

# FROM MOTOL TO CHICAGO

*An Autobiography*

*by*

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*1902 - 1976*

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## Chapter One: My Home

This that I will write here, is about my life in the *Alter Heim*<sup>1</sup>. It is good to remind myself about my former young years. Now I have enough time since I have decided that I have worked enough. But one must do something; I think this is a good piece of work for me, to write an account of my life. Now I will begin to write.

I was bom in Tabulok, a village near Motele in Russia (currently Poland). Now as I remind myself of my baby-sitter there, it is truly a miracle that I can now write about myself. She was an old gentile woman, exhausted even before she came to work. Firstly, she made a "kukli", a pacifier as it is called in America. Now I will tell you how she made the "kukli". She took a black piece of bread and a few pieces of sugar, chewed it up, then wrapped it in some cloth and stuffed it into the mouth; "sha, sha". Now as I remind myself, I think my mother never saw this as she was always busy and exhausted, cooking and baking through the night. She had no time during the day, she had other work. She used to sell a little snaps goods for dresses, everything secretly. It was forbidden to sell without a permit but she never took a "back seat".

Then she had more work. Almost every day, wagon drivers used to pass, and stop to rest by us. They traveled to Pinsk from Motele. My mother fed all of them, never leaving out potatoes, pickles, and black bread. She never took pay, it was always her pleasure, and so they came every day.

Then she had other business. Every Thursday she traveled to Motele by horse and buggy, a distance of ten "vieart", to get meat for *Shabbos*. They used to load eight – ten calves on the wagon. My mother traveled alone to the butcher in the city. The *shoichet*<sup>2</sup> slaughtered, the butcher prepared, and then my mother got busy looking for poor people to divide the calves. She didn't care how much she brought home as long as the poor had. This was her pleasure. This was my mother, how I wish she was living. I would give this to her to read, the good things I remember about her. How was she able to do all this? My father also had a hand in this. He never encouraged much but he had the greatest pleasure quietly in his heart. He knew he had whom to rely on.

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<sup>1</sup> The old country

<sup>2</sup>A person certified to perform the slaughtering of a kosher animal

Now I will write about my father. He was a quiet angel; one never heard a loud word from him. He never bothered a fly on the wall. He used to rise early while it was still dark. He would say the whole *tehillim*<sup>1</sup>, then *Daven*<sup>2</sup>, take a bite and he would be off to the shop. This is how it was every day, from darkness to darkness.

This was our home. We were nine – ten people, plus some poor people but we never lacked food. If we had bread, potatoes and pickles, then we were rich since these were the best foods. We made the best foods from potatoes. The first thing to eat was potatoes with peels, second – peeled potatoes, third – with soup, all this with pickles. I see now in America that these were the best foods, better than American meat.

I remember that when it was *Erev Shabbos*, my father used to send my brother to put an *Eruv*<sup>3</sup>. Near our village was another village called Poritze – a distance of four “vieart”. There was a *minyana*<sup>4</sup> there; we used to go *Daven* there every *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*<sup>5</sup>. We includes my father, my two older brothers and myself. We did not ride but rather walked back and forth. Not like here in America; if one has to go two blocks to *Shul*, he rides in a car and all is Kosher. Unfortunately there are no such people anymore.

Then I remember that as my father *Davened*, the walls would tremble because he *Davened* from the heart. I was a young boy then, even so my heart fell apart from my father's *Davening*. We felt *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*. Now I see why my fellow townspeople tell me that I had a grandfather, how he *Davened* by the *Amud*<sup>6</sup>, they have not yet heard here in America a Cantor Daven as he did. I do not remember my grandfather but this I do remember; my father was greatly honored. They used to say "The Tabulker, Moshe Fishel's son, a fine man". Now as I remember all this, I am very happy. The same was for my mother. Rifka the

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<sup>1</sup>Psalms

<sup>2</sup>Pray

<sup>3</sup>A piece of bread (enough for two meals) placed on the side of the road before a distance of 2000 cubits to enable one to walk further than the 2000 cubits past a village normally permitted to walk on *Shabbos*

<sup>4</sup>A group of ten people required for *davening* together

<sup>5</sup>Holidays

<sup>6</sup>Pulpit where the cantor stands

Tabulker. They were both honored greatly. Due to them the children were also honored. I had fine parents, fine sisters and brothers, five sisters and four brothers but unfortunately, only three of us are left from the whole family. My two sisters and I are here in America. We have the holy names after them.

Now I will write a little about my two sisters, they should live and be well with their husbands, children and grandchildren for a hundred and twenty years. They have good husbands and good children. I have one sister that follows in mother's footsteps - she deals with Rabbis and thus with *Mitzvahs*<sup>1</sup>. Like this we can be healthy and live a hundred and twenty years. Lots of times she is sick but if she does a good thing, she becomes healthy right away, let G-d help her. My brother-in-law also follows in my father's footsteps. He goes to *Shul* every day. I have a lot of pleasure from this.

Now I will write about myself. Let's start with my childhood. I liked horses very much, which disturbed my learning. Only now do I realize this but it is a little too late. Like we say, wisdom comes after the years.

As my father was a blacksmith, near his shop the *Goyim*<sup>2</sup> would come with their horses to put on horseshoes. They would bring corn or potatoes or something else and I would show them where to put it down. I would go with them back and forth and so I got to like them (the horses). The *Goyim* had no money so they would bring a treat for the worker and I was the receiver of the goods. This is how my great liking to the horses came to be. Then they would sit me on the horses while they were riding. This made me like them even more. I would walk around all bruised. I would fall down, pick myself up and climb up again. Nothing would stop me. I became so popular by the *Goyim* that they gave me a name, "Japanese", because the Japanese are very capable. I didn't need more than this. I became more capable than before and even more bruised.

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<sup>1</sup> Good deeds

<sup>2</sup> Gentiles

## Chapter Two: Off to Cheder

Now I will write about my learning. I had a *Rebbe*<sup>1</sup> for a while in the house. This didn't work out because the horses were in the way (being near the horses disturbed my learning). Afterward, I went to a nearby village, a distance of two "vieart", to a family that had a *Rebbe*. The village was called Tzemeron. This also did not work out as it was too close to home. Now I understand what my parents went through with me.

Next I was taken to Motele, which was already quite a distance. My mother arranged an apartment for sleeping and eating and a *Rebbe* and *Cheder*<sup>2</sup>. She then kissed me, said to me "Be well my child", and went home. I stood there heartbroken - I couldn't hold myself back. I went to a corner and cried bitterly. The *Balabuste*<sup>3</sup> came over to me and calmed me down a little. There was nothing I could do now.

Then my *Balabuste* cooked supper. We sat down to eat. Believe me, the food did not interest me. All I had in mind was Home. After supper I went outside until it got dark. Then the *Balabuste* called me to go to bed. She had prepared my bed and I was off to sleep. I was very tired.

An accident occurred at night. I turned and rolled off the bed and hurt myself. At home we had homemade mattresses as there were no factories in the small towns. We took hay or straw and stuffed it into a sack and this was the mattress. The *Balabuste* was not stingy because my mother left her plenty of hay for the mattress. As the sack was too high and the bench too narrow, I rolled off. My *Balabuste* took a knife to push down on the bruises and put on a cold compress and released me from the "hospital". I remember this happened on Sunday because my mother used to come to the city Thursday and by then, everything was healed.

The next day, I went to *Cheder* and did my best for a few days. I didn't have another choice - I was too far from home. Then came Thursday. I waited for my mother to come see me but she didn't come. My heart filled with sadness. I didn't want to ask the *Rebbe*. I could hardly wait to get home. When I got home, the *Balabuste* told me my mother couldn't come - she would come next Thursday. Lost cause - I was too far from home and couldn't do anything about it.

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<sup>1</sup> Jewish teacher

<sup>2</sup> Traditional elementary school in the old country which consisted of only one class and a *Rebbe*.

<sup>3</sup> The woman who provided room and board

The next day, Friday, I took the black bread with jelly. I took these sandwiches and went on pretending nothing had happened. Later, the *Rebbe* sat down next to me and said to me, "You are learning so well, you have a good head. If you learn well, the angels will throw money for you." On Monday, this happened. The angels threw money for me. The *Rebbe* sneaked to the back and suddenly, kopecks were falling. This went on for a few days until suddenly, one day a boy screamed out, "*Rebbe*, throw me also a kopeck." I pretended like I didn't know what was going on, and waited for my mother to come on Thursday. My mother came to *Cheder* and hugged and kissed me. The *Rebbe* said to my mother, "Your son has a precious head, the angels are throwing him money." I shouted, "*Rebbe*, you are a liar." Despite the great embarrassment and trouble I caused my mother, she laughed. From then on, I didn't believe him. I understood that it was a made-up thing, that when she hired the *Rebbe*, she gave him a few kopecks to throw. In the old country, no one threw money, neither the *Rebbs* nor the angels, because they all were poor.

A few weeks passed and everything was quiet. Then, my mother gave me a break and took me home for *Shabbos*. But that didn't work out too well for her, because Sunday she had to take me back to the city and I was nowhere to be found. I was hiding for a few days in the silo. One time, I sneaked into the house to eat something. I was caught, and the following day, I was in the city again, in *Cheder*.

The taste that I got, of Home, made things worse. I stopped listening to the *Rebbe* all together. I would go to the bathroom and spend extra time there. I saw on the *Rebbe's* face that he didn't like it but, I pretended like I was unaware. This took place on Wednesday. On Thursday, my mother came to *Cheder*. She didn't have much business with me, because she was still angry at me for the job that I pulled off at home the previous weekend. She spoke to the *Rebbe* for a short while, kissed me and left. The following day, Friday, I again did a few tricks. Now I could already see the anger on his face.

On *Shabbos*, when I went to *Shul*, I got to know a few kids and we made up to meet after dinner. So, where do you go to spend your time? We decided to go to the *Shul*. At the *Shul*, we talked for a while but, how long can kids just sit and talk. So, we got busy. Every man in the *Shul*, had his own *shtender* with his name written on it. We began moving around the *shtenders* to cause confusion. In the middle of all this, the *Shamash*<sup>1</sup> walked in. His name was Aba. He should forgive me for saying this, but, he was a bad tempered man. He didn't say a word, just took a towel, tied a knot at one end and began spanking us. We were hardly able to run away.

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<sup>1</sup> caretaker

The weekend passed. Monday, when I got to *Cheder*, I noticed a *luckshin* on the table. The *luckshin* was like a whip. It was made of a small stick with three or four straps at the end. This was supposed to be used on us when we would be bad. We began learning, and after a short while, I left to go to the bathroom. As always I prolonged. The *Rebbe* came out to me and told me that if I ever do it again, he will no longer let me out to the bathroom. He then grabbed me by the neck with his *luckshin*.

I didn't need more than that, and as soon as he turned away, I was outside again. A few hours later, I came back because I decided that it was too much already, and I was afraid of my mother. I came to the window of the house, and cut a deal with him that if he would not hit me, I would come back into *Cheder*. From then on there was no peace between us.

A few days later, we again had an argument. The *Rebbe* again gave me a spanking. This time I was mad and I decided on a brand new plan. Since Motele was situated near a river, a ship would often come from Pinsk to bring all sorts of things for the merchants. As the ship would pull in, it would whistle a few times. When I would hear the whistle, I would open the door of the *Cheder* and yell, "Boys, the ship is coming." The boys would leave the *Rebbe*, and run after me to the river. Once there, we would roll up our pant cuffs and go into the water. The *Rebbe* would run after us, but he couldn't go into the water. He would run around on the shore like a hen running after her chickens. He would scream, "I will get even with you." Imagine what happened to us when we would come out of the water. But, I was not alone.

That was the way those days in *Cheder* went. We would be there from dark until dark, and every day it was something else. I remind myself now how we would walk home from *Cheder* at night with lanterns because it was so dark. When the semester was over, my mother found me another *Rebbe*. This time I had room and board in the same house as my *Rebbe* lived. The *Rebbe* was now called Teacher. This signified a higher level of learning. I thought to myself that since I know so much that I am on a higher level, then surely I deserve a vacation. But, my mother didn't think much of it. She didn't have a vacation in mind for me. She probably still remembered the last time she gave me a vacation, when I ran away and hid.

Now I was already learning by this teacher. Everything was working out well. I learned well and he would tell my mother about it and praise me. He would tell her how I had such a good head and that I understood everything. But, going home was a different story. My mother just ignored my requests.

Now I was insulted, here I am learning so well and my mother knows about it and she is just ignoring me. I began planning what to do about my situation until I came upon a plan. Every Thursday when my mother came to the city, she would come see me. As soon as she left the *Cheder*, I waited a little and also left. I ran to the end of the city, hid behind a building and waited for my mother's wagon. As she came close, I threw a stone at the building and broke a window. The owners stopped my



mother, and she had to get a glacier to put a new glass into the window. Now she was angry at me and she didn't want to take me home. She rode off without me. I began chasing the wagon until about halfway home, she took pity on me and took me on the wagon. After all, a mother is a mother

I missed home very much. My soul longed for home, the horses, the calves, the animals and the dogs. Not only did I not have all of those things in the city but, I was also in a strange house with strange people. I see that the children here also have hobbies, but, at least they are in their own home. If I had the sense that I possess today, I would have acted differently.

I finished the semester but, things were not good. I kept on doing the same mischievous things to get home. Once home, I would always have to wander, in the barn in the hay. That was the life of the *Yeshivanik*'s children, I was always afraid that if I came into the house, I would get a spanking.

I want to mention another thing about the city. There were two *Shuls* in Motele. Every Shabbos morning, we boys would go to *Shul* and *daven*. After dinner, since we had nothing to do, we would gather in the *Shuls* and have meetings. How long does a meeting last with children? So, we would then find something to do. We would turn the *shtenders* over and hide them behind the benches. Whatever we did was not for "free". We "paid" dearly for it, we got plenty of spankings. The caretaker, he should forgive me, was such a person. He would never let a child into the *Shul*, even if outside it was freezing. As soon as he would find a child in *Shul*, he would take a long towel, tie a knot, and begin spanking, But, the more he spanked, the more trouble we made, just to spite him. The other *Shul* was all together different. It was a pleasure to be there. We sat there without bothe ring even a fly. The caretaker here was a fine man, may he rest in *Gan Eden*. His name was Berel. He would even sit down and enjoy himself with us. We in turn would help him bring in wood to heat the stove.

This is how I ended the learning of my younger years, and how I occupied my younger years with wise things and foolish things.

### Chapter Three: Back to the Farm

I came home and immediately got busy with the things that I had missed while I was away in *Cheder*. I went to the stable, took out a horse and rode off. This was my greatest pleasure. Then, I took out the second horse to give the first one a break, because we had two horses. This was great for me, and I had no complaints. My parents, on the other hand, looked at matters very differently. They wanted to know what will become of me.

They took me to the shop to learn how to be a blacksmith. This didn't work out since I was too close to my "pleasure", the horses. So they began thinking about another trade. Since my oldest brother was a blacksmith and my second brother was a tailor, it was only proper that I should be a shoemaker. What could I do, if this was what they wanted then, let it be a shoemaker.

The next day, we left for the city, my mother and I. My mother gave away her "bargain" (meaning me) to the shoemaker for only room and board (that was my pay) because she was happy that someone was willing to teach me the trade. She also promised to bring him some corn and potatoes the next time she came into the city.

The following day he began to teach me. The first thing he taught me was how to make a "drort". This was the first thing in the shoemaking line that you had to know. This was the process of polishing the leather. First, you had to put pig's hair in the edges and then you had to wax the leather. If you could do this, then you were already on the way to becoming a shoemaker. Then, I had to sew a "roloveh". All of this did not last too long, because it did not interest me in the least bit.

Now, my brother the tailor already began getting involved with my life. He would ask me "What is going to become of you, you don't take interest in any work at all. I too work, why do you think that you are special?" My brother was different than I was, he was of a much quieter type and therefore he took his work differently. There was another reason that his situation was different than mine. The tailor who he worked for had four daughters, and he was in love with one of them, and so he didn't miss his home so much. After a short while, he married her and his boss became his father-in-law. Now he was completely cold blooded toward home, and he couldn't understand my feelings at all.

I left the shoemaking business to return, as they say "no longer a bride, again a single girl". I came home, and my parents said nothing to me about the matter. I guess that they were already tired of talking. Now, I had to find work. I managed to find work that I enjoyed doing. At that time my father had *Goyim* farming the land for us. They would plant and sow corn and potatoes for us. The land itself didn't

belong to us. Next to where we lived, there was a farm which belonged to a *Poritz*<sup>1</sup>. We rented a piece of land from him and in turn he would get one quarter of the produce. We would keep the other three quarters. Since I was only eleven years old at that time, I couldn't handle farming myself, so I became a farmer's helper. This was exactly what I wanted, now I was doing work in the field, and I would be able to be near the horses. After a short while, I became a better farmer than the *Goyim*. Since the ground was good for farming, whatever I planted grew like yeast (a phrase – how quickly it grew). After a short while when my friends saw me, they didn't recognize me, I was a full grown man. Had I liked learning as much as I liked farming, I wouldn't Klap Chotosi<sup>2</sup>. But, what's the use talking, that's life.

Now that I look back on the past, I realize that the fact that I didn't learn and I landed up on the farm was for the good. As we Jews have a phrase, "From the bad comes the good". As my father was a blacksmith, he needed a lot of coal for his shop. He would travel to where the coal was produced, in Svente Vohl, which was far away from our house. It was situated near Talichon. During the summer he would have to take the long route, around the river, but, during the winter he would cross the river, a much shorter route, since it would become ice. During one such journey while crossing the river, the ice gave and my father fell into the water with his horse and wagon. As a result, he got wet and caught a bad cold. From then on he coughed very much. He never recovered from that illness and was never again fit to work. My older brother was married already, so I became the breadwinner and with my farming skills there was always enough to eat in the house.

Since my father did not feel well, we decided that we already had enough of the village. First we figured that we would move to America with our whole family. We began to inquire, and were advised that it would be better to go to Israel. Since we had a large family, good workers, and we knew how to farm, Israel was the place for us. We got busy right away. We sold all of our belongings, packed the baggage, and sent it off. The following morning we awoke, and prepared to leave. As we were about to leave, we saw posters announcing that the Germans and Russians were at war, and we were caught in the middle. My brother, knowing that we would never be able to leave the country safely, took a horse from a *Goy* and quickly rode off to Yaneveh where he caught our baggage at the station. When he returned, we took everything and went to Motele where we rented an apartment and stayed.

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<sup>1</sup>A rich non-Jew landowner

<sup>2</sup>Repent for the sins that I committed throughout my younger years

## Chapter Four: The War Years

Now began the chapter of the war. In a matter of only a few days, the Cossacks were already in our city. I remember as if it were now, how three Cossacks rode up to our house and asked my mother for something to eat. My mother invited them in and fed them. One of them began speaking in Yiddish. He told us that there would be a government change, an uprising. He told us to leave the city and be sure to take enough belongings with us because he did not know how long the fighting would last.

Since we had sold all of our belongings, we didn't even have a horse and wagon to enable us to leave the city with our baggage. We immediately went out, bought a horse and wagon, put all of our baggage on the wagon and waited. Not only did we do this, all of the people in the city did the same. Two days later, shells began flying. We immediately ran away behind the river, into the forest. We stayed there for approximately two weeks. We then came back into the city. Then after a week we again had to leave the city. This went on and on. One week we were in the city, and then the following week we had to run away and hide in the forest.

As I write, I reminded myself of something. While in the forest, the Germans were occupying the area that we were in. They would ride up to us on their horses. They would speak to us in German. They were nice men. The only thing they ever did was, occasionally change horses with us. They would leave us their horses and take ours. After a while, I befriended them. As we were already running out of food, I begged the Germans to allow us to go to the city and find some food. When we arrived near the city, the shooting was so intense that we were too frightened to enter. It was already becoming dark, and we did not get any food yet. As we were walking we decided that we would go by Nuske the writer's house. We knew that Nuske had cherries and we figured that on our way back we had to pass his house anyway so, we would stop by and get some to take back to the forest. But so many rockets were flying that it was frightening to even go to Nuske's house. Now, as I write, I think about how crazy we were then, how we risked our lives.

The shooting slowed down a bit and we entered Nuske's house. While there, we reminded ourselves that he also had jam. We found a door in the floor which led to the basement, and we went down. We began searching in the dark because if we would light a fire, we would be caught and shot immediately. After searching for a while, we found the jam. We loaded our sacks with the jars and left. We still had to cross a stream to get back to our families so, we took off our pants so that they wouldn't get wet. This sounds like loads of fun...a pity on people that have to go through such "fun", but, this is what we went through.

The front was now situated approximately five miles from near a city called Lahishin. There, the Germans and Russians fought for about three and a half years. We were on the German side. Since the Germans were dug in, and they knew that they would be there for a while, they took all of the men and put them to work. As far as they were concerned, everyone had to work. The men with the better horses

and wagons were sent to the front to work, and the weaker ones were put to work near the city. They knew how to put people to work. They told us that we would be gone for a week and that we should take along enough supplies for ourselves and for the horses. We had no idea where we were being led to. We were never allowed to go anywhere ourselves, we were always escorted by a soldier.

As soon as we arrived at our destination, we were immediately put to work. They didn't lose a minute. The area was a forest, and we began to clear it to make place for barracks. This was behind the battlefield, because civilians were not allowed at the front. The stronger men were told to cut down the trees, and the weaker ones cleared the fallen trees. The following day, we already had a place to sleep and keep the horses at night. Every morning, we would hitch up the horses to the wagons, and the Germans themselves would transport the timbers to the front because civilians were not allowed at the battlefield. We would just cut the timbers into smaller pieces, clean them and load them on the wagons. I think that we were worse off than the people near the front because, the Russians used to shoot rocket shells, and they would fall near us. They would travel under the ground and then suddenly explode. The explosion would shake the ground so, that we would fall over. At times the blast would kick up so much earth that our eyes got full of sand and we wouldn't be able to open them. There was no water nearby to enable us to clean our eyes.

Now as I am writing about our situation in those days, a chill goes up my spine. I think that while the fighting was going on, it didn't bother me as much as it does now. Maybe I had better blood in those days.

We came home on the following *Shabbos*. We slept over the night, and on the following morning we packed our bags and went to the market place. At the market place, we had to report to the commander because we would all leave from there together. As I was standing near my wagon, I saw someone leading horses without wagons. The German commander went over and showed him which wagons to lead the horses to. The commander then had us hitch the horses to our wagons, and he told the man that if he wanted he could go along or he could stay home. The man's name was Marktro the Black. I remember as if it were now, how I told him, "I don't want to take care of your horses for nothing, I want to be paid". He answered me, "How much do you want, fifty kopecks? I will give you twenty-five". I told him that it was no deal so he just got onto the wagon beside me. The German was already on his horse and he commanded us to follow him.

When we arrived at our work site, it was already dark so we had to eat supper. To prepare supper, we had to cook. I was already an old timer, so I went out of the barrack, picked some fire wood, started a fire in the barrack and cooked supper. The supper consisted of kasha (buckwheat) which I shared with Marktro. I gave him half and I took the other half and we sat down to eat. Marktro couldn't take the smoke in the barrack from my fire so he went out of the barrack to finish his meal. He sat himself on the wagon and put the pt on his knee and continued eating. All of a sudden, a rocket slammed into something near our barrack. The explosion was so loud that I thought we were already torn to pieces. I ran out of the

barrack and I saw Marktro laying on the ground next to the wagon with the pot laying next to him and he is screaming, "My wife and children! My wife and children!" The force of the blast made him lose his mind and as a result, he fell off of the wagon. I tried quieting him down for fear of the German soldiers because whoever made noise would get hit. They were afraid that the noise would give away their position so they were careful to keep everyone quiet. Marktro kept on screaming all night long. He barely made it until the end of the week when we finally came home. He didn't come along again. This was the way we lived near the front in those days.

Several weeks later, the situation improved somewhat. The Germans found out through the *Goyim* of our village that we used to live there. Since they had no way of communicating with the *Goyim* of the village, they asked us if we would like to move back to the village and be interpreters. We agreed, and went back to our old village. Since we had sold our house, we had to move into a different house. There were a lot of empty houses around because when the Russians ran away from the Germans, a lot of *Goyim* ran along with them. My brother and father reopened their business. My brother did most of the work and my father helped him as much as he was able.

The Germans set up a local government. City Hall, the main headquarters was in our village. The officer in command, a Jew, oversaw three villages. I was his interpreter. I interpreted from *Goyish* to German. Now I was far from the front and shells were no longer flying overhead. Every morning all of the *Goyim* came to the City Hall, men and women, because under the German rule everyone had to work. They would line up and I and the Jewish officer would go outside to them with a list. We sent ten here, twenty there...each group was led by a soldier to their work site.

We took the milk from the *Goyim* to make cheese and butter, because the law was that anyone who had a cow that produced milk, had to bring half of the milk to City Hall. At the City Hall, a dairy plant was set up where cheese and butter was produced. My job was to transport the cheese and butter to their main headquarters which was not far from where we lived. This was not a bad job, because I always had enough cheese and butter, and I didn't even become fat. Not like it is here in America, we eat nothing and become fat.

Then, I had some trouble. The commander had five horses and I would take care of them. Every day they were sent out to the pasture, and after a while I would round them up and lead them back into the stable. During roundup time one day, one of the horses kicked me and broke my knee. I had to be hospitalized for six or seven months. The doctors healed my broken knee, they tried their best for me because they liked me. I would always get them whatever they needed. The *Goyim* were big nosers. They liked cheese, butter, and chickens. I managed to get them what they wanted. I did favors for them and they did favors for me.

A few years went by and without reason, the Germans packed up and left. We immediately returned to the city and then new trouble began. The Poles

returned, and after a few days they ran away. Then, the Bolsheviks came, and the Revolution began. When the Germans left us, we crossed the border and brought back horses because the Russian army left everything behind when they retreated. All of a sudden everyone became horse dealers, tailors, shoemakers, carpenters and Rabbis. The again there was trouble. People began robbing and looting and we never were able to catch them.

Now, the Poles came back again and fought with the Bolsheviks. This time, the fighting took place a few miles from the city. After a few days of fighting, the Poles took people from the city to gather the dead. There were mountains of dead people, swollen and black like coal. Limbs were strewn all over, a hand here, a foot there a head...Everything was gathered and put onto wagons. We then dug graves and threw twenty, thirty or forty bodies into each grave. As a result of this work, nearly everyone including myself contracted the Typhus disease. After this disease one did not recognize the other, we should never know of such diseases.

Then the Bolsheviks began driving the Poles back. They recruited people with horses and wagons to Ubvoz, to transport food, ammunition and wounded soldiers. By now, they had already pushed the Poles back to Warsaw. I was with them from Ubvoz almost until Brisk. I am describing the situation very mildly, but that was not the way it actually was. Plenty bullets were flying all over, under me, next to me and over my head. This kept up for five weeks, and I wasn't even able to wash my face the entire time. I was so black that when I see a Black in the street now, he seems white compared to what I looked like then.

As I am writing, I reminded myself of another episode which happened at that time. This took place at the other side of Kobrin, and I was right there on my wagon. Since rocket shells were flying all over, one shell landed right near where I was and exploded. A few soldiers were nearby, and one was wounded by the rocket. Just at the same time, two officers happened to be passing by on a *Britzke*<sup>1</sup> en route to Kobrin. One of the soldiers who was with the wounded one shouted to the officers, "To varish to varish oz mi do hospatola" (comrade, comrade get us to a hospital). The officers ignored him and kept on going. He took aim with his gun and shot them both. He got onto the horse with his wounded comrade, and turned back to the two dead solders saying, "they are not Soviet gentlemen". That was the real picture of things at that time.

After that time, I already got the chills because I did something that the authorities did not know and were never allowed to find out. At times, when I wanted to get out of doing work for the Bolsheviks, I would put a small pebble between the horse's hoof and the show. This would cause the horse to be uncomfortable and it would move very slowly, and wouldn't want to pull the wagon. They thought that the reason that the horse wasn't moving was because it didn't have any energy from lack of food. They would remove everything from my wagon

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<sup>1</sup>A quick, horse drawn wagon

and send me back home. As soon as I was out of their sight, I would stop, remove the pebble and the horse would continue traveling normally. After a while other Bolsheviks would see me with an empty wagon going in the opposite direction. They would stop me and send me back to work. As we neared Brisk the fighting intensified, and the Bolsheviks ordered everyone to retreat. We turned around and ran back a lot quicker than we came. In only a few days we were already approaching Motele. As we came closer, there was a backup of all the wagons returning. I had to get myself out of working for them, so I stopped and put the pebble back under the horse's foot. Again it worked, but this time, I was already home. So, that's how my trip was.



## Chapter Five: The Post War Era

After this retreat, the Poles were back for good. Things quieted down, and I again began working in the field. Once in a while, I would buy and sell a horse. During the summer, I barely came home. I stayed in the field because it was far from Motele. The field was near the village that we used to live in, Tabulok. But, I didn't stay in the village, I stayed in the field and ate and slept there. I would start a fire and place my "drifus" which was a grill with three legs, on the fire. I would place a pot of potatoes or another vegetable on the grill to roast. The food would mix with some ashes from the fire that the wind would blow. But it tasted very good because I worked alone on the field from dark till dark, and by the time I got around to eat, I was very hungry. At night, I would let the horses pasture close to the wagon. Because I had two good horses that never thought about their own safety, I would lock them up with an iron chain so that no one would be able to steal them.

Near the field was a large forest, and occasionally wolves would come out in the middle of the night. When the horses would see the wolves, they would run over to the wagon and begin banging with their hooves. Upon hearing the noise, I would immediately wake up. I would look around, and if I saw four eyes staring at me, I knew they were wolves. I would take some straw, make a fire and they would get lost. I was always prepared with the straw because I would always take the horses to the pasture at night and I would sleep there next to them on a sack filled with straw. That was my mattress in the old country.

Friday, before sundown, I would come back home, and stay over Shabbos. Sunday morning I would already be back in the field. Now as I write what I went through alone on the field, I begin to wonder if something was wrong with me. To be all alone in the field all week, no feelings, no fear? Only in the old country could one find such creatures. And that is the pure truth, that's the way I was in those days.

All of this took place summer time. Let's go on to the winter now. During the winter one has to do something to make a living too. I would sell or buy a horse or a calf. I would travel to the train station, and bring someone either there or back. I was never lazy, wherever I was not planted, I grew (an expression, I was always where ver I was least expected as long as I could earn some money).

I used to go to the market to either buy or sell things there. Since I was wild, wild things were always happening to me at the market. I would look around at the market, and if I saw a nice looking horse, I would not be able to move away from it. On the other hand, I would think to myself that the only reason that the horse looks so nice is because it didn't do any work, it let the other horses do the work. Now I was already in doubt, and had to find out the truth about the horse. Meanwhile, I was already all excited. In the end, I was the lucky one because I got it for my price. I earned quite a few rubels [rubles] from those idiots. In those days, the rule at the market was that if you sold a horse, you had to let the buyer try it out first. If the

horse pulled a loaded wagon, it was a deal, and if not, it was no deal. I would ask the seller how much he wanted for the horse and he would give me his price. I would say, "Come let's try it out." He would then say, "You have to take it as is." I would then take it for my price, since he didn't let me try it.

When I would bring my purchase home, everyone would come look at the wonder. They would look so nice, but they were so wild. You had to know how to train them because if you hitched them to a wagon without training, they could rip the wagon apart. But I knew how to train them. I would load a wagon with so much sand that you would need three horses to pull it. I would then hitch the horse to the wagon, and tell him to go. He would listen to me like the cat did, he would just put his head to the side and stare at me. I would then go into the barn, bring out a long piece of straw and light it. I would then put the burning straw to the horse's belly. As soon as the heat got to him, he would begin moving so quickly that I barely would be able to jump onto the wagon. From then on he was the best horse around, because he had the energy of ten horses and he was fat and as nice as a doll. He just wasn't used to working. That was how I used to deal with wild things, and I myself was wild. But, as they say in America, "Once a hobby, always a hobby." Working with horses was my favorite trade, I loved it and therefore it never seemed like hard work.

## Chapter Six: Unhappy Times

Now I will write about another period that I went through in my younger years. It was not a happy time for me, but that is the way the world goes, and everyone must go through such a period one time or another.

I undertook a new project far away from home. It was winter at the time and the location was 14 miles from home near a town named “Lininetz”, in a large forest, the “Belovizer Forest”. Large trees were cut down and then cut into small pieces. Our job was to transport these pieces of timber out of the forest. I mentioned “we”, I had a partner and his name was Yashe Shmuel Hershis. He was a fine Jew. We had sleds to transport the wood because there was so much snow that the horses were barely able to carry their own feet let alone such heavy loads of wood.

A few weeks went by. One evening after a hard day’s work, we lay down to rest. We were frozen and knocked out from the work. The temperature must have been fifty degrees below zero. I remember that night very vividly and I will never forget it as long as I live because it was on that evening that my father died. We had just laid down to sleep and my friend, Reb Yashe A”H<sup>1</sup> began snoring. All of a sudden, I felt a rip in my heart and I felt as if I was going to die if I did not go home right away. I woke Yashe to tell him that I must go home, if not I will die before daybreak. He tried to talk me into staying. He asked me, “What happened to you, maybe you had a bad dream...” I could not fall asleep, and so I harnessed the horses and bade farewell to Reb Yashe and left for home. I traveled all night through a black forest through snow and freezing temperature. The horses were black horses but they became white from the snow, and so did I. At times I traveled on the sled, and at times I ran alongside it, always holding on, for were I to leave go, the horses would run away because they were running so fast due to the freezing temperature.

I arrived home the following day at about *Mincha Maariv*<sup>2</sup> time, but it was too late, my father was no longer alive. As I was coming closer to town I noticed people returning from the cemetery, but I, as of yet, did not know of anything. As I came home and I started ascending the hill which lead [led] to the stall, my brothers ran out towards me and fell on my shoulders and told me that our father, may he rest in *Gan Eden*<sup>3</sup>, is no longer alive. My brothers could not forgive themselves for not postponing the funeral until I came home because before my father died, he

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<sup>1</sup>Of blessed memory

<sup>2</sup>Afternoon and evening prayers

<sup>3</sup>Paradise

called the whole family together and told them he was going to die and that they should wait with the funeral until I came home. They waited from morning till evening, and I came only one hour late. This is what they told me when I arrived home. I already understood why my heart felt like it was being ripped. It was exactly at the time that my father was wishing everyone farewell from his deathbed and I was so many miles away. But, my heart was there, besides, nothing can be done about it, that's the way the world goes. Only, until this very day I can't believe that my father died, because I was not there when it happened. This is how I lived my younger years in the *Heim*.

Now that my father was no longer alive, more responsibilities fell upon me because my older brothers were already married and had families of their own to support and I was the oldest at home. As far as money was concerned, I did the same for a living as I used to and there was enough money from that to support the whole family.

Since I was a young boy at the time, I needed some form of enjoyment. To satisfy that need all us teenagers would get together every evening in the street and spend some time together. Since it was dark out, and there were no forms of entertainment such as chess matches or dances, all we were able to do was sit and talk. But how much time can be spent just talking, and doing nothing. Naturally, since we were big thinkers, we came upon a plan. At that time two people in town were building houses, a person by the name of Dunetzky and Zelig, Zanvil the butcher's son. We decided to switch the beams from one job site to the other. Since we were 10 or 12 boys we didn't think much and we began our "job". We worked for a few hours until we were almost finished. We were up to the last beam when we were caught by none other than Zanvil the butcher. He began screaming and calling us all kinds of nasty names. We were afraid of Zanvil, since he was the town butcher. If we didn't put everything back, everyone in town would be talking about us. It was really a miscalculation on our part, we should have remembered that Zanvil was one of the first people to get up in the morning. He would rise when the first rooster would cry and go to the village to buy a few calves or cows since he had to be back home when the day began. This is only a sample of the kind of things we did for entertainment, each time it was something else, as long as it was exciting. The truth of the matter is, I don't remember a single calm moment in those years, I was always busy doing something.

A few years went by and again there was some excitement. I was already becoming an old country boy and I decided that it was time to start going out with a girl. In a small town, when a boy and girl are seen together everyone starts spreading rumors that they are already engaged. My mother found out about it even before I was sure that I would go steady with this particular girl. My mother objected and I had to drop her. So, here again I was into trouble. That's the way

things worked out for me in the old country, I just didn't have any *Mazel*<sup>1</sup>.

A short while later another problem arose. The Poles were governing our town for a few years, and thus became the bosses. They couldn't tolerate seeing young boys, raised in their jurisdiction, wandering around. They decided to draft them into the army. They were all called to the Town Hall to register for the military, and were told that they'd be notified when they would have to serve. They began arguing that they are too young to join the army. The Poles then told them to show their birth certificates and then they would decide. All the boys being drafted picked themselves up and went to Kobrin, the city where the birth records were supposed to have been housed. But to no avail, the records were no longer available, they were all burned during the war. The boys, seeing that they could do nothing, decided to inform on all the remaining boys in town that were not originally drafted. They told the Poles that there were still quite a few boys that were not yet called to register and I was one of those.

Later that day, the Poles came looking for me, but I made sure not to be home. In the evening, when I came home, my mother let me know that the Poles were looking for me. She wanted to know what I did and what they wanted. I told her that I had no idea. I quickly ran over to my brother Berel's house to ask him what he can do for me. Berel was considered an important person between the Polish officials because he had the ????? [unknown word].

The following morning, Berel went to the Town Hall to inquire about why they were looking for me. The Poles answered that they wanted me to register for the military. Berel told them that I was too young. Naturally, they requested a birth certificate to substantiate my age. So, go look for a birth certificate if you don't know where to begin searching. I was born in the Minsker province and am currently in the Grodner province. I began inquiring as to where to search for the documents, and was told that all documents from Motele and the surrounding towns were to be found in Kobrin. I went to Kobrin, but *A Nechtiger Toog*<sup>2</sup>, the birth certificate was nowhere to be found. Now the question arose, what do I do? The Poles had to be given an answer, no one dared fooling around with them. Since I had no proof of age, I would surely have to serve in the army, and who wanted that?

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<sup>1</sup>Luck

<sup>2</sup>A previous day – an expression – just as the previous day cannot be found.

## **Chapter Seven: Goodbye Motele!**

At that time, many boys of military age had already left town for Warsaw to try to obtain a visa for the United States, but they were told that there was a long wait for a visa. In the process, they found out that going to South America was the best alternative. Since they were already in Warsaw, they inquired with the South American consulate, and found out that they could acquire a visa in a matter of days. I had heard of this, and decided that this would be the best plan for me.

I joined a group of boys that were my age and we left for Warsaw. We completed the proper documents, and in one week we already had our visas. Since our ship to South America was due to leave in two weeks, I decided to travel home and be with my family for a few days before I leave. As I entered the house, I was told to leave immediately because the Poles came searching for me a few times. I left a corn sack made of straw which I had picked up in Warsaw for my mother in which to pack my belongings and left for my brother's house. There, I bade farewell to my brother and friends. I rushed back home to pick up the corn sack I had left with my mother to be packed, bade everyone farewell and left my mother, my brothers, my sisters, my friends and my beloved horses in a hurry, that same evening. That was the story of my young years until I left the old country.

I arrived in Warsaw which was a big city and I saw a different way of living, different people with different thoughts. Suddenly I too changed and began thinking about the big world which I chose to travel to and join. I saw that I was alone and that I am my own father, mother, brother and sister and should I make any stupid moves, there will be no one to direct me. Subconsciously I began telling myself; "Reb Dovid, forget about your younger years, grow up because you are traveling to a foreign land with strange people". In Warsaw I purchased food for the trip – salami, bread, rolls and whatever else I thought I might need.

The day I was to depart from Warsaw finally arrived. We boarded the train for Berlin. I am using the word "we" because I was not alone. There were a lot of boys from my town, a few from Bialostok and a few more from other cities. In Berlin we made a stop for a few hours. We took this opportunity to look around the city. It sure was a lot nicer than where I came from, it was a different world. From Berlin, we traveled to Belgium. There again I had a chance to see one of the wonders of the world, the Belgian horses. I had already heard of these horses during the first world war. I noticed that the German soldiers had such beautiful horses. I once asked them where they were from, and they told me, from Belgium. Well, now I had a chance to see them. From Belgium, we traveled to Paris. In Paris we also did a little sightseeing, what a beautiful city! From Paris, we traveled to Bordeaux where we boarded the ship that was to take us to South America.

## Chapter Eight: Crossing the Ocean

We were led aboard the boat and then down about twenty steps. We shown our sleeping quarters which consisted of a bunch of bunk beds. The air below was so damp and smelled so bad that we could not catch our breath. Some people began to vomit even before the ship began moving. This was our first experience with travel, first class style. As soon as the ship pulled away from port, we went up to the deck and leaned against the railing, since there were no chairs, and watched the water and sky. It was pretty boring but there wasn't much else to see and at least we got some fresh air. As night came we dreaded going down to our sleeping quarters. There was such a strong odor that we barely made it alive until morning. This was our form of perfume in those days. Such "pleasure" one cannot forget quickly. I would remind myself of my bed at home, in the stall, on the hay, and I felt like a king.

We traveled like this for three days and then we entered some port. I had no idea where we were. As soon as the ship came to a stop, we thought we saw animals running towards the ship. They took on the form of people, but they were all black, we never saw such people in our lives. A few of them, on horses, were dressed like soldiers and were chasing away the others from the ship with whips. We were dead scared. Others on the ship began theorizing that at our destination, South America, the people looked the same. One can imagine how frightened we were, we didn't know what to expect. We dropped off some cargo at this unknown port, loaded other cargo, and were off to sea again. Meanwhile, everyone had something to say about our destination. No one really knew what they were talking about but, meanwhile, we were all scared stiff.

The ship isn't interested in our fears, and she continues traveling in her course. A few days later we entered another port, and the same episode happened again. We began fearing that this is the way it will be in South America, our fears were being reinforced. We dropped off some more cargo, picked some up and left this port.

Another three days at sea, and again we pulled into a port. This time things were a little different. We didn't notice any soldiers, and we saw some white people. The white people took the cargo off the ship but, since there were no soldiers, the black people came close to our ship. We began studying them, and they were looking back at us, when all of a sudden one of our sailors threw something at them. They began running toward what was thrown at them. They fell one on another trying to grab it, banging their heads into each other like a bunch of hens trying to catch some food. This really frightened us. Now our hearts really became full of sorrow. We were all depressed from this last scene. We found out that the previous two ports that we stopped at were French colonies in Africa. The French kept law and order and therefore there were soldiers at the port. The latter port was an African colony where no one kept order.

We pulled off to sea again until we reached yet another port. It was the same as the last African port, only worse. This time, the sailors would throw pennies into the water, and they would jump in after them under the ship. Understandably, this brought us more aggravation because we were sure we would have to live with such people. All day the thought of being with these people occupied our minds until we began to regret the whole trip.

As I lay in my bed one night, I reminded myself of a song I heard as a young boy back at home. It described my situation very well. I must have been eight or nine years old at the time, but I remembered the song clearly. The main chorus was "I would turn back home, but I have no money to go back". The song was written by a *Goy* who lived in the village where I was born. He wrote it before the first World War. At that time people from Poland would travel to the United States to earn some "dollars", and then return home after a few years. The writer of this song also went to the United States to earn some money. When he returned, his family made a party for him. Since our house was big, he asked my parents if he can use our house for the party. My parents let him use the house. In the middle of the party Marko, the song writer, got up and said, "My brothers, I have a song which I myself wrote the very first day that I left for America and I will sing it to you." He began singing the song and then began crying. Everyone at the party also began crying, that was the kind of song it was, straight from the heart. Since the song described my feelings on the ship so well, I will write the song lyrics in Yiddish.

One nice day he sat spending some time with his wife and children. He tells his wife, "My precious wife, we are so poor and have no money, maybe I should travel to America where everyone says you can earn a lot of money." His wife answers, "My husband, if you want to go, it is all right with me, be well and earn a lot of money." He packed his sack, bid farewell to his wife and children, put the sack on his shoulder and left to an agent (in those days one had to contact an agent in order to be taken over the border). He continues, "Dear precious wife, I am only traveling on the train three days and three nights, and already my black eyes cried so much because I left at home a young wife and small children." One nice day, the church bells begin ringing and everyone is going to pray, but he is being taken to the ship. As soon as he boards the ship, he prays a small prayer asking G-d to bring him to that America where he is traveling to. In the middle of the journey, the sea became rough and the ship began shaking violently. He fell on his knees again and prayed that G-d should deliver him safely to that America.

When he arrived in New York, he didn't know where to turn, since it was not his country. Again, agents found him and spoke to him like a mother to her child. Why did they speak to him so nicely? Because they saw that he had a few dollars. As soon as they fooled him into trusting them with his money, they were off like dogs nowhere to be found. He was left alone in an alien country thinking to himself, if only he had enough money for the trip, he would return home right now. If anyone would ever tell him that in America you can just pick gold off the streets, he would call him a liar. In America one must work bitter hard until he sees a dollar. He must



also have superhuman energy and sleep like a dog. That was his song and since it fit my situation perfectly, I did not need to write my own song.

We made a stop in Lisbon, Portugal, and then at some other islands. We continued on to Brazil and Montevideo. At the last few ports there were no longer so many black people, and we were much calmer. We were also allowed to leave the ship and wander around in the port for a few hours. We saw new things that we had never seen before, different houses, mountains and completely different lifestyles. So many different people, white, black, yellow, half white, half black, naked and completely covered, a new world. This caused much excitement for us. Finally, some happy and enjoyable moments.

We made another stop at some other island port. Here we made up that we would go buy something. The question arose, how does one buy something when he can't speak the native language? But I needed cigarettes and razor blades. So, I entered a store, walked over to the store keeper, and began conversing with him in *Shtim Loshon*<sup>1</sup>. I put my fingers to my mouth as if I were smoking. He understood and gave me a pack of cigarettes. Now I needed razor blades, I put my finger to my sideburns and rubbed it up and down. Again it worked, he understood and gave me razor blades. Now I had to pay, I took out an American dollar and gave it to him. I then stuck out my hand as if to request change, how much, I did not know because I did not understand the language nor was I familiar with the currency of that country. One thing I did know was that he didn't lose any money on the deal.

We then came to yet another island. Here, I wanted to buy something with the change I was left with at the last island, but they did not want to accept my change. I figured that every island has its own currency. I did not have much money so instead of taking out another dollar, I just left the store without purchasing anything.

We boarded the ship and it left port. As we pulled away, we noticed that the sailors were taking out "palatkes" which was something like a large tent. They made a roof over the ship with this tent. We thought that it was supposed to rain very hard and they did not want the ship to become flooded. We soon found out the real reason. Since we were near the equator, and the sun is so low there, they did not want us to get burned from the sun. Meanwhile, this again provided some excitement for us. A few days went by, and we passed the equator. The sailors removed the roof and again we were able to spend our time on the deck.

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<sup>1</sup>Silent language or, as we know it, sign language.

The ship again docked at some port. This time, we were much happier because we were used to these stops and now we barely saw black people. We already passed the equator, which was the most gloomy part of the trip. I noticed that the captain and the sailors were also a lot calmer and happier. The sailors came onto deck with musical instruments and began playing "Hello Cabtzin Ales is Bilig." People began dancing on the deck to the music. We, seeing all this became much happier. This took place at lunch time. In the evening, after supper, we noticed that the sailors were again making some kind of preparations. We did not know what it was for, but we saw them making some kind of fence out of rope. After it was set up, all the sailors gathered on the deck around this fenced off area. Two sailors dressed only in shorts went into this area. Another sailor entered the ring carrying four things that looked like small swollen sacks. He took two of them, put them on each hand of the first sailor and tied them with laces. He then did the same to the other sailor. We just stood there and watched not knowing what was going on since we had never seen anything like this in Motele.

We're waiting to see what will happen next, when all of a sudden, they begin dancing around the ring throwing their hands at each other like two madmen. At first, I thought that the sacks on their hands made them dance and that this was the show. But, all of a sudden, the bell rings and they begin fighting, not play fighting, but really fighting. Everyone was shouting "Stronger" and they began fighting even harder. Suddenly, the bell rings and they stop fighting. I notice sailors standing next to them with pails of water and towels. They poured water over the fighters. This was a scene I never before saw in my life, I was all confused. Again the bell rings, and they begin fighting and everyone is shouting. All of a sudden one of the fighters fell to the floor. The other fighter bent down over him and whispered something into his ear. At the time, I thought that the one on the floor was dead and the one bending over him was asking forgiveness for killing him. But, the sailor gets up from the floor and begins fighting again. The bell rings, the fighting stops, and water and towels are brought again. This was the first fight that I ever saw.

When the fight was over, I asked my friends, what kind of business it is to first kill people, and then revive them. As we were discussing the "fight", a few boys came over to us saying, "It was a great fight." I shot back, "You are all a bunch of murderers. How can you let two people bruise each other, revive them and then let them kill each other again?" One of them answered "What do you mean kill, I am a fighter and this boy next to me is also a fighter. In Bialostok, where we are from, we had fights every week." He told me that he even had his own pair of gloves with him. He asked me whether we had any fights in our hometown. I told him no, I never even saw a fight before. They just stood there staring at us. They were never in Motele, and they thought it was a big city. They left us, and came back a few minutes later with their own fighting gloves. It was true, they really were Bialostoker fighters. So, why are we to be blamed if we came from a small town?

## Chapter Nine: Prize Boxer

Now that we got into the topic of our hometowns, everyone began discussing different things about themselves. Since there were so many boys from different places, big cities, small cities and villages, everyone had stories to tell about their cities and villages, their forms of entertainment and their past in general. Suddenly, everyone became actors. We began showing off our talents to one another and the atmosphere on the ship became very lively. We began playing a game called "Pachenes". One would hide his face in the other's lap, and put his hands on his shoulders. Then other boys would slap his hand and he would have to guess who it was. The captain and the sailors were standing on the side watching who gave the strongest slap. Meanwhile, the boys from Bialostok took out their boxing gloves and showed us how they used to fight. The captain saw that there were fighters on the ship, so he arranged another fight. The sailors set up the ropes again, but this time I already knew what it was for. First the sailors fought, then the boys from Bialostok, and then the captain picked boys to fight one another. As was my luck, the captain picked me. I did not want to go because I did not know how to fight. One boy from Bialostok ran into the ring to fight me. I still did not move, I was not interested in fighting. Suddenly, everyone began cheering and whistling. I was totally embarrassed and without choice I entered the ring to fight. Someone put a pair of gloves on my hands. I just dropped my hands and stood there not knowing how and when to begin.

The bell rang, and I began feeling the fight. The boy that was fighting me was an experienced fighter, and I was not. The situation was very bitter, my eyes began tearing, my nose was hurting, and I no longer saw the world. He just kept on throwing punches in my face. The bell rang, and the fighting stopped. They sat me down and put wet compresses on my face. It felt great. The bell rang again and he was already waiting to continue fighting, he saw who he was dealing with and was eager to get finished. Again he starts punching in my face. This time, as he was trying to punch my face, I banged his hand down and threw a punch straight in to his face. He fell to the floor and the referee ran over and began counting. But, to no avail, he never got up. He had to be taken to the hospital on a stretcher (there was a hospital on the ship). My hands were raised above my head by the others to show that I was the winner. It really didn't matter much to me since I was frightened and felt sorry for the boy. One thing was clear now, that boy never picked me for a fight. That is another example of how I always managed to be involved in excitement, it just always came my way.

## Chapter Ten: Buenos Aires

The ship made stops at ports in Brazil, Rio-de-Janeiro and Montevideo. We finally arrived in Buenos Aires, South America. The trip took us thirty-six days in all. We got off the ship and began thinking about where we would go, what we would do and, as it was almost night, where we would sleep. We were stranded in a big city in an alien country, and did not know or understand the native language. We did not have much money in our pockets, and we started feeling depressed. It was not much fun anymore. Then, a few Jews appeared at the ship. They were from the local *Hachnasas Orchim*<sup>1</sup>. They took us to a location a few blocks away from the ship. There they had a building with a kitchen. Since in those days many *Greene*<sup>2</sup> came to South America, the *Hachnasas Orchim* supported them until they found employment. Those who were tradesmen from before in Poland usually found a job right away. But those who did not know a trade suffered plenty. The *Hachnasas Orchim* only supplied them with food. It was a pity, the way they toiled, without a penny in their pocket. Since I did not know a trade, the situation was bleak. Eating suppers in the *Hachnasas Orchim* was not a job or a way of making money.

The first supper in the *Hachnasas Orchim* did not appeal to me at all. That same evening, I approached the Jews who took care of us, and asked whether it was possible to get a job on a farm. They told me that I could, but I must be sure that I know farming. They said the farms were far away and it takes one and a half days to travel by train. If you do not know farming, they will not keep you, and the return ticket is very expensive. The trip to the farm will not cost anything because it is included in the ship fare. I told them that I am going. I had nothing to lose, since it was definitely better than living off the *Hachnasas Orchim*.

We were a group of three boys who came together from Motele. One, a tailor by trade, who had an older brother in Buenos Aires, said he would stay. The other one did not know any trade and he said that if I go to the farm, he is going along. We did not have a place to sleep for the night, so we returned to the ship. There were no longer any mattresses left, only wire springs. We took our overcoats and laid them on the springs and slept through the night.

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<sup>1</sup>A general name for an organization whose function is to sponsor room and board for people in need.

<sup>2</sup>Newly arrive immigrants

## Chapter Eleven: Off to the Farm

The following morning, we were already on the train to the farm. The trip itself wasn't either too easy. We were generally depressed, and here we were, two mute people who did not speak or understand the language. We showed the conductor, on the bulletin, where he should drop us off. He just looked at the location on the bulletin and said "Kal Es Kosares", the name of our destination, and that was all we knew. We did not understand anything else that he said to us, and he did not understand anything we said to him. We did not hear from him until the following morning at four o'clock a.m. when he came over to us and said "Kal Es Kosares". He motioned with his hand that we should take our corn sacks. We took our corn sacks, walked over to the door and waited until the train stopped. The door opened, and we jumped off. The door closed and the train was gone. It was so dark that we could barely see one another. We were dropped off in the middle of a field, no station, nor lights, not even a road, only tall grass. Even if there would have been a road, it did not matter much because it was so dark that we would not have seen it.

We stood near the tracks looking here and there, and then noticed small lights in the distance, probably a few miles away. We noticed more lights to one side than to the other and decided to follow those because we figured that it was either a bigger farm or a village.

I will never forget how I felt that morning. If the situation we were in wasn't enough, my friend was causing me additional grief. He never went away from his parents for more than an hour. Now he was homesick. Whenever things were not going well, he would become homesick. I would always console him, and he would forget about it. Now I was in no position to console him.

We began walking through the tall grass towards the lights. Since the ground was not level and it was dark, we constantly tripped and fell over our corn sacks. All we heard while walking was the sound of dogs barking and roosters crowing. As we came closer to the village, we decided to stop and wait until daybreak before going any further. We put down our corn sacks in the grass and sat down and waited.

The sun was coming up and it was getting lighter, so we began wandering further. Where we were going, we did not know, but we knew that we couldn't just sit in the grass and wait. As we neared the first house, we noticed a man sitting in front of the house relaxing. He had in his mouth what looked like a pipe and we thought he was smoking. We came even closer and noticed that he had a glass in his hand, and what we thought was a pipe, was really a straw from the glass. He was drinking "mote", which was made of a type of leaf and hot water poured over it. It was what they drank for breakfast, just as we, in America, drink coffee.

We walked over to him, and he said to us "Buenos Dias" to which we answered "Buenos Dias". We just repeated what he told us. He stared at us and asked us "Gringo?", and we answered him "Gringo." Buenos Dias means Good Morning and Gringo means *Greene*. Then he asked us in Yiddish if we were Jewish to which we answered yes. He got all excited, and we cheered up a little bit. As we

were talking Yiddish, he knew we were Jews, and he took us in to the house. We *davened* and ate breakfast. I did not enjoy the breakfast too much because I reminded myself of the poor people that used to eat in our house back in Motele. But, what could I do, I was in a strange land.

Then more Jews came over, they were all his neighbors. They questioned us about the *Heim*. They wanted to know everything since I left Poland right after the first World War. They had not heard anything from the *Heim* for years. There were approximately thirty Yiddish families in this village. They were all very *Frum*<sup>1</sup>. They had their own *Shul*, *Shoichet* and *Rav*<sup>2</sup>. We arrived Friday morning, and Friday night we went to *Shul*. *Shabbos* morning we went to *Shul* again and I was called up for the *Haftorah*<sup>3</sup>. All the people in *Shul* were excited and busy with us, but no one had work for us.

There were a lot of farms around the village. The farmers would come to the village to buy things, to *Shul* or to the *Shoichet* to have their chickens slaughtered. We remained in the village over *Shabbos*. On Sunday, one of the Jewish farmers happened to come to the village. The people let him know that a few *Greene* came from Europe and were looking for work. They asked him if he had any work for us. The farmer came to see us and talk to us. He first asked us all kinds of things about the *Heim*. He then stared at us and said to me that for the time being he could use only one man. He said he paid thirty pesos a month and that he supplied room and board. He looked at me as if to show that he was interested in me, because my friend was short and did not look like a good farmer. When I was first introduced to this farmer, they told me that his name was Galanternik. I spoke up and said to him, "Mr. Galanternik, I will not accept the job myself without my friend. Either you take us both, or neither one of us is going. I came here with him, and I must stay with him. The work does not frighten me because I know the job very well from the *Heim*." Mr. Galanternik answered me, "I see that you are a fine boy since you don't want to leave your friend. Both of you, take your belongings and we will travel to the farm shortly." We put our corn sacks on his wagon, and were off to the farm.

We arrived at the farm at *Mincha Maariv*<sup>3</sup> time, and the first thing we did was *daven Mincha* and *Maariv* since the farmer was very *frum*. Then his children came from the field and he introduced us to them. We then were served supper after which they questioned us about the *Heim* and all sorts of things about the war. By the time we answered everyone, it was already midnight. The reason it took so long was because he had a large family. He had five sons and two daughters. We then went to sleep in a small cottage next to the barn. We barely fell asleep, when already we heard the first rooster crow. This must have been only one o'clock at night.

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<sup>1</sup>Religious

<sup>2</sup>Rabbi

<sup>3</sup>The weekly portion of Prophets read aloud on *Shabbos* after reading the portion of the week in the Torah

Before we knew it, the farmer's wife was already knocking at the door, "Wake up children, I already have warm milk for you, we must go milk the cows." My friend got scared and told me, "We are in trouble now. It is so dark out and I never milked a cow before in my life! The cow is going to crush me with her foot! Or she might stab me with her horns!" (He was so unfamiliar with farming that he didn't even know the difference between a cow and a bull.) That was our first experience on the farm. We did not end up milking the cows, the farmer's children did that. We helped transport the milk, and we held the lanterns for them while they were milking, since there was no electricity at the farm. Even though there was no electricity, the farmer must have been rich. He had well over a thousand cows, and over a thousand horses. In fact there were so many horses that some of the horses would run around wild and we could not even catch them.

By the time morning came around, we were finished milking the cows. We the *Davened*, ate breakfast and helped the boys, meaning the farmer's sons harness the horses. We all went to the field. When we came to the field, we saw many sacks of sweet corn laying around. The farmer had laborers who would pick the sweet corn and put them into sacks. They were paid by the sack. It was the farmer's sons' job to transport the corn. They harnessed about thirty horses to the wagon and brought the corn to the threshing machine. The machine would throw the corn into a sack and the junk would fall to the side.

The boys, meaning the farmer's sons, would throw the sacks of corn on to the wagon like the Moroccan boys would throw their ball. They were, one by one, real farmers. The first time we went with them, they showed us how to lift the sack on to the shoulder and then carry it to the wagon. They would lift the sack from the top with both hands while another boy lifted from on bottom with both hands. They would swing it on to the shoulder. They would steady the sack with one hand and walk over to the wagon. A few boys stood on the wagon and they took the sacks off the shoulder and stacked them on the wagon. The first few times they did it, and we watched them. Then they watched us do it. When I did it a few times everything went fine, but when my friend tried to put the sack on his shoulder, he just fell over with the sack. As much as we tried to show him how to do it, he just couldn't manage. Being that he was small, the sack weighed more than him and he did not have enough energy to carry the sack.

It was already dinner time (which we refer to as lunch). One of the laborers took a rope, sat himself on a horse and rode over to the livestock. He threw a rope and caught a calf. Another laborer killed it, and right away skinned it. They then took two [unknown word] and attached one to another, put dried straw under, and started a fire. They put half the animal on one side and the other half on the other side. After only half an hour of roasting, they were already cutting pieces of meat and devouring like wolves. They drank wine with their meat as was the custom in South America, to have wine with every meal. We watched them eat the meat, and were nauseated from the sight. But, we had worked very hard and we were very hungry and had to eat something, so we took glasses and drank some wine. The wine made us even hungrier, so we just stared at them wishing we had something to eat.

One of them turned to us and asked us why we don't join them. I told him that the meat was raw and that we were not prepared to eat raw meat. He walked over to the meat with a large fork and knife, lifted the meat, cut a piece from the bottom and showed it to me. It looked like it was well done and we were so hungry that we both took some and began eating. After we finished, we became sick from the meat. The other boys told us not to mention anything about our meal to anyone because the boss was religious and everything in the house was kosher.

The following morning, one of the boys took me to the village to show me where the *Shoichet* was since they traveled to the village three times a week to slaughter chickens by the *Shoichet*. From then on I would be the one to go to the village to the *Shoichet*. All the boys liked me because I was more capable than they were. I would catch wild horses and train them while they were afraid of them. I was not afraid because I was already used to dealing with madmen from the *Heim*.

As I used to travel to the village very often, I began noticing that people lived differently than we did. They had clean faces and clean clothes and they had time to live it up a little, too. I became nauseated by the farm life. I began discussing the situation with my friend while in bed at night. Since we had the address of the two boys from Motele that stayed in Buenos Aires, we wrote them a letter asking if there were any available jobs in Buenos Aires. We wrote that we would very much want to join them. They responded right away writing that we should come and that we wouldn't get lost, we would find a job. We had already been on the farm for a few months, and we saved enough money for the trip back to Buenos Aires. I approached the farmer, and told him of our intentions to leave the farm. He did not like it at all. The fact that my friend was leaving did not bother him at all, he just did not want me to leave. He offered to pay me ninety pesos a month if I stayed. But I missed my friends and the city life. There was another reason for my wanting to leave the farm. I was far from a lazy person and I was very capable. Because of this, I had a lot of bosses over me. Since I knew how to do everything, everyone sharpened themselves with me. Whatever anyone had to get done, they would call the *Greene*. I had no day or night, constantly doing everyone's jobs. I was working like a horse. Therefore, I didn't think about it much longer. Said and done, goodbye farm forever. This was what made me part with my beloved horses, and my hobby which I loved and occupied myself with in my younger years.

We packed our belongings into our corn sacks. We then bade farewell to everyone on the farm and thanked everyone for helping us and giving us work. One of the farmer's sons took us to the village with a horse and buggy because it was a distance. Once in the village, we bid farewell to all our friends there and thanked them for all they had done for us. We then purchased train tickets. One of the Jews from the town took us to the train station with his horse and buggy. We left Kal Es Kosares for good.



## Chapter Twelve: Back to Buenos Aires

We arrived in Buenos Aires the following day. We took the tram way, known today as the street car, to get to our friends. We had their address, and we knew which street car went to which neighborhood. With a little asking around, we found the address. We arrived at their house a little after dinner, but the boys had not yet come home from work. We waited around for them. When they came home from work, we all went together to the restaurant for supper. When we finished supper, we went together to their room and spent some time together discussing the past few months. Already we felt happier, they were able to calm us down since they were already in the city for a few months. They knew the city, not like us farmers who knew nothing. As we were spending some time talking about the last few months on the farm, in walked a boy from Pinsk whom they had befriended in Buenos Aires. Over the months, they became very close to him. They introduced him to us. He happened to be a cabinetmaker by profession. He told us that the following day, he would ask his boss if he could take one of us as an apprentice. Since he worked alone with his boss, there was a good chance that one of us would have the job. He said that he would have an answer for us the following evening. He also mentioned that there was a fine *Goy* next door who had a shop, and that he would inquire there as well.

The following evening, the Pinsker boy came over and told us that he got jobs for both of us. One of us would come with him and the other would go to the Russian *Goy* next door, who he said was a fine *Goy*. My friend decided to go next door to the Russian, and I chose to go with the Pinsker boy to the cabinet shop. The following morning he took me along to work. As soon as we arrived at the cabinet shop, the boss looked at me. The Pinsker boy introduced me to him. He told me that the boss's name was Senor Brochman, and he told the boss that my name was Senor Dovid Chez. Senor Brochman began asking me questions, about what I used to do, and what I can do now and so on. I told him that I am not a carpenter by profession, but I am willing to learn the trade of cabinetmaking. He said that he would pay me a peso a day and he would teach me the trade. At that time a peso was the equivalent of thirty-three cents in American money, which meant that I was earning thirty-three cents a day. I accepted his offer and began working.

I now had a job, and enough money to buy breakfast, and for dinner and supper, G-d will worry for me. My friend got a better deal than I. His boss was a Russian *Goy*, a good boss and a sport, too. He wasn't married, and so didn't care about his money. They would go to the restaurant for dinner every day and the boss would always pay for both meals. My boss was totally different, he was as they say *A Yid Mit A Oiringel*<sup>1</sup>. To get a penny out of him was harder than pulling a tooth, and as much work as I could possibly do for him was never enough. I will soon tell you more about my boss.

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<sup>1</sup>A Jew with an earring – in the sense of being stingy

Now that I had work, and I already worked for a few days, I needed a room to sleep. My friend and I were staying with the rest of the boys, but there wasn't enough room there for us. They were four people, and their landlord did not allow more than that. The only reason we were able to stay with them until now was because the landlord was unaware that we were there.

We left the other boys and found ourselves a room. Since I was still left with ten American dollars in my pocket, I changed it for thirty pesos because at that time, one dollar equaled three pesos. We went out and bought beds, a few chairs, a table and a few other odds and ends. Suddenly, we became *Baalei Batim*<sup>1</sup>. The rental rooms came with just bare walls and so we had to furnish the room ourselves. In fact, our room was so bare that it did not even have a window. That was how we lived there. Since the temperature was always hot in Buenos Aires, I was always sweating, and there was never a chance to dry up. My pillow got wet from sweat the first night. I came from the farm, and never dried until I left for America a whole year later.

We were now set up in our own room. A few weeks passed. I wasn't earning much, but it was a little better than at the farm. I worked only eight hours a day not from dark until dark. I didn't have a bunch of bosses over me, only one. I was also learning a new trade. Besides, the boss got to like me and became a little more generous with the peso. Every few weeks he would give me a raise because I produced a lot for him. Sometimes if he forgot to give me a raise, I would remind him myself. In a matter of three months, I could already produce a piece of furniture by myself. I picked up the trade very well, and it was no wonder. I had a great teacher, the boy from Pinsk who introduced me to this job in the first place. The boss was constantly away from the shop. First of all, he had to go out to purchase materials for the cabinets. Then he would be out on the road selling what we made. That left me and the boy from Pinsk alone in the shop most of the time. This was very good for me because he always showed me how to do everything.

Now I was already very happy that I left the farm. But the calm did not last too long. I already had this luck from my younger years. If one thing went well then another went wrong. As we ate our meals in a restaurant, I and another few boys would frequent the same restaurant all the time. One time, something must have happened to the cook's wig. Somehow it fell into the pot of soup. We came into the restaurant, sat down and ordered soup as we always did. The waiter brought us the soup. As one of us lifted the first spoon of soup to begin eating, a piece of wig came along with the soup. The same happened to another few boys. We were all nauseated by this. We picked ourselves up, left the restaurant and went to a different restaurant. From then on, we never ordered soup in any restaurant. In fact, to this very day, from time to time, I remind myself of the soup with the wig in it and tell my wife about it.

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<sup>1</sup>Bosses

We began eating in another restaurant. It was a Jewish restaurant as was the previous one. The food was not bad. One time, I ordered gefilte fish. After finishing the fish, I felt sick in my stomach. I became weak, and remained so for eight months. I tried every medicine that there was, but nothing helped. I even lost some hair from my head which was probably related to my stomach disease. This sickness went on until I left Buenos Aires for America. In America, thank G-d, the sickness left me and my hair grew back. That's how I struggled until I left Buenos Aires and came to America.

I am just saying this to myself, that all of this is just a forward to writing about what I went through in my life. All that I wrote here is only one drop from the sea of what I went through. There wouldn't be enough paper to write everything. That is why there is a saying that a person is stronger than steel.

I reminded myself of something I forgot to write about. At about the time I left the farm, America closed its doors to all foreigners. The only people that had no problems obtaining a visa to the United States were South American citizens. When I left the farm, I filed the necessary documents to become a South American citizen and to obtain a visa so that I would be able to enter the United States. A few weeks after I had filed, the law was changed and one had to live in South America for five years before he could enter the United States. Again, I was not sorry for leaving the farm.

## Chapter Thirteen: Chicago, At Last

In 1923, I left Buenos Aires for America. The trip took twenty-one days by boat. I arrived at Ellis Island on July 4, 1923. There I also met trouble, everything happened to me. Since I had lost a little hair in South America, the doctors at Ellis Island thought that something was wrong with my health. They kept me for a few hours, but those hours felt like a year. One can imagine how I felt after their examination. After the initial exam, a German doctor came in to the room and gave me a physical examination. He told me in German that I am in good physical health. He gave me a slap on my shoulder and said that I am good for America. That was the only good moment in my life until then.

I reminded myself of a story from the *Heim* which described my feeling then. As was the way of doing business in those times, there would be a market day every now and then in different cities across Europe. People would come from far and near. They would bring wares to sell and would buy wares that they could sell in their own village. There was one such market day on a Thursday in a city named Lahishun. A man from our city, Motele, went to the market with his horse and buggy. Since Lahishun was five miles from Motele, and the market day was on Thursday, he had to stay in Lahishun over *Shabbos*. On Sunday, he left the city and started his journey home. In those days, five miles was quite a distance, and with Yosel's horse (was probably his name), the trip home took him all week long. Friday afternoon right before the candle lighting, he ran into his house. He was so happy that he made it home in time for *Shabbos*, that he said to his wife, "Devorah, I traveled and traveled and I made it in time for *Shabbos*." He did not care that it took him a whole week to come home or that he wasn't home the previous *Shabbos*, as long as he made it in time for *Shabbos*. I felt the same way. I did not care about all the hardships I went through until now. I am now in America. Here everything will be served to me on a golden platter. This is America, the golden land. This is how I traveled around the world to come to America.

Upon departure from Ellis Island, I took the train to Chicago. When I arrived in Chicago, I already felt at home because I came to my sisters. I had two sisters here in Chicago, they and their families should be healthy. One was still single at that time and the other was already married. I went to the married one, and there I really felt at home because she did whatever she could to make me feel that way. In a few days I joined the carpenters union and my sister got me my first job with a contractor whom she knew. The contractor was very happy with me because I gave him a good day's worth of work. I was already an experienced cabinetmaker from South America, and that came to use. The work that I was doing now was a little different, but I was not a sleeper. As soon as my boss showed me something new, I took over right away because I wanted to learn and know how to do my work the American way.

My work place was not far from where my sister lived, and that was not good. She neglected her family because of me. Her son would come home from school every day to eat dinner (lunch). Instead of serving him, she would send him

to deliver dinner for me at my place of work. By the time he got back home, no time was left for him to eat his own dinner because he already had to be back in school. She was busy only with me. At suppertime she was also busy only with me. I did not like this so, after a few weeks, I moved out of her house. She got insulted, and was even angry at me, but a brother and sister don't hold grudges against each other and we made up after a little while.

At that time my sister lived in the South Side, and I left her and moved to the West Side. In those days, the West Side was the nicest Jewish neighborhood in Chicago. The fact that it was Jewish was very good for me because I had with whom to spend my free time. I went out with boys and girls. There was a park there named Douglas Park. We would meet there and spend time together, it was a very cheerful place. In the old neighborhood, the South Side, there weren't that many Jews, so I had no one to go out with. But, my sister had her business there and therefore she had to stay there.

Not long after I moved, the job I was working on was completed. My boss wanted to take me on a different job that he was beginning at the time, but I did not want to go since it was an alteration job. I wanted to learn the American work, so I did not want to work on alterations, only new construction. I managed to find more work shortly thereafter. Construction of a sixty-three flat building was in progress at Devon Avenue and Sheridan Road, and I got a job there. On that job I really learned the American work. Not only did I learn the work, but I also learned the English language. My foreman on this job was a *Goy* and he would always talk to me in English. When I first began working with him, he would converse with me in sign language. He would motion with his hands or fingers what he wanted me to do, and I was not a sleepy one so I would understand right away. He liked me for that, and he took time to show me the work.

The fact that I was single also helped me learn the work. I was a young boy at the time, and since it was summer time, I would go out and spend some time with the boys and girls. We would go to Douglas Park every evening and walk around until one or two o'clock in the morning. It was hot outside and the room was too hot to fall asleep in. Since we had no air conditioners or even fans in those days, rather than go back to my room, I would take the elevator (the elevated train) to my job site. By the time I got there, it was already beginning to get light outside. I would walk around and study the way things were made. I would walk around until seven o'clock. At that time, I would go to the restaurant and eat breakfast. At eight o'clock, we would already begin working. I carried on this routine all summer long, every day except Sunday. On Sunday, I would sleep a little longer and try to make up the week's sleep.

A while later, this job was also completed. I found a new job, again, new construction in a new building. The location of this job site was Washington and Laramie. Here the foreman was Jewish, and that was no benefit. As soon as they recognized a worker was a *Greene*, they would look for the toughest work to give him. There were approximately ten workers at the time I came. As soon as I came

in, the foreman set me up to cut two by fours for all the other carpenters. I stood there all day long just cutting two by fours. I thought this would be my job only the first day. When I arrived on the second day, again he set me up to just cut two by fours for the other carpenters. This I did not like, and so after two hours working, which was at ten o'clock, I put my tools in my box, put the box on my shoulder and left. As I was walking on the sidewalk to catch the streetcar, the boss happened to walk by me. He noticed me walking with my box of tools, and asked me where I was heading. I told him that I quit the job. He asked me what was the matter, and he said that he had so much work. I told him that for the second day straight, the foreman set me up to cut two by fours all day long for all the other carpenters. I said that I was not a mule and this was not the type of work that I was looking for. He asked me what kind of work I wanted. I told him that I didn't care what kind of work he gave me. All I wanted was to have a partner to work with like all the other carpenters. I didn't want to be everyone's slave. He told me to come with him and he would give me a carpenter to be my steady partner. He also said that the foreman would not bother me anymore. And that is the way it was, I got a partner, and the foreman never bothered me again.

My partner liked working with me, and we produced a lot of work together. The boss was also happy with me. I also learned the American trade, and not long after this episode, I myself became the foreman. That is the way it is if you don't let yourself be trampled on, and if you have blood. Besides, the carpenter trade was like being a *Heimische Meshulach*<sup>1</sup>. One would have to wander with his toolbox on his shoulder every few weeks or months looking for another job. If you didn't know the trade, it would be every few days. Therefore, I was not a *Greene*, and didn't let anyone take advantage of me. When they needed my services, they got what they wanted from me, and I expected to get from them what I thought I deserved. If I didn't get what I was supposed to, I wasn't embarrassed and I let them know about it.

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<sup>1</sup>One who wanders from one house to another collecting charity for an organization.

## Chapter Fourteen: I Meet My Wife

At the same time, I began going out with a girl. She ended up becoming my wife and we are together until one hundred and twenty years. I will write the details because I want to remind her of the past which she might have forgotten about. I remember it all very clearly. She arrived in America at about the same time I arrived from Buenos Aires. When she arrived here, she stayed with a brother who already lived here. After a few weeks, she moved out to the West Side because the neighborhood that her brother lived in was *Goyish* and she had no friends there, there were no other Jewish girls with whom to spend time. In the West Side, she moved in with her cousin. She would spend time in Douglas Park, and so did I. It was really a miracle, I got a good wife only because of Douglas Park. She was lonely and missed her home very much. She had already saved seventy-five dollars for the trip back to Europe, but since we met and began going out together, she calmed down and began feeling better.

After going out together for a few months, we decided that since she had no home, and I had to eat out in restaurants, we should get married. I made the wedding arrangements myself, and I even sent a taxi to pick up her brother and sister-in-law to come to the wedding. In those days no one sent invitations so we sent a taxi for them so that they knew where to go. They didn't make weddings in halls as they do today either. Wedding ceremonies were held in a flat. Our wedding took place at my cousin's flat. Our wedding was like the song that went, "America, a strange land, with strange people, who will bring us to the *Chupa*<sup>1</sup> and who will bless us?" Our friends walked us down the isle [aisle] to the *Chupa*, and G-d himself blessed us.

As we were a couple from the old generation, we didn't buy a home or rent a flat. We took a room at her cousin's house. After we managed to save a few hundred dollars, we rented a four room flat. We went out and bought furniture and a palace stove with coals so that it would be warm in the house. In those days, there was no steam heat, and we were happy with what there was. These days, if we have steam heat, we need air conditioning, and if we don't have it then we are not in style. In those days, whatever we had in the house was enough, as long as it was paid for. I remember as if it were yesterday, how on the cold winter days we would stand near the palace stove to warm up. If we would stand with our back to the stove with our hands folded on our back, then our front would be cold, and if we would stand with our hands folded in front facing the stove, then our backs would be cold. I remember once going to the closet to get my coat. I found the coat frozen to the wall, and I was barely able to rip it off the wall. But, it was America and everything was good.

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<sup>1</sup>Traditional Jewish wedding ceremony which takes place outside, under a canopy

Then, came our “rattle”. When I say rattle, I am referring to our first daughter. We placed her in a crib near the stove because it was warm there. I called her rattle because from the minute I brought her and my wife home from the hospital, she did not stop crying until she was three months old. She was a colic baby. My wife had a job for three full months, she didn’t remove her hand from the crib, constantly shaking her. Even that didn’t help, and she didn’t stop until she was three months old.

After the three months, she became my pal and I even transformed her into a *Litvak*<sup>1</sup>. My wife didn’t know about it, it was a secret between me and my daughter. When I would eat my breakfast, I would enjoy having a piece of herring. I would put my daughter on my lap while I was eating and would share my breakfast with her. I would give her a piece of herring or a piece of egg yolk. She loved it, but it was all kept a secret, just between me and her. In those days the doctors believed in feeding the baby only every four hours, not before. I never believed in what the doctors said. I knew that when a baby cries, you feed it and then the baby will sleep well. But not my wife, she had to do exactly what the doctor said, and that’s why I kept it secret. Now, as I look back, I see that I knew more than the doctors of those years because today’s doctors don’t even believe in the theories of the old doctors. Today they say exactly as I said then, if the baby cries, feed it and it will stop crying, even if it is less than four hours from the last feeding.

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<sup>1</sup>A person born in Lithuania – obviously, herring was their delicacy



## Chapter Fifteen: Mastering My Trade

Time passed. I worked and made a living and after a while, I became the foreman. Now, let me explain how I became the foreman. I never attended school to learn how to read a blueprint in Motele or in America, so I couldn't read a blueprint. I used to work together with my boss, we would lay out the rooms together, he would read the blueprint, and would tell me what to do. One day the boss had to leave and attend to something in the downtown area. He told me he must leave and he wants me to finish laying out the rooms by myself. He showed me only once in the blueprint what I was to do, and he left. By the time he came back a few hours later, everything was already completed. He checked the work and said that everything was perfect. He then said that from now on I will be the foreman and I would make the layout by myself, and that was how it was. From then on, I had a few carpenters working for me, and I took care of everything. The boss would come once a week to check the work. He relied totally on me and he was very happy with me.

Another trade that was good to know was stair building. In those days, very few carpenters knew how to build stairs. Even my boss didn't know how to build stairs. When he needed stairs made up, he would call a special stair builder. In the entire Jewish neighborhood, there were only three or four stair builders. This caused them to be very independent. They had to be treated with silk gloves and they were paid any price they asked for. When they came on the job, they would never let anyone watch what they were doing and how they were doing it. One time Berel came to build some stairs for my boss. Since I was the foreman, I stood next to him to watch him while he was working. He turned around with his back to me so that I wouldn't be able to see. I said to him, "Berel, what are you afraid of, an *Eyin Hora*<sup>1</sup>? He answered, "I don't want you to see what I am doing. Since you won't understand anyway, you don't have to see." This already got me angry, only he knows how to build stairs, and I will never understand.

Since Berel was one of the few stair builders in Chicago, he was always in demand and therefore always busy. He finished one staircase and told me that he would return in a few weeks to complete the other three staircases on this job. The following morning, my boss came on the job and was very satisfied that Berel already started building the stairs. He called him to come so many times and he finally came. I told him that Berel said he would return in a few weeks to finish the rest. My boss said to me, "Those stair builders are terrible. They are so independent that you can't even talk to them, and they take so much money for their work. Whatever you give them is not enough, and they cause so much trouble. What can you do, they are the only ones who can build stairs." My boss remained on the job for a little while and then left.

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<sup>1</sup>Evil eye

**Reb<sup>1</sup> Dovid is not a lazy person, and I am thinking to myself, if Berel the blind man (he wasn't physically blind) can build stairs, then so can I. And so it was, I began building the stairs myself. When completed, I made a better stair than Berel. My stairs looked like a piece of furniture because I was originally a cabinetmaker by trade.**

**A few days later, my boss came to take a look at the job. He saw that the stairs were completed and asked me if Berel already returned since he originally said he would be back in a few weeks. I answered him, "He will return in around two weeks but he won't make any stairs because I made the stairs myself, and from now on I will be making them." My boss couldn't believe his eyes. He was in seventh heaven, and it cost him only half the money.**

**Berel returned two weeks later to finish the stairs. He walked in and just stood there looking at my stairs. He was so shocked that he couldn't get a word out of his mouth. I went over to him and said, "Berel, don't look, because you won't be able to make such a good stair anyway." I asked him if he remembered how he told me two weeks ago that I won't know what I'm looking at. I said, "Now you don't know what you're looking at". He walked away from me all embarrassed.**

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<sup>1</sup>Abbreviated form of Rabbi