farmers knew they couldn't get drinks off the Jews so they waited until evening.

### **Mote's Struggles**

Time was marching on. My oldest brother Mote, as foreman on the estate west of Grodno, could see no tachelith for him to stay there. He and his wife began to raise a family. She gave birth to a boy and they knew more will come, and that the wages he received there will not be sufficient to live on. So he came to father and cousins in Amdur to seek advise, if he can find something to do around Amdur to make a living for his family. Our uncle Mordecai, the baker, had a son by the name of Israel. A young man about. He was a live wire, as it is said. He knew everybody and everybody knew him, not only in the town of Amdur, but for miles around. There was a small estate about 1½ miles from Amdur. The owner of that estate was Kozlowsky. Most of the estate had dairy cows for milking. Most Jewish men were running the dairies, paying so much a year for conducting the dairy. They were making butter and cheese, and if it was close to Amdur they sold milk every day. Many Jews made a living in that business. The owner of the estate gave them a house to live in for the dairyman and his family and a good cellar for the milk products. They managed to keep the dairy in good condition to produce milk summer and winter by feeding the cows good.

So, Israel proposed, as there is no dairy on that small estate, it would be a good proposition to talk over with the owner if he will put in one. Brother Mote would pay him so much a year for running it. My brother took his advise into consideration and he went to see the owner of the estate, Pan Kozlowsky. He asked him whether he would be willing to put a dairy on his estate. He told him, yes, he would like to own a dairy, but he hasn't money enough to buy the cows. My brother still had the dowry money which he received when he got married. That was about 300-400 rubles. So one of them suggested a proposition that my brother shall buy the cows and shall conduct the dairy for so many years without paying any rent to the Pan. The owner of the place shall furnish for the dairy a place for my brother to live and a place for the milk products. A contract was made as to the agreement of both partners and each of them signed before a notary. As for lawyers, there were none in Amdur. That was in the spring of the year.

My brother figured that the place is only 1½ miles from Amdur, so he will be able to sell all the fresh milk every day in the town, and not have to make butter and cheese. That was good figuring in his mind and on paper, but it didn't work out as he figured. First, he began to accumulate the cows. On Tuesday, on market day in Amdur, many of the surrounding farmers bring in whatever they have to sell and some of them came to buy what they need. On that day my brother began to get cows for his dairy. Of course he could not get all the cows in one market day. There were enough cows brought in to the market for sale, but not all are suitable to give much milk. Of course my brother was always around cows and he knew the kind that are suitable as a good milker. He tried to get the best as he was able to. It took about a month to get 15 cows together. The average price was 30 rubles for a cow. As soon as he bought one or two, he took them over to the estate. He had two women who were taking care of the milking of the cows. His wife and child and mother-in-law were still on the estate where he was foreman. So he was making preparations to go after them and bring them over to the dairy where he had room for them. My brother David had a horse and wagon, but brother Mote had some furniture to bring over there and the wagon was too small. He borrowed a large wagon from a farmer that he used to use to take in the hay and the harvest from the field. He filled the wagon with loose straw that the women would be able to sit in it.

I wanted to go with him but my father would not let me go. It would take, there and return, three days. I would miss three days of learning, so he said no. My brother started out to go toward evening to get there the next day toward evening. It took 24 hours to go there. I had been watching him before he

came out from the house to get into the wagon. I went inside the wagon and laid down on the bottom and covered myself with straw. My brother came out from the house to get into the wagon and drove off on his way. He discovered me about six or eight miles from home, so he let me go with him. That was a long ride for me. We went through Grodno, and the place was about 30 miles west of Grodno. Up to Grodno I couldn't see much of the country as we were riding at night, so I was asleep in the straw. But in the morning we passed Grodno toward the west and I observed the country and villages and towns. The government highway we were riding on was very interesting for a young boy like me, as in our section near Amdur there was not such a hard road like the one we had been riding on, and we came there in the late afternoon.

We stayed on that estate until the next day. The horse rested up good. We put everything on the wagon and started out back toward the east, on the same road of course. The same time, toward evening. Grodno was just half way. We came there in the morning. From Grodno to Amdur we were coming in the daytime and I saw all of the country, which I couldn't see in the night while going the other way. So we came back to Amdur and the place where he had his dairy toward evening. I was away from home about 3½ days. When I came back in the house, my father said to me, "NU SHEGUTZ, you had enough riding? Wait, I'll get after you. You are not going to remain like a GOY as long as I live!" And he fulfilled his promise. He didn't give me any rest. Say this prayer and that prayer. Then the portion of the week with singing, according to the dots, a form of notes. In a year or so I had been showing progress, especially in translation in the five books of Moses. Then there was the Mishna and the Book of the Prophets.

I began to do a little writing in Yiddish. In the next village where we used to go on Saturday for prayers at the blacksmith's house, they had a boy by the name of Shalom. He was a few years older than I. He had beautiful handwriting, and I envied his writing. He didn't go to any school for that as there was none, but was always practicing by himself. So I managed to imitate him. He used to come 3 times a week to our house. His mother wanted him to take lessons from my father in Hebrew. So we used to do some writing together, and I learned a lot from him. But I kept exercising right along. Writing paper was scarce. With the small amount that I had, I made good use of it. When I got through with a piece of paper, the paper itself could not be seen. It was all ink, as I wrote in all directions just for exercising.

## **I Get a Secular Education**

In the village of Kosly there was no public school for the farmer boys. Once, all the villages of the place got together and decided to give their boys instruction to read and to write. There was one man in the village that was a little educated. He knew how to read and write. So they engaged that man as a teacher. But he had no school building, so it was decided to meet each week in a different farm house. So I joined the classes. The classes were only in the forenoon, mostly reading. That teacher got books from somewhere for beginners, first grade. In a couple of weeks I began to read. Of course I took one of the books with me to the house, and I studied the lesson which he gave. Also my brother Dave helped me as he was reading and writing the Russian language. As time was going on I was able to read before the class and teacher. Many times, he reprimanded the boys by saying "look, you pig-heads, this Jew began like you, didn't know to read, now he is reading because he is studying." Of course, teaching was only in the winter, until about April 1st. For one year my father sent me again to town to learn. Also my sister went to take lessons in writing. She was taking lessons in sewing and writing. During that year, I gained a lot in reading and writing the Russian language. I was then 12 years old.

## **Odelsk and the Trip to Sokolka**

My brother Tanchun was still with our uncle the baker. Father and mother saw there was no future for him there. My mother had a brother in Bialystok and he had a leather factory, and he was employing a few men. So she decided to take him over there so he could learn the tannery trade. Bialystok from us was about 75 miles. There was a train running from St. Petersburg in the north toward Warsaw in the south, running by the way southward through Vilna, Grodno, Suvalky, Bialystok, and

Warsaw. The nearest station from us was Suvalky, about 25 miles. So it was decided to take Dave's horse and wagon and take mother and Tanchun to Sokolsky to the train for Bialystok. But someone would have to go with them to bring the horse and wagon back. They asked me whether I'll be able to come back by myself. I told them "Yes, I'll be able to come back by myself." So, one day we started out, mother, Tanchun, and myself. Brother Tanchun was driving. He was 18 years old. I watched every turn in the road, to know how to come back. We started out late in the afternoon and came to a village, a small, little town by the name of Odelsk.

It was a famous town, or village. There weren't many Jewish people living there, as that town of Odelsk was in the middle of nowhere. There was surrounding it all around for miles and miles very poor land. There weren't many farms or villages around, so there wasn't much there for Jewish people to make a living. The few Jews that were living there were very poor. But it made no difference how poor they were, they managed to keep a Rav (Rabbi). He had a big wife and four large daughters there. How did they live? Once a month he used to pay a visit to all the Jewish innkeepers in all the surroundings and asked for help. Of course no one refused and each one gave him something. In this way they managed to live in Odelsk.

If something out of the ordinary happened in town, the few people called a meeting together in a little square, as they had no meeting house, and they arranged everything right. So the three of us, and the horse and wagon of course, arrived there toward evening. Mother inquired of some man that was passing by on the road if we can find a place to put up for the night. He told her of a house on the brow of a hill near the road, saying possibly there you may find accommodations. So we drew up to the house. It was middle-sized and had a barn in the rear. So we were accepted as wayfarers. The name of the owner was David Hundel. He was the whole town of Odelsk. He was the innkeeper, storekeeper and without him nothing was done in the town of Odelsk. He was known all over by the name of "Odelsker Lad," as most of the time one man arranged all the affairs of the town, as there was no opposition. So we put the horse in the barn, gave him food, and went into the house. It was an ordinary Jewish household. There was a married daughter living with them and some more children. We had our supper that mother brought along. After, we were sitting in a living room and we heard a woman screaming. First, mother didn't pay attention, but as the screaming continued, she inquired what is the matter. She was told that the married daughter somehow got a splinter in her hand. It was there for a third day and it began to swell up and was very painful. Of course they had no doctor or even a fieldsher in town. My mother said "Let my young boy look at it as he is very handy for such a thing." Of course I was very embarrassed. When it happened around our house, I always managed to pull out such a thing. But here in a strange place and among strange people I was afraid to do it. But everyone began to beg me that I shall try if I can get out that sliver. So I consented. Of course I examined her hand and I saw where the sliver was. The spot was a little swollen with a white spot on the top. So I asked them for a needle and I told her it will hurt. I'll do it as light as possible. I began to work at it. A lot of puss came out when I opened the cap. That didn't hurt her much, but when I began to work to wiggle out the sliver, then she began to scream. But I kept right at it. I let her rest for a while, and began again. It took me quite a while and I pulled out a piece of wood and everyone was looking it over. Then they washed it out good with warm water and put something on it. I didn't know what it was. She began to feel better right away. That evening those people didn't know what to do for us. They made for us all kinds of things. They put up the samovar for tea with jelly and gave us a good place to sleep.

The next morning we were up early as we were half way to Sokolka and I wanted to come back home during the light. So we started out early. I watched the road very closely so I would know how to come back. We came to the railway station. They told me goodbye with words to be careful not to drive the horse too fast and to watch the road not to get lost. I started right back, although I was disappointed. I wanted to see the locomotive and the train but they were not there yet, and I couldn't wait for them. I was driving slowly and came home late in the afternoon. That driving by myself the distance of 25 miles as young as I was put in me a certain amount of courage and confidence. I felt that I wouldn't be afraid to go anywhere by myself. That trip to Sokolka turned out to be a life saver for me ten years later when I

deserted the Russian army from near Warsaw. I came to the same Sokolka by train and walked the distance home in the night, and I knew the road.

### **The Struggles Continue, for All**

My brother Tanchun remained in Bialystok with my uncle to learn the leather tanning. My mother stayed there about a month, then she returned home. That was during the High Holidays. After the High Holidays were over, brother Dave got discouraged with dealing with the farmers and he decided to go to Bialystok. There, in a large city, he might have a chance to do something for a living. Of course he sold the horse and wagon, which I missed very much. Many times I used to take the horse to good pasture and I had a chance to get away from father's nagging. So I lost one excuse. Also, many times when brother Dave made his rounds among the villages, he took me along with him. While he went to the farmer, whether in the house or in the barn, I was the watchdog that no one should take anything from the wagon. There was a certain class among the farmers that would take anything that was loose. So it was necessary to keep a close watch.

All those things I missed, but on the other hand, I had my brother Mote. He just started in his dairy. That was a distance from our village of about five miles in a westerly direction over a chain of sandy hills. Sometimes in the summer I would take a walk over there and stay for a couple of days. There was a forest nearby that estate. When I came there, I would go out in the forest and gather mushrooms. When I brought them in my sister-in-law cooked them, first in milk and then fried them in a frying pan in butter. I still remember the good taste of those mushrooms. Of course I stayed there only a couple of days as my father wouldn't let me stay there very long. There I couldn't get the instruction of the Hebrew education. Then I would come home again and get to work again on the books, and listen to the boys of the village. When they came together it was not for dancing with the girls, but just for a chat among themselves.

That was always their gathering place in the Kerchma. The large room was always full of smoke from the pipes which they were smoking. Their tobacco was the cheapest kind that they were able to buy. Then someone would buy a bottle of whiskey and pass it around. Then another fellow would buy one. Sometimes they would stay up until midnight, and the innkeeper stayed with them and listened to their immoral and profane talk. Many times, after midnight, when they were overloaded with whiskey, then someone started a fight. Soon nearly all of them was fighting, and sometimes it lasted until 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. Many times the windows in the big room were smashed, with not a pane of glass left, and my father or his partner were looking at all this. They were compelled to look and keep quiet, as they were making a living – or some kind of existence.

### **A Trip to Bialystok**

Brother Dave didn't go to Bialystok as soon as he sold his horse, but tried to do something around the village and about the town of Amdur – but without success. He couldn't make a living for himself. Besides, he used to go once in a while to see his girlfriend, his cousin, west of Grodno. When it came about March he made up his mind to go away to Bialystok.

My father had a brother Chatskel, and he was living on a small estate about seven miles from our village of Kosly. It was called Odle. There was a big house and some barns and a certain amount of tillable land to it. He had a large family, just like his brothers, or to better to say, like the Effrons. He had four sons and six daughters. The youngest son was my age. His name was Jacob, named after our grandfather. Theodore Effron in Chicago is his son. On the estate there was a lot of work in the summer. But in the winter there wasn't much to do. He had something to do in Bialystok, but I can't remember what it was. As they had a horse and wagon, one of his sons was going to Bialystok in the winter with the horse, in a sleigh. So Dave decided to save the expense of the train and go with the uncle's son on the sleigh.

I wanted to see the big city of Bialystok, and see my brother Tanchun and my uncle Simon, mother's brother. Somehow my father didn't object to my wanting to go. So I went with them. On the way, I took good notice of every village and town. We went through a very long forest, what was called the Belevestie Pristy. The width of it was about 30 miles. The distance from our village to Bialystok was about 75 miles. It took us from 1 o'clock in the afternoon until the next morning. We were going all night. During the night I was wrapped in a big sheep skin coat and was asleep until the outskirts of Bialystok. In the morning we arrived at our uncle's, the one who had the leather factory where brother Tanchun was learning the trade. The factory and their living quarters were in the suburbs of the city, but close by. My uncle had two sons, and two daughters who were married, and one who was not married. The sons were not married. The sons and the uncle were conducting the business. This uncle was a religious man. The first question he asked was if I prayed that morning. It was early and he gave me a prayerbook and told me to say the morning prayers. After, they gave me breakfast. During the day my uncle took a Droskhe (taxi) to take out some finished leather to be shipped by train, and he took me along with him on the taxi. He showed me around the big city. While we were riding, he asked me where did I go to cheder, and what did I learn. Of course, I told him that my father gave me instruction. When we returned with the taxi it was dinner time and I had dinner at my uncle's house. Of course I saw brother Tanchun and Uncle Chatskel's son from Odle who was working in the factory.

We stayed in Bialystok until the next day in the afternoon. Then my uncle's son from Odle got through with his business. Then he started out for home and I went with him. Brother Dave remained there. That night, a big snow storm started. I was wrapped in the sheepskin coat and laying in the rear of the sleigh hard asleep. My cousin was watching the road. That was in the month of March, before Purim. When we arrived in Odle where his parents lived, about 4 o'clock in the morning, he dug me out from under the snow in the sleigh.

Brother David remained in Bialystok and began to look around to do something. To look for a job – that wasn't in him – he didn't care to work for someone else. He was looking for some kind of business. South of the city there was a large forest. The government fell the trees and cleared the land and was building army barracks. Of course there were different contractors on the job. So Dave got in with one of the contractors. He bought two teams to supply sand and gravel to one of the buildings at a certain price per wagonload or cubic. His doing was the same as when he was dealing with the farmers – always figuring the eggs before they were hatched. The result was, he couldn't pay the expenses with the income. So he was dragging along for a few months. But he couldn't keep it up for very long and he saw that things could not go on further. So he began to look for something better.

Around those barracks many people were employed, all kinds of craftsmen and many common laborers. The place was about 2 miles south of the city. There was also a large brick yard there that was supplying bricks for the buildings of the barracks as well as for the city. So Dave decided to open an inn around there. There was a large house on the highway, about ½ mile from the place where the barracks were built. So he rented that house. But he was by himself.

### **Another Trip to Bialystok**

My oldest sister, as she was separated from her husband, she was in Amdur and working for my uncle the baker, helping out in his inn. I suppose that she made over there, in wages, as much as brother Tanchun was making while he was there helping in the bakery. But at least she had some occupation and did not sit in the house idling away her time. One day, Dave came down to Amdur, and he put a proposition to her. You are working here for nothing. Come over there and we will run the place together. So she took up the proposition. Of course, she had nothing to lose. So she left Amdur and went to Bialystok. In the meantime, when Dave was in Amdur, he bought two cows, milkers, as he had a place over there where to keep them. He hired a farmer from Kosly to take over the cows to Bialystok with horse and wagon. My sister, to save expenses, she would go also with the farmer. But she didn't care to go with the farmer by herself as she didn't trust him. So father and mother said I shall go along. So I did. He was driving slow, and the cows in the rear were walking.

We started out very early in the morning, about 4 o'clock. I knew a little of the way as I went during the winter in March with my cousin. We followed the same way. In the morning, by about 9 or 10 o'clock, we were in the large forest. There was some kind of inn on the highway and we stopped there for a few hours to rest, especially for the cows. They were walking behind the wagon, and while walking, they fed themselves. Where there was good grass, they went right at it. We wanted to eat, but in the inn there was a woman who had nearly nothing except herring. We had bread with us so we had some herring with bread. Then my sister asked her if she had some kind of a pail to milk the cow. Yes she did have a pail and my sister got some milk from one of the cows. After a good rest we proceeded on our way to "Suprasle." That was a town inhabited mostly by German people. There was a small textile industry there run by German people. Of course Bialystok had a large textile industry. Next to Lage, Suprasle was situated on the edge of the forest, and it was just about 15 miles from Bialystok. We arrived in the suburbs of the city about dusk. Of course, I knew already where my uncle was living and we came there. But there was no place for the cows over there. So, my brother Tanchun and a cousin that was working in the leather factory went with us because Dave's place was south of the city. We came from the north and it was a long distance. Besides, we were told, going through the city we must be very careful. There are great thieves in the city. From strangers they can take away the cows. So we had a cavalcade of escorts through the city to be on the lookout.

The reason David bought the cows in Amdur was that in Bialystok they were very high priced. Anyone that had a couple of milkers had a good source of income by selling the fresh milk. We got the cows safe in the barn under lock about 10 o'clock in the evening, and I went to sleep. My sister took charge of the cows. The farmer and me returned home. I was then about 12 years old. So, when I came home, it was the same routine and occupation. Morning, noon and evening, studying the books.

### **Cousin Victor**

Once a week I used to go to Amdur and stay for a day in my uncle's house. My uncle had boys and girls. Some of them were my age. We were chums together. One boy by the name of Victor was older than I, about two years. He liked dogs. Any time I came to town he used to show me the new dog he got. Of course, in Amdur there were many stray dogs. There used to come a dog catcher which the state sent out to destroy stray dogs. But the state didn't send him often. Then the dogs used to accumulate. Victor had his choice. He always carried fresh rolls in his pockets to attract the dogs, as they always were hungry. Victor was known through town that he was a lover of dogs. He was about 14 years old. For a Jewish boy in town it was a great misconduct to have to do with dogs. A very low habit. His mother, father and older brother all condemned him for this dog habit.

He didn't want to go to cheder to learn. Beside, any melamed (teacher) was afraid of him as he was a strong boy. When he got mad, he had his way. No teacher dared to reprimand him, and to use force was out of the question. So all the teachers in town wouldn't have him. So, he became my pal. He liked me, as the rest of the boys in town would not have anything to do with him. When I came to town he knew he had a friend. Sometimes we used to go swimming together in the summer. His mother knew that he liked me. So she would talk to me that I should try to persuade him to stop having to do with the dogs. But no matter how friendly he was with me, whenever I began to talk to him that he should not bother with the dogs, then he would say to me, "Ha Ha, my mother was talking to you already." "No," he would say, "you are not going to change me. You are a sissy. You are afraid that some girls wouldn't have anything to do with you. I will marry any Christian girl or woman if the Jewish girls wouldn't have anything to do with me. And by the way, you didn't see my new dog. He is a beaut. Come with me." Then he takes me over to a shanty in the rear of the big barn. There he has two dogs. One he's had several weeks and one he got not very long ago. He told me all about their pedigrees.

### **Mote's Dairy**

Now, I will tell you about brother Mote and his dairy business. It took nearly a half of the summer to accumulate the 15 cows for the dairy. He began to milk them, but he was not able to dispose of all the fresh milk in town, so he was making butter and cheese. That was during the remainder of the summer. But as Fall began to approach, the cows began to give less milk. As a rule, when cows are on pasture, and when it is warm, then they give milk. But when the cold weather sets in, they commence to dry up. In the big estates where the owners have the dairy cows established for many years, choice stock, warm barns, and good fodder in the winter, those cows give some milk in the winter, but not as much as in the summer.

My brother got together 15 cows from different sections and from different breeds. When cold weather set in in October they gave very little milk. The cow feed was not good as the owner was not prepared for such a thing, and the barn wasn't warm enough for the cows. So they stopped giving milk all winter. Toward the end of the winter some cows, when they laid down, were not able to get up. A couple of them died. So he was left with 13 for the spring. That was during the first winter. When Spring came and they went out to pasture there was no milk being produced.

There was a lot of work to do around the dairy. Milking, twice a day, and taking over the fresh milk to town and peddle it out by the quart dipper. The surplus was kept in a cellar in earthen pots for two days until the cream gathered on top. That was taken off to be churned for butter. Sour milk, it was congealed-like, was put in a warm oven for a couple of hours. When it was taken out, it was put in linen bags and hung up on hooks until the water ran out or drained off. That became pot cheese. To make farmer's cheese out of the pot cheese, it was put in another linen bag with boards on top, and with stones on top of the boards. That squeezed out all the water that was in it. When it was taken out of the bag it kept together. It was sold as fresh farmer's cheese. Sometimes, when it laid outside for a couple of weeks, it got dry and it kept for a long time. There was a lot of work around the dairy all the time. Of course he had help. A gentle woman was doing the milking, and she also put the surplus milk in pots in the cellar, and removed the cream, and made the cheese. He also had a boy, about 12 years old, an orphan, or a bastard. He had nobody to claim him so he stayed with my brother for his keep and helped with the cows.

I used to go there quite often. That was the second summer that he operated the dairy. There was a lot of work, but not much progress. Like most of the Jewish people of the town, he earned just enough for bread for his family. As the Jewish population was squeezed into the Pale territory, and forbidden to go and live beyond certain territories, every Jewish family was trying to make a living somehow. There were more storekeepers than buyers, and the same with the tradesmen. Some of the young people began to emigrate to America. But a family man was compelled to stay where he was, and increase his family for more misery. My brother Mote was in that category.

It happened that a cousin of ours, the son of the baker by the name of Israel, he was the older brother of my pal Victor, but he didn't run after dogs, he was well educated in Hebrew and he was the favorite son of his father and mother. He knew everybody in town, and he knew most of the farmers in all the villages for 15 to 20 miles around Amdur. They all knew Mordecai the baker in Amdur, and his son Israel was the main leader of the inn where the bakery was. So Israel and two men became partners in buying horses and exporting them to Germany or selling them to the Russian army for cavalry or artillery. To buy horses, one must be a good expert on horses, to know their soundness and to tell the age of the horse. Brother Mote was one of that kind. He knew horses. He was able to tell the age of a horse up to 8 or 10 years, also whether he was sound and had good wind. That was the principle knowledge of a good horseman. So, the three partners took my brother in as a qualified expert. When they went to fairs in different cities to buy horses, he went with them to examine the horses before they bought them. Many times while he was away with the dealers I was over to his place to take the milk down to town in the morning, with the help of the boy which stayed with him. Sometimes he was away for two or three days, so I was there. After all the hustling and bustling he couldn't make much headway.

In the meantime, he had some different trouble. The Russian government had promulgated laws that Jews could not take up residence anew in villages or estates. That law began in the year 1804. For some years the government did not enforce that law very strictly. But in about 1875 they did begin to enforce that law very strictly. So the district officials came after brother Mote that he took up residence at

the estate of Citaraz in violation of the government law. They gave him notice to move out. Otherwise, they would come and put the family on wagons and take them down to the town of Amdur and let them off in the market square. So he went around to a man supposed to be some kind of lawyer and they tried for him to postpone his removal. It dragged along for six months and in the end he was compelled to get a place for his family in town. During the day he was there at the dairy. The government could not stop him from being there during the day as he was there temporarily only for business. But at night he was in town. It was a hard life. At least, while the family was on the estate, he didn't have rent to pay for his living quarters. He had three large rooms. Now he moved into two rooms on the ground floor. His wife got very sick. Of course my mother came down to town and stayed with them until she got well. By this time he had a family of four children, two boys and two girls. He had a hard struggle. The only thing that helped him along was that he used to go with the horse dealers to fairs or sometimes helped them take out horses toward the German border, for many horses went for export to Germany. Then he earned something. The business of the dairy went from bad to worse. The cows didn't receive the proper care, so they didn't produce milk. The milk that was brought to town to be sold as fresh milk many times got sour, for he had no place to keep it cool. So he discontinued selling fresh milk. He turned to butter and cheese. Brother David and my sister were conducting the inn which they rented and they had two cows. But they didn't supply milk enough for the demand there.

### **A Fateful Trip to Bialystok**

The next summer Dave came to Amdur and bought two cows with calves. In the summer, all the farmers are occupied with their farm work, and Dave could not get anyone to take down the two cows to Bialystok. My brother Mote had a good horse, but he couldn't go himself. So it was decided that as long as I was in Bialystok twice and I knew the way, to ask me if I would be able to go. Brother Mote will send with me the boy that was working for him in the dairy to help drive the cows to Bialystok. Of course I was glad to go. I was 13 years old. My second sister was 16 years old. She decided that instead of staying in the village, and not to see anybody, she will go with me to Bialystok and stay there with Dave and our sister. In a big city there is more opportunity than in a small village among the farmers. It was decided that we shall start out Sunday morning. In the meantime, brother Mote had some butter and cheese. He decided that while we are going to Bialystok he may as well pack the butter and cheese and we will take it over there. My older sister could sell it in the market. In a large city that kind of product always brought good money.

The two cows and their calves were in the place where my brother had the dairy. So Saturday I stayed with my brother. I went there on Friday. Saturday, the day of rest we didn't do anything in preparation for the voyage. In the evening, as soon as the first star appeared in the sky, my brother Mote got busy preparing everything. The cheese and butter were in wooden tubs just as it used to be in the U.S. about 60 or 70 years ago. Then he prepared feed for the horse. He instructed me how to feed the horse and give him water. He didn't tell me not to drive too fast, as with the two cows walking in the rear all we could do was just walk. Of course, I had the boy with me to help with the cows. The two calves were put on the wagon laying down with their four feet were tied together.

When we started out it was about 12 o'clock midnight. The distance to the village where we were living was about six miles. I was on the wagon, driving the horse, and the boy with the cows was walking slowly in the rear. We came to our village about four o'clock in the morning. Father, mother, and my sister were still asleep, and the day was just commencing to break. It was about August 1st. When we arrived, they got up and my sister began to prepare to come along with me. Later, my father got up and got me to say morning prayers. Mother made breakfast. We didn't start out on our long journey very early as we planned. It took time to pack my sisters clothes. It was a very warm and humid morning. When the sun came out the day began to get cloudy. The sun rose very early, about six a.m. So, we had a long day for ourselves. I knew it was a long distance and I thought that we would not make it in the same day. I planned to stay overnight about 10 miles from Bialystok. I knew that there was an inn with barns for the horse and cows. We started out late, about 9 o'clock, my sister, the boy, and myself. Of course we were

going slowly. The 2 cows, where there was good grass by the side of the road, they went at it. But we wouldn't let them stay at the grass very long as we were on our way to a destination.

Between 12 and 1 o'clock we stopped at an inn for a rest and to feed the horse. A heavy shower came. It was just before we came to the large forest. We started out again and it wasn't long before we were in the forest with thunder, lightening, and heavy showers. All of us were drenched to the skin, but we kept on going. It rained very hard all afternoon until about five o'clock. Then it cleared up a little. It was heavy going for the horse. In all that section the road was sandy and with the heavy rain the wooden wheels with the iron rims around them had to cut a new track in the sand. That was very hard pulling for the horse.

I told my sister that as soon as we reached the inn, ten miles from Bialystok, that we would stay over until morning. We were all tired. The boy and myself, we did not sleep the night before. The storm and rain wet us right through. We felt like falling asleep in the middle of the road. In this way we kept going until we reached the inn where we expected to stay overnight. On arriving there, we found many Jewish people were in the inn, and a dead Jewish man was laying on the floor on straw. There were several burning candles around him. We were told what happened. On that day there was a fair a distance from that village. Many Jews from the surrounding cities, town, and villages were going to that place where the fair was. During the storm of thunder and lightening many of them stopped at the inn until the storm would be over. A Jew, middle aged, was standing and smoking a cigarette when lightening struck in the inn and killed him. There he was, laid out on the floor. When we saw this, we were afraid to remain overnight, as there was no room for us. We stood there astonished and frightened. I told my sister from here there is ten miles to Bialystok. We may as well go on and we'll come late at night over there. It began to get dark.

I knew that we would not be able to see the road as that whole section is sand. At night it would be hard to distinguish the road from the field. But, I also knew that there were telegraph poles and wires to Suprasle, the town of Germans manufacturing textiles for Bialystok. I knew that they would be a good guide, those posts and wires. On all that road, a distance of ten miles, there wasn't a village or a house close to that road. So we were going in the dark, watching the poles. But the poor horse began to get tired pulling the wagon in the sandy road and plowing a new track in the road. The horse was in harness for 24 hours, since we left my brother's place. About 10 o'clock we saw a rig with two horses coming from the same direction as we. When they passed us they came to a stop. They saw three teenagers with a rig with two cows on such a dark night. There was a woman and two men. They began to inquire where we came from, and where we are going. They were city people and they spoke Polish. They felt sorry for us as they saw that our horse was very tired, and so were we. They told us that they would drive very slow, and we should follow them. But our horse was all in, and they saw that we couldn't go any further. They left on their way. We unhitched the horse, tied him to the wagon and put the feed bag on him. We also tied the cows to the wagon. And we three huddled together on the wagon and fell hard asleep.

It seems my sister didn't sleep. While me and the boy were sound asleep, my sister started to wake us by saying "Shevach, Shevach see what is there!" When I awoke, I saw two lights in the distance running toward us. I said that it must be wolves coming toward us. My sister started to cry and lament. The two lights were getting closer and closer. So we decided to run for our lives. We all three jumped down from the wagon and began to run. Where to? Of course, in the direction toward Bialystok. It was pitch dark. We didn't follow the telegraph poles any more, but ran over fields, anywhere to get away from the wolves. My sister and the boy were holding tight to my jacket and I carried them with me. My sister got so tired that she couldn't hold me any more. So she was left behind. The boy and myself kept on running until we came to a field where rye was harvested. The sheaves of rye were put together to dry in the field before they took them into the barn, 10 to 15 sheaves in a group. Both of us crawled in under the sheaves, half asleep and delirious from fright, laying on the ground until daybreak. When it began to get light up in the east, we crawled out from under the sheaves of rye and I began to look around where I was. Since I was a child, until this day of my writing, I've had a good sense of direction. While standing there I figured out that the city of Bialystok was in a certain direction, and I knew about three or four miles distant from where I was. As to my sister, I knew nothing as to what happened to her. While standing

there, I said to the boy, come, let us go to Bialystok. He said "No, I will not go with you, I will go to my boss Mote at the dairy." I tried to explain to him that the dairy of my brother was a long way from there. He wouldn't listen to me, and he pointed out to me in the distance there is a forest. "You see, in the back of that forest, there is my boss Mote. There is where I am going." I saw that I could do nothing with him, so I left him there. I went toward Bialystok. It was just daybreak. I think I was barefoot. I was going on double time and it didn't take me long and I was in the outskirts of the city. I was going direct to my uncle. That was situated in the suburbs where I was coming in. My brother Tanchun was working there in the leather factory, also a cousin, and they were all asleep, as it was still early in the morning. I knocked at the door, and when they opened the door and saw me, and asked me where is my sister, and the cows, and the horse and wagon, I told them that the wolves consumed everything. And when I came into the room where they were asleep, I fell into bed, sound asleep. When they tried to get me out of bed to go with them to show them where it happened, all I could tell them was it was on the road from Suprasle, about five miles from Bialystok. They they had already given the alarm all around as they expected us the day before. Brother Dave and my sister were on the other side of the city. They came and tried to get out of me what happened, and where. But I was delirious and couldn't say anything. So they decided to let me sleep. Four boys from my uncle's factory, including my brother Tanchun, formed into pairs. They went out on the road to look for the remainder of the horse and the two cows, and the calves which the wolves didn't consume. They went in the same direction but on different roads. My brother and a cousin were about four miles from the city. There on the road stood the wagon, the horse, the two cows and the calves. just as we left them. But two Jewish men were standing there as watchmen so that no one would steal them. When my brother told them that he came to take them, they told him that two young boys and a girl passed the day before toward evening with the outfit through that village and the inn where the accident happened with the man. They didn't know what happened to them. My brother and cousin convinced them that they were the right men concerned. They brought the horse and wagon and what was on it safe to my uncle's place.

Now, what happened to my sister when she was left in the field in the darkness. She kept on going. But where she was going she didn't know. Then she saw a light in the distance, and she went toward that light as she knew that there must be a house. It was late at night. When she came close to the house dogs began to bark. A man came out from the house and quieted the dogs. It was near a forest and he saw a young woman, barefoot and tired. I suppose that she explained to them as good as she was able to what happened. His wife came out. She asked them if they would let her stay until morning. They gave her a place in the vestibule, and she laid down and went to sleep. They woke her in the morning as they were going to work. She asked them the way to Bialystok, and they showed her the way. She walked toward Bialystok, and when she came to the beginning of the city she kept on walking. She didn't know where the uncle lived. But it happened that the second team of two boys from the factory were searching for her. They found her walking in the outskirts of the city and brought her to the uncle.

I was asleep and didn't know what was going on. I slept all that day. When I woke up, I began to think over what happened that we got so frightened of wolves. I was raised and brought up in the village among farmers. Many days and nights the young farmer boys had nowhere to go to have some enjoyment. So they used to come to the Kerchma, the inn. There, many of them came together evenings, smoking the strong Machorka, a cheap kind of tobacco, and telling stories of all kind. Some stories they heard from somebody, and some they used to make up themselves. Many and many stories they were telling about wolves. Of course, as a young boy, I was glad to listen to their tales. As to the wolf stories, when I listened I used to shiver, listening to how a man was riding in a sledge and a pack of wolves attacked, first the horse and then the man. Nothing was left of him but his feet inside the boots. They were telling one another how you can tell whether it is a wolf at night. When a wolf opens his eyes, they shine just like a light. Many times, at night, when I saw lights moving about, I always thought that there were wolves running around. So all the farmer boys' stories about wolves, and me tired-out after twonights without sleep, and the dead man laying on the floor in the inn, and walking all day in the rain near the wagon. . . When I sat down in the wagon and fell asleep, and my sister awoke me to see what is coming toward us

with two moving lights, I cried out without hesitation, it can be nothing but wolves. We jumped out of the wagon and ran for our lives.

So my sister and myself were safe at my uncle's. Now the question was, where is Mote's boy? When I left him on the field and he wouldn't come with me, he walked away by himself, and was looking for his boss, my brother Mote. He found a place, the same as my brother's, a dairy with a Jewish man running it, on a small estate, just like my brother. He remained there. All he wanted was enough to eat and a place to sleep. After a day, when the horse rested, two boys took the horse and wagon and went to that section where it happened, and began to enquire whether anyone saw a boy of a certain description. They were told that a strange boy was at a dairy on an estate. They went there, and the boy was there. But he refused to go with them, as they were strangers to him. But when he saw the horse and wagon, he came to his senses and he went with them. They brought him to Bialystok. We stayed there another day. My sister sold the butter and the cheese at a good price and gave me the cash to take it to my brother the dairyman. The next morning we started for home. The boy, myself, and a cousin of mine. My sister remained there with my older sister and Dave. The going home was not so hard as going away from home. The horses knew when they were going homeward. There was a different life in them. Most of the time he was going on a trot. It wasn't necessary to drive him. We arrived at my cousin's house late at night. We didn't wake anyone. We put the horse in the barn, and we went up in the hay mow and went to sleep. The next morning, after breakfast, the boy and me took the horse and wagon and went to my brother, about 8 miles distance from my uncle where we slept, and I told him the whole story of the journey. Of course he had nothing to say. But after several weeks, when the story got around, it was called the "imager-of-the-wolf" story, and everybody was laughing about it.

As for myself, I began to feel that I have done something, that no one boy of my age would undertake to accomplish such a trip. I felt more like a grownup. I was not afraid to do anything if it came to do it. It put in me a lot of confidence. The stories of the farmer boys about wolves attacking people, I began to realize, that was only jokes. When I returned to the village and came together with the boys, and told them where I was, what I did, and what I saw in the big city, they had some respect for me for a while. That self respect remained with me until this very day. Even my pal Victor, my cousin the dog lover, envied my courage. Although he was older, by about two years, and a good deal stronger than me, he considered me as a hero to undertake that trip.

## **The Village Routine**

That summer passed away and the fall came. Most of the time I stayed home. After the holidays, my father got after me with the books, especially during the long evenings. We had no electricity or gas lights. I don't think that anyone in the Russian Empire had it. All we had were kerosene lamps. From that light we did our reading. By the way, when I came in the U.S. in 1899 the majority of the population still used kerosene lamps for light in the evening. In the day time, I used to go amongst the farmers, as I was friendly with their boys, and played games with them. I knew everything that happened in their houses. Many times, my father and mother warned me not to go too often to their houses because they were ignorant farmers and whatever I learned from them was not proper for a Jew. When I came to Amdur and met boys of my type and size I began to realize that the village boys were ignorant, just like their parents. I decided to keep away from them as much as possible. I was going on 14 years. When I used to come to Amdur, the town boys found out I was not as dumb as a village boy should be, as I knew Hebrew reading, writing and translation nearly as good as the town boys that were going to cheder all year round. When I found that they were not much more educated than I, that gave me encouragement to learn.

Quite often I went to Amdur and stayed there for two days and got acquainted with different boys. My cousin, my pal Victor, didn't like it, as the boys wouldn't have anything to do with him, as they called him the "Dog Master." On the other hand, he didn't care to have anything to do with them. He was a boy for himself. His only friends were the dogs while he was feeding them fresh rolls and bagels. When they had enough of that, they went the way they came. So he was looking for a fresh pack. He was in a family of eight children, five boys and three girls, and he was the black sheep of the family. I was the only

friend that he had. His mother and father were worried about his conduct. Many times she begged me that I should try to persuade him to act different and keep away from the dogs. When I talked to him, he would get excited and he would say "Aha, aha! they talked to you already, you sissy." Then he would keep away from me for a week or so. But when I came again to town, and he had a new dog, he made up with me again, and told me I should go with him and see the new dog which he got. When I told him his dog was very nice, he was very happy, and he said I was his only friend.

My sister who went with me to Bialystok at the time when we took over the two cows stayed there until about New Years. She didn't find much interest to stay there, so she came home on the train by way of Grodno. My older sister over there got sick, and she wrote home asking if they could send me for a couple of months to help her. She had the two cows, and the milk had to be taken to some customers in certain streets. When she was well she delivered the milk herself. Now she wasn't able to do it. So father and mother arranged that I would go to Bialystok for a few weeks until she got well. I think I went again with one of my cousins from Odle. I stayed there until after Purim. I came home with an expressman that went there every week. He delivered certain things and brought merchandise on his return for store keepers.

At home everything was as usual. Get up in the morning, say the prayers, have something for breakfast, feed the cow and get her milk, if she had any. I was then 14 years old. We used to buy the whisky for the inn in Amdur. There was a wholesale place where all the inn keepers were buying their supply there. My father let me go there and get about 20 or 25 gallons at a time. It wasn't bottled. At the inn, my father and his partner sold it by the glass or by the quart. Of course they had no license to sell it. It was done QT. Very seldom did a revenue officer happen to pass that village as it was off the main track. If a stranger appeared to come and ask for a drink, they were very careful, and sometimes they would not sell, as they were always afraid for a shadow. The whole system of making a very hard existence was by taking a chance of not going to prison. So it was with all the innkeepers. Throughout the Pale settlement, there were 100s of thousands in the same category, and my father was one of them. That was called making a living or an existence in the village, among farmers. But some Jews living in townlets envied the innkeepers at the villages, as they always thought that living among the farmers, a family had no worries. The farmers are producing all the necessities of life, and the innkeeper is right near them. For this reason many of the town Jews always had an eye on the village. The only thing is, they were kept out by the law. A Jew from town cannot move into a village unless he was a blacksmith that the farmers wanted. Otherwise, no new Jewish settlement in the villages. Peddlers with horse and wagon used to come from town quite often, buying most anything that the farmer had to sell: rags, bones, old fur coats, flax, wool, eggs, chickens, calves, potatoes. There were quite a number of Jews that used to come out through the village for that purpose of making a living bringing products back to town.

### **Hey, that's My Harness!**

An incident happened to one of the peddlers and I witnessed what happened. There was a farmer in the village who had a nice mare, so he used her to bare a stallion. As a rule, the harnesses that farmers used were very light. Bridles for horses were homemade from ropes. Their horses were poor and the hand-made bridles were sufficient to control the animals. But a young stallion has plenty of life and a homemade bridle will not do. So this farmer went to town to a harness maker and bought a real bridle to control the stallion which he raised. He had that bridle for many years. When he didn't use it, he kept it hung up in the vestibule. It happened that the bridle disappeared. Of course, he could not accuse anyone. After it was gone, a year or two passed. There used to come to the village a peddler with a horse and wagon, going from village to village, house to house, asking if they had anything to sell. That man after many years came to the U.S. and settled in Kingston. He was one of seven sons in the town of Amdur. They were all big and strong, but this peddler was lame on one foot, so he was making his usual rounds among the villages. He came in front of the farmer where the bridle disappeared and stopped there. The farmer came out and saw the bridle on the horse. He called out his son. "Look! Here is the bridle that disappeared a year or two ago!" Both of them went to the horse and took it off. When the peddler came

out of the house and saw that they took off the bridle, he got hold of it. The farmer and his son was holding one end and he got hold on the other end. They were wrestling for a long time with that bridle. In the end, the farmer and his son took away the bridle. While they were wrestling and pulling, the peddler made a terrible noise, and that was in the center of the village. Many farmers and women came out to see what was going on. The farmer explained what happened a year or so before. "I missed the bridle and now this peddler comes in front of my house, and the bridle that disappeared is on his horse!" The farmer reported the case to the district official and they made a case of it. But many people, especially Jewish people, friends of the farmer advised him not to press the charge, as that peddler could do a lot of harm to the farmer in different ways, for all of his family was known as very tough people. The farmer became afraid to press the charge and the whole thing was dropped, and they didn't go to court.

## **Fratricide**

I remember another incident that happened in that village. There was a large family among the farmers. There were three sons, all married. They couldn't live together in one house. So they divided. Each one took a small piece of land and built houses separately, but near each other. They were tilling the land separately and living separately. One had two young daughters. One had no children, he was the youngest. One son remained with his father in the old house. It happened in the spring of the year while taking out manure to the fields, the two married brothers got into a fight. The older brother took hold of a pitchfork. It landed on his younger brothers head, and he fell to the ground. He lived three days and he died. I remember the way the older brother and his wife came to my father, "Isrolsko," that was the way they called my father, because his name was Israel, "we are in great trouble." The district officer was here, and they took the case, charging him with murder." They came to my father to see if he could do something to help them. They had a slogan, "in case of trouble, you must come to the Jew." My father told them that he couldn't do anything in a case like this, but he would try to get in touch with certain men in town to find the head officials, and see if anything could be done.

The next day, the man was under arrest, and an important doctor was ordered from Grodno to make the autopsy to determine what caused the death. My father took the farmer's horse and wagon, and I was the driver. We went to Amdur. He was told that the doctor who was ordered to go and make the autopsy is by the name of Kulkin, and he is a military doctor. If he can be approached before he starts out, possibly something can be done to make the case very light. Of course, my father could not approach the doctor. There was a fieldsher in Amdur, something like an intern. He didn't use the title doctor. But in some cases he was watching how a doctor was treating a patient in certain sicknesses. He said that when the doctor came he might call on him to go and witness the autopsy. If he can see him before he starts out from Grodno he would talk to him about the case. While we were in Amdur, it was decided to go to Grodno with the fieldsher. Possibly the doctor didn't start on his journey.

He was supposed to be riding in a carriage drawn by two horses. So my father and the fieldsher got in the wagon, and I was at the reins, and off we went to Grodno, a distance of 25 miles from Amdur. Midway there was an inn where all the passersby stopped to give the horses a rest. When we stopped there, the fieldsher inquired of the innkeeper whether Dr. Kulkin had passed through there. He told them that he left just before we came in. So there was no use to go to Grodno, and we returned. The fieldsher was left in Amdur as the doctor had not asked him to go with him. Father and myself returned to the village and the doctor was there already. The autopsy was made the next day, so father wasn't able to do anything to help the farmer. Dr. Kulkin stayed in the village overnight. The next day a platform was erected in the yard of the dead farmer. There, the autopsy was performed by the doctor. Many people got together to watch how it was done, including women. I was there, close, right next to the doctor.

He wasn't by himself. He brought another doctor with him. The body was brought out and placed on the table. First, he opened the chest. Then he scalped the head and with a small saw he cut all around the skull, and took it off like a skull cap. All the brains were visible. He took out some round things from the brain and put them in a glass jar filled with a solution, and that ended the autopsy. The brother was in prison in Grodno before the trial. Meanwhile, his wife died while he was there. The case came to trial

before a jury of 12 men and a judge. It seems the report of the doctor was favorable to the prisoner. The brother he had a fight with was suffering of a certain sickness, and his death was not directly caused by the fight. So they gave the farmer two years in state prison. During the time he was serving his two daughters worked his share of the farm just as good as their father. Quite often they went to Grodno to visit their father in prison.

### **David and Victor Go to America**

The time was going on. My brother Tanchun, who was in my uncle's leather factory, became 21 years old. So he got a notice to appear in November, 1891 for an examination for service in the Russian army. The place of the district of induction was Grodno. Father went with him. He was examined and accepted as fit for the four years of actual service. He was assigned to the infantry and was shipped to near Moscow in the government of Oral. After the first year of service he became a drummer for the company, and in that way he served 4 years. After a Jewish young man served in the Russian army, and after he was honorably discharged, he still had no right to reside anywhere in the Russian Empire except in the Pale of Settlement with all the rest of the Jews.

As to my brother Dave in Bialystok, there was no success. He started with nothing, and he had nothing. So one day he came home to father and said that he wanted to go to America, but he didn't have the price for the passage on a ship in steerage. It amounted to possibly 50 rubles. Somehow my father got the money for him. While Dave was in Amdur preparing for the trip, my pal Victor decided that he would go with Dave. Of course, his mother, when she heard that he wanted to go to America, she was glad, and delighted just to get rid of him. But nevertheless he was her child, and she made good preparations for him. She made for him a new pair of boots, a new suit, and an overcoat. It was in the month of February, 1892. She asked my brother Dave to look after him on the way and on their arrival in America. He did look after him, especially after Victor's mother gave him a small sum of money above his expenses so that on his arrival he would have a few dollars in his pocket in case of emergency, or in case gold could not be found in the middle of the street. I imagine that brother Dave made good use of the money that Victor had with him.

Dave had hardly enough money to pay for the steerage passage. I remember, just like today, the night when they left for America. There were three of them: Dave, Victor, and Charles Epstein, the father of Morris Epstein (the grocer on Tulip Street). Epstein was married and he left his wife and three or four children in Amdur. After a few years they joined him here in Poughkeepsie on Water Street where they lived for many years. I remember, they left early in the morning, about 1 o'clock. It was a bitter cold morning. I was in Amdur that day to see them off, and I was full of envy that Victor was going to the golden land of promise, and I am left in the land of suffering. But Victor promised me that as soon as he earned some money he would send me a passage and I could come over and we would be chums there.

It took them about six weeks before they reached the golden land, but, on their arrival, they found that there was no gold in the streets. They found a big depression, with hard times, and no jobs to be had as many people were out of work. Dave promised to take care of Victor on arrival in New York. First he saw to it to find something for Victor to do. His father was a baker. Although he didn't know anything as to baking, still he saw how it was done. So Dave went with him to bakeries on the East side and he landed in a bakery as a helper. Now Dave was free to do something for himself. For a couple of weeks he was fixing chair bottoms. He went in many houses and asked if their chairs needed new seats. So he replaced them.

Dave found out that there were in Kingston some Amdur people. So him and Epstein left New York and went up to Kingston. There, all the Amdur landsmen were junk dealers. So they too fell in line. With the help of the wholesale junk dealer each of them bought a horse and wagon and went out to get together junk. They were selling it to the wholesale dealer who helped them get the horse and wagon. While making the rounds through the country looking for junk, Dave happened to visit Poughkeepsie. By looking over the town he saw that there was no wholesale dealer for junk. So he decided, as long as there is no wholesale dealer in Poughkeepsie, he'll be one. So Poughkeepsie is where Dave made his home, at

699 Main Street. That was the address we got from him in his first letter. Victor again wrote a letter to his mother, and in that letter he was cursing America and especially Columbus that discovered it. He was still a helper in that bakery for his board, and his bed was on old flour bags. But brother Dave didn't let him stay there very long once he established himself at 699 Main Street as a wholesale junk dealer, although he was still peddling junk himself. But the peddlers around knew the place where they could sell junk in Poughkeepsie. He came down to New York and took Victor from the bake shop and made a junk peddler out of him in Poughkeepsie and the surroundings. Of course, the more peddlers, the more business for him.

After a year or so, the cousin that Dave was in love with came to New York and he went to see her there. He told her that she should come to Poughkeepsie and they would get married. She consented to it. So she came and they got married and lived at 699 Main Street. Now, my oldest sister, the one that was in Bialystok with brother Dave, also came to New York. She got some kind of a job in a sweat shop. I suppose her husband, the one she separated with, went to Canada. They had one girl, 13 years old. She stayed with us, in our house, all the time. Her husband found out that she was in New York, so he came from Canada to settle one way or the other. She was rooming with a family named Sleginger on the Lower East Side. He came to those people and they tried to reunite them. But my sister made up her mind not to live with him anymore and insisted on a divorce. So they got a Rabbi and he divorced them, and this fellow went back to Canada. Meantime, she got acquainted with a man who had lost his wife. The man's name was Snyder. She got married again. Afterwards, they moved to Chicago, and she had two children with him.

While my sister was rooming with the Slegingers, they had a niece staying with them. A girl, not young anymore, but small in stature, and not bad looking. So they decided that she would make a good wife for Victor. Victor was a junk peddler around Poughkeepsie. Through the summer he made some money, but during the winter he ate up what he made in the summer. So he had nothing. So my sister wrote to him, that he should come to see her, that she has a girl for him. So he did. The girl had a job somewhere, and she saved a dollar. Also, her uncle and the aunt, the Slegingers, saw to it that she would get married. They were very nice people. I met them when I first came to the U.S., together with the Coplowitches. So the family saw to it that she should have a small dowry, and they married her to Victor. There was no love in their marriage. Right from the first day, she feared his look. Whatever she did was wrong as far as he was concerned. I must say that he was a devil in his youth, and all his family in Amdur were glad that he was not near them.

## **A New Wardrobe**

In the village Kosly, where we, my father, mother, sister and myself were struggling for existence, always, my parents worried where the daily bread would come from the next day. And sometimes it used to happen we were short of bread, and we lived on potatoes for a few days. There was no outlook for better times in the future. The farmers in the village were very poor. Sometimes, if one of them would come to the inn and begin to drink, that was only to drown his miseries in the vodka and forget his troubles while he was drunk. And while he was drunk, he tried to stir up all kinds of trouble with the innkeeper, and many times started a fight. I remember, there was one fellow that when he got drunk, it was danger to be near him, as he was always ready for a fight. He used to begin to talk to himself, "Them rotten Jews, they gave me that vodka, 1/2 filled with water and took away my good money. Wait, the days of reckoning are coming. Some day we will chase you back to Jerusalem, you so and so." My father, mother, myself and the partner would listen to all his curses and would keep quiet. All we would say "we Jews, we are in Galuth, and must keep quiet in order to make some kind of a living." And that was the plight of the innkeepers all through eastern Europe, to withstand all kinds of abuses from the drunken peasant.

I was already sixteen years old, and I was well acquainted with the farmer boys. We played together on the meadows, and I liked to wrestle with them. Many times, I came home with pants torn in many places. I had a job to fix them myself, as mother wouldn't do it, saying, you tore them by wrestling

with them, so fix it yourself. I became quite a tailor. Of course, I had only one pair of pants and one jacket. Even on Saturday when we went to the minion in the next village, I was wearing the same pants and jacket that I wore every day. There was not enough money to buy me new cloth. Then again, if my mother and father were able to squeeze a ruble to be put away in a safe place, it was always with the intention that my sister was three years older than me. They always had in mind that some day she will need a small dowry to get her married. As far as new clothes for me was concerned, they didn't pay much attention.

One early summer, a cousin of ours, the one that had the small estate in Odle, who we used to go with to Bialystok once in a while, he came over and asked my father if he would let me go to stay with them on the estate for a couple of months to help him with the farm work during harvest. All their family moved away to Bialystok to live. He was left with his wife and two small children to take care of that small estate for the time being. So I went to his house and stayed with them ten weeks. I helped with all the harvest. First the haying, and then all the grain to be taken into the barn. I also looked after the three cows. Then there was torp (peat), that was dug out early in the spring for fuel. I used to go with the horse and wagon once a day and bring in a wagon load and put it away. I liked to do that work. After all was finished, he gave me 20 rubles for the help that I gave him. So I came walking home with 20 rubles in my pocket. First of all, I needed a pair of boots. My father went to a shoe maker and took the measure for a pair of boots. The price was 6 rubles. Then he got a tailor and we went into a store where they sell cloth. We bought some that was light, good for a suit, and heavier cloth for a top coat, as it was coming toward winter and I needed one. It wasn't high grade material, but I was clothed with my own earning.

I began to feel a little more confidence in myself. I wasn't ashamed to mix with people, especially among the young boys and girls in Amdur. Even in the surrounding villages there were some boys and quite a few girls of all ages. On Saturday or Holidays we would come together at certain appointed places, play games, sing and dance, and that was called having a good time for the day, as that was the only entertainment we had in the villages. There was a family in the next village, "Eitche Konichier". They had 5 girls (Umbreshrien) with no evil eye. When I saw that Eitche and his wife passed by our village in the morning to spend the day in the town of Amdur, on the market day, I knew that the girls over there would be glad to see me. I was 16 and they were the same, 16 or over. So we used to have a swell time that day, especially when their parents were away for the day, and my father was going to Amdur on the market day. That was on every Tuesday. Although he had nothing to sell or anything to buy, father would go just to get away from the monotonous days of the village life, and to be among people. That was my chance to be among the girls. Otherwise I would have to give a clear account of myself as to where I was all day. While he was away, no questions asked, and no answers returned.

Then a day or two I used to go down to my brother to help there with the dairy while he was away with the horse dealers to a fair, buying horses or taking out horses when they were sold to the army, or sold for export. My job was, while he was away, to go to the estate where the dairy was, about two miles from Amdur, and bring the milk to the house where he was living. His wife was selling it out by the quart. The women came around with pitchers or tin cans to get the milk. It was a poor business, and I didn't like that job. Many times I carried the milk in my hands in 2 cans from the dairy to the house, about 2 miles, as sometimes my brother took the horse and wagon when he went. So I brought the milk by carrying it in my hands. But that sure gave me good exercise.

### **Liquor Runs to Grodno**

The whiskey that my father and his partner were selling in the village was bought in Amdur, in the wholesale liquor place. They bought a barrel of about 30 gallons at a time. The liquor which they bought had a certain strength of 40 percent. But then they brought it to the village, and the first thing that was done was take out five gallons of whiskey and put in five gallons of pure water. Some of the farmers began to complain that the vodka was not strong enough. If there was among the farmers a wedding, a funeral, or a birth, they went to the wholesale place in Amdur and bought the real vodka, 40 percent. So my father and his partner were losing that business. After a year or so we began to use bottled vodka.

There was a concern in Grodno under the name of Shereshensky that had a distilling plant for bottled vodka. All the farmers called it Sorokovka. It meant 40 percent, distilled in the bottle. That was my job to go to Grodno with a farmer and a horse and wagon to get that bottled liquor. That distillery was in the city of Grodno proper.

A small part of the city was on one side of the river Neiman. It was called Fershtoy, before the city. Most businesses and the government were west of the river. It was quite a job, especially in the fall, to cross that river. As I explained before, between the seasons, summer and winter, the crossing was done on a small barge. A platform was laid on top of the barge, with railings around it. All it would accommodate was 5 or 6 teams of horses and wagons. The round trip would last about one hour.

It was torture to stay on the bank of the river and wait for the barge to take you across. Sometimes, you were waiting for the barge to take you across, and when you were waiting in line and your turn came to get on, then a strong voice came, "make way, a high celebrity official must go first." So then you had to wait again for an hour or so. Meanwhile, the cold November wind is cutting into you. From April 15th until October 15th, a pontoon bridge was erected, and we were driving on it. Also, from about December 15th until about March 1st we used to drive over ice. Then there was no waiting.

Coming down toward the river there was a very steep grade on either side of the river. It used to be dangerous to go down that hill, especially with a farmer's country horse and wagon. The outfit of the farmer's harness had no hold-back, and the wagon came down on the horses feet. It often happened it would run away down the hill. That was the street with houses on each side. On one side of the street was the large army barracks of the 104th Regiment infantry. At the end of the street, on the edge of the river, the street had a sharp turn to the left, following the shore on level ground for about one block. That prevented the rigs from going into the river.

My father didn't like to go to Grodno after the vodka, so it became my steady job, every two weeks to go. I used to go out in the evening to be there in the morning. Sometimes the partner's boy went with me, but in the winter he refused to go as he couldn't stand the cold. Once he went with me, and we had the farmer with us. He was driving in a sledge. It was a terribly cold night, possibly 25 to 30 below zero. When I began to feel cold, I used to jump out of the sleigh and walk or run following the rig. So I used to warm up. But the partner's boy was sitting on his buttocks. He nearly froze his feet. Since then, he didn't go again if it was very cold.

In Grodno the bakers used to bake good tasty rolls. In Bialystok the bakers had a good name because of their flat round Kuchens. They had a good taste and flavor. Coming home from Grodno I always bought rolls, and sometimes I bought fish, a few pounds. Small ones, like sardines or smelts. My mother cooked them sweet and sour. I still have the taste in my mouth. The price was reasonable, about 15 kopeks a pound.

Kopeks were very scarce, when you take into consideration the men in the village who went to work for the estate owner to plow in the fall of the year, when he had not much to do on his own farm, was working for 20 to 25 kopeks for a full 8 or 10 hour day. And he fed himself. Consider the farmer boys. They wanted to take out a girl to a dance, whether in the same village or in the neighboring village, and they needed money to buy drinks. So they used to go to work around the estates, which were around three or four miles distant, and work to have spending money. When they came to the dance with their girl, they had a good time, in the beginning, dancing and drinking and making whoopee. In the end, they would get into a fight. That was the end of their good time. The next day they used to be black and blue on their faces. That was their life in the villages.

## **Household Chores**

In our house, father was always interested in his books, especially during the long winter nights. When the farmers didn't come in to buy drinks he sat many times over his books until two o'clock in the morning. Mother, when she got through with the supper, she had some company. She used to make stockings for the farmer women. They brought her the yarn which they spun themselves. She made stockings for them. She made them with long knitting needles or pins, and she kept busy. They paid her

for her work in barter – sometimes a chicken, eggs, or cooking cereal, which they always made themselves. In the summer they would trade some vegetables which they raised. But as for cash, very seldom. My sister, she kept busy with sewing, making shirts for me, or underwear. Until I was 16 or 17, I didn't wear any underwear.

My routine included many chores. Prayers in the morning was the first order of the day. Then I went to feed the cow. The barn was in the yard of the third farmer in the village. In one of his stables we kept the cow. Then I brought the water into the house with pails from the well. It was some distance from the house. We had a barrel that held about 25 or 30 gallons. When I filled her it was a supply for two days. It was kept in the house to prevent freezing in the winter. Also, I was the expert in making the fire in the small oven. In our rooms we were burning torp, which was dug from the marshes in the spring. When mother or my sister made the fire, it wouldn't burn right. There was no life to the flame. Then they would call on Shevach, "See what you can do with it." So I used to put out all the torp from the oven and build a new fire. In short time it was warm. We were careful how to use the damper. To close it was dangerous – that fuel had a peculiar stinking gas, and it would make a person very sick. When I was finished with all my jobs, I did a little reading and writing for my lessons from my father. I used to get, in the evening, a large kerosene lamp that was standing on the table to give us light. It was my job to keep it clean. During the day I cleaned the glass chimney, filled the reservoir with kerosene and cleaned the wick to be ready for the evening.

### **Preparing for Shabbos**

Friday, all day, my mother was busy, especially in the winter when the days were short. First, she baked challah in the large oven, of course for the Sabbath. Those were the only days we had white wheat bread, Saturdays and the Holy Days. During week days we ate dark rye pumpernickel. After she had the challah ready, she began to prepare the evening meal for Friday night. This was composed of sometimes chicken or meat soup with noodles with a small piece of chicken or meat. Then a tzimes of carrot and turnips with a little fat in it. Included in the tzimes was a skin of the neck of the chicken, or a round piece of dough with a lot of pieces of fat in it. It tasted very delicious, especially because I was hungry from preparing for the meal all day Friday.

Then she also began to prepare the meal for Saturday noon, as it is prohibited to cook on the Sabbath. On Friday afternoon she made a good fire in the large oven, and prepared the following: potatoes, dry beans or peas, and a little barley or pearl groats. Also, a piece of meat and some salt. All of this was put in one pot. Then she made a pudding. Broad noodles, rice, or buckwheat groats. That was put in an earthen pot, just like the flower pots we use here in the U.S., but that one had no hole in the bottom. She put a lot of fat in that composition. Then, before sundown she put the pots in the oven. Our partner's wife also prepared their meal for the next day and used the same oven. Then, before they lighted the Shabbos candles, they sealed the mouth of the oven with a thick board, made for that purpose. Then they sealed the mouth of the oven with wet clay so that the heat shall not escape. It remained there until the next day, noontime, when the family was through with prayers and ready for the meal. It was a very heavy meal. It was called cholent.

Another dish was used, called foot noge. You take the foot of a steer, from the knee down to the hoof, and put it in boiling water to make it clean of the hair and hoof. Then chop it in small pieces and cook it with onions and garlic. Then set it in a cool place and until it has congealed. Some people liked it very much. I used to say it was good once in 25 years.

The preparation for the Sabbath was as follows. Everybody, while the sun was setting, stopped doing whatever he was doing, and began to cleanse himself. In town, many people went to the public steam bath. There was plenty of steam and hot water. That was done Friday afternoon, before sun down. Then they went to the synagogue for prayers. But in the villages we had no steam baths. And we didn't go to the minion in the next village in the winter, as the snow was too deep, and it was cold. So we used to clean up and wash ourselves with luke warm water and put on a clean shirt and then we were ready for the Sabbath. There were afternoon prayers, Sabbath evening prayers, and special prayers for the Sabbath

day. It took about two hours until we got through with the prayers on Sabbath evening. Then we were ready for the Sabbath evening meal.

My mother, she prayed as well as we – she was well educated in the prayers. Father made Kaddish over a glass of brandy, or sometimes over the challah, and we were ready to eat. The meal was composed of, as I said before, soup with noodles, some meat or chicken, white challah, and tzimes. Between courses we used to sing Hebrew songs, especially on Friday evening. The meal with the songs lasted about two hours. Then the prayers again at the end of the meal. We didn't use the kerosene lamp on Friday evening, only the Sabbath candles. When the lights went out, everybody went to bed, as we were not allowed to light a fire on the Sabbath. When the fire went out in the oven, which heated the rooms, it was freezing cold. We were in our fur coats during the day, until the evening stars appeared in the sky, and then we made another fire. On Saturday morning everybody slept a little later. Father, as soon as he was up, he began to pray. There was so much of it on the Sabbath. The first section, then reading the portion of the week in the five books of Moses – not once, but three times – then the additional prayers. That lasted nearly to the middle of the day. By then, everybody was good and hungry, as no one was allowed to eat before the prayers were finished. After father made the benediction over a glass of brandy, the meal was served. Mother opened the seal on the oven. The pot with the potatoes and beans was transferred into dishes. I must say, it was delicious. Of course we were all very hungry. It was a real cholent. The potatoes and beans were brown and it was a very heavy meal. Although I was young and my stomach was good, after I filled up with that cholent I didn't feel like eating until the next day.

During the noon meal there was special singing done by my father. I helped with the singing. After dinner my father used to lie down for a snooze for about two hours. When he awoke, he took to the books and kept me right near him. There was more reading and translation: first the portion of the week, with the commentaries, which are many. Then part of the Prophets and the Psalms. That kept up through the afternoon. Again, there were afternoon prayers, and then a light meal. A Jew was supposed to have three meals during the Sabbath. One on Friday evening, and two meals during the day. On Saturday evening, when the stars appeared, the Sabbath was ended with a lot of singing of religious songs. Then I made a fire in the oven, and we warmed up. We put up the samovar for tea, and when the samovar began to boil, it was put on the table. It was fired by charcoal. Everybody sat around and drank hot tea. Not sweet, but with one lump sugar. Father, wearing his skull cap, and over his books, would drink five, six or seven glasses of tea. That washed down that heavy meal from noontime.

### **Changing of the Seasons**

They were long dreary days and nights during the long winters. Beginning about the first of December until nearly May first there was no traveling on wheels – only by sleighs. The snow was four or five feet deep most of the time. Sometimes during the week I used to go down to Amdur and stay there for the day, and go to Grodno once in every two or three weeks. But in the summer it was different. I was on the go all the time. When good weather set in I used to go fishing with the farmer boys. Not with a hook and line, but with a small net. There was a good size river about two miles distant. In some places it was quite deep. There were good tasty fish of different kinds in there, and that's where I learned to swim. Sometimes I was away all day, fishing and picking berries. When fall came I used to help some farmers with their harvest of the grain. Although they didn't need my help, I used to hang around them. I didn't like to hang in the house and be nagged by my father with books and religious instruction.

### **The Fruit Orchard**

One of our partner's sons was working in a leather factory. There was a place, an estate which was called Kustin near Kusnetsky. Jewish people had that estate, and they had there a factory to prepare leather for shoes. They had about 25 young men working in that factory. They had a lot of land and buildings, living quarters for all the help, and also a large mansion for themselves to live in. There was an orchard with a lot of fruit trees, but the owner never bothered to harvest the fruit crop and sell it. Jews

from town came to the owner and looked over the orchard about June, so they would have an idea of how the crop was going to be. They offered a price for the right to harvest the fruit crop for the season. Sometime they made good money on the deal. The partner's son decided that he would try to go into the fruit business. So he came with a proposition. Him, his brother the same age as me, and me, we would go in the fruit business, and buy the crop from the owner. Possibly we can make a few rubles during the season for our labor. Around an orchard there was a lot of work. First, as soon as the early fruit gets ripe, you have to become a watchman, especially during the night. Otherwise, the farmers and their boys will fall on the orchard like flies on molasses, and in a few days there will be nothing left for the man to pick. Some large orchards employed many men to watch at night and pick during the day. In many orchards there used to be big fights. The boys used to come in gangs and they were ready for a fight if the watchers interfered with them. So the partner's boys and me took up the proposition. About the middle of July we were there as watchmen for the early fruit.

This estate was about 20 miles from Kosley. So we both took our belongings and we walked over there. In the middle of the orchard there was standing a hut made of boards with a roof on it. That was the place for the orchard man to sleep or to be out of the rain, and in the meantime to keep watch that no one breaks in at night and picks some fruit. Our food we were cooking on an open fireplace in the orchard near the hut. There was a dairyman on that estate, just like my brother near Amdur. We used to get dairy products from him. On Saturdays, we ate at his table the noon meal. Many of the men who were working in the factory boarded there. They paid so much per meal, and so did we on Saturday.

The partner's boy and me were the watchers at night. We took turns. Each one had his night to watch, and in case of trouble, either one would give the alarm. But we had no trouble. There was on the estate a foreman or manager in the farming department. He was a Jew and had a wife and two small children. They also had a serving girl or woman. After she became acquainted with me, she told me that she came from Grodno. One night after midnight, while I was on watch, I noticed someone is coming toward me. I saw it was her and she came close to me. She said "Did I scare you? You are a young and innocent boy." Of course, my heart was beating hard as I was still innocent. But by the way she acted, she was experienced at it. She sat down on the grass near me and she motioned to me, as if to say, "Don't be a fool, sit down; I won't eat you." So I sat down, not close to her, but she got close to me. She began to tell me that she was lonesome by herself in her room, while everybody was asleep in the house. Of course, my heart was beating faster and the temptation was great. She was smiling at me, and put her hand at my head. In a short while I was in her arms and our nude bodies met. One night she came and had with her a small bottle of honey, and some cakes which she used to bake for the people she served. But that plan didn't last long. After about a week she disappeared from the estate.

I was told that the manager found that she was running around with men, so she was discharged and went back to Grodno. I suppose she went to one of the public brothels, of which there were many in the city of Grodno. They were allowed by the government as a convenience for the army. In Grodno was stationed the 26th Division of infantry, a cavalry regiment, and sappers. In all the big cities, wherever there was an army barracks or camp, there were public houses with many women for the accommodation of soldiers and officers. They were all licensed by the government, and often the women were examined by military doctors that none of them should be diseased. In the army every man was examined by the regimental doctor once a month for venereal diseases.

About the first of August the early fruit began to be ready to be picked. These were summer pears and apples. In three days we nearly had them all picked. We got a farmer with a rig, and we took the crop to Kusnetsky. There were women that were selling fruits in the market place every day, they bought out everything we had. When we were coming toward September, there were a lot of trees with ripe blue plums. So we picked them and took them down to Grodno. There, the fruit dealers had their places in cellars. Then too, the same, the women were conducting the fruit business, and they bought us out. That time I went to Grodno with the partner's son who worked in the leather factory. After we sold out, we went in to a restaurant and had our meal. As he was well acquainted with all the public places in the city, we visited one of them, and then we went back to the orchard.

The winter fruit we didn't pick until after the Jewish New Year. That was the first time I was away from home on Rosh Hashanah. There was a minion on the estate right in the mansion. While at home, we always went to Amdur, the whole family, for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We stayed with my uncle the baker for the three days. No pious Jew was willing to be isolated among farmers during the three days of the High Holidays. They wanted to pray in a real synagogue and listen to a good chazan (cantor). Right after Rosh Hashanah, we picked the winter apples. A man with a rig came and bought the whole thing. We were to pay whatever came in to the owner of the estate. After all the figures, we didn't make much. But, I as a young boy, I went through some good experiences. I was home for Yom Kippur. If my father would have known before hand about my conduct over there, he would never have given his consent for me to undertake that job there.

**END OF PART I**