

Interviewed by Lucille W. Brown  
Miami Beach, Florida  
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Mr. Prince, born with the surname "Khina", changed his name upon arrival in the U.S. so as not to be mistakenly called "China". He has many stories of his knack for surviving in times of starvation and chaos.

Lucille Brown: Would you say your name for the tape Mr. Prince?

Milton Prince: Milton Prince

LB: And if you would tell me what year you were born.

MP: 1900

LB: And where were you born?

MP: In Russia - small town, [Kniazhe](#).

LB: Which means "king" doesn't it? Knayzh?

MP: Kniazhe. K-N-I-A-Z-H-E

LB: What was the name of the nearest big city?

MP: Real big city, [Tulchin](#).

LB: Tulchin. I never heard ...

MP: Tulchin, there where my parents were... Otherwise you know Europe so good?

LB: The part that I'm interviewing about I know pretty well by this time, yes. Is this in the Ukraine? It's not far from Priluki. It's a couple hundred miles away. How far were you from [Vinnitsa](#)?

MP: Not far, that's right. You could put down better; instead of Tulchin, put down Vinnitsa.

LB: Vinnitsa was also about as close as Tulchin.

MP: I believe Tulchin is nearer. Now you want to know how to spell Tulchin? It's also [Podolia Gubernia](#).

LB: Yes, I don't think it's on this map. This is mostly Poland.

MP: Tulchin may be on the map. Even Tulchin is not there? Kniazhe, for sure you wouldn't find because it was such a big city before you walked into the town - the city was maybe a population of about 300 families.

LB: That's the next question, about 300 families. Okay, could you describe the layout? Was it a shtetl?

MP: Of course it was.

LB: And what was the physical layout of the town? Was it like straight up and down streets or...?

MP: No, no, no, no, not straight up and down. It was like, here we would call the main street, there were stores. The stores were really built up by the people that owned the ground; the pomeschik; the graf, if you know that.

LB: A graf is a lord.

MP: A graf is a lord, that's right. And he built the stores and he used to rent them out to the people there.

LB: The graf was a Russian then? Or a Ukrainian?

MP: Sure, they were too rich they should stay there. They never lived in Kniazhe, naturally, but they lived somewhere in Poland maybe, or somewhere.

LB: Usually a graf is a Pole. That's why I wondered.

MP: Yes. You should know that. Any graf, Graholski, Zabanski - ours was Graf Zabanski. Graf Voholski. Graf and graf and graf. But our graf was Zabanski.

LB: So he probably was a Pole.

MP: Because they don't know. They thought that they have everything there, for instance the forests. There were tremendous forests and especially in our neighborhood. There, where I come (from), very big forests. They built in the forest a home, a sobniak. That means special for them; nobody lives with them and they lived there six months in the year. They're coming down and they're living in the forest. And in the forest where they builded it, is growing pine -full of pine. Very, very interesting. And then brought some fruit down there. And then they're going away somewhere. They're playing the rest of the year, they're playing cards somewhere, maybe in Poland or somewhere else. Nobody knows. They leave a watchman.

LB: Was the watchman a Jew or a Pole or a Ukrainian?

MP: The watchman was Christian, you know, not Jews. But they have Jews, they should watch them - they should be above them. Always without a Jew you couldn't turn around there.

LB: So the Jew was like the superintendent.

MP: A superintendent. That's good, yes. We used to call him - it's a Hebrew word - Maimen. Ah fargleibter. He was the superintendent. That's it.

LB: Maimen, you called him?

MP: Maimen. It's a Hebrew word. A fargleibter. You know anything about Hebrew? Ah maimen -er iz ah maimen gevehn. Because the graf, when he left the home, he was supposed to be there and he should take care of everything, what's going on there. Because he didn't take the furniture and they left horses, pigs, cows. It had to be taken care of; somebody supposed to be taking care. And in Russian, they said Opravlyaistche; see, he's supposed to be like a sort of manager and he used to manage that. After all, he left everything there.

LB: Did he collect the taxes too, this Jew?

MP: No such thing, taxes, but he used to collect the rent. For instance, even the homes. We have a home there. Usually in small towns, when they're building a home, it's a duplex. One for themselves and one they should rent it out. For instance, we have a duplex there too. We were paying to the manager how much, I don't know, I wouldn't mislead you with how much we used to pay, but they used to pay me the rental for the ground.

LB: For the ground; not for the house but for the ground.

MP: The ground was there, he used to collect. I suppose he knew where to send it. He used to send the money once in a year, whatever it was. As well for the stores. How small the town was - it was a lively town, very lively, very lively. Of course, I really was brought up in [Kryzhopil](#).

That's three versts from [Kniazhe](#). And in Kryzhopil we used to call it there Malenkaia Odessa. Small Odessa. Why? Because we had already there paved streets in Kryzhopil.

LB: Really?

MP: Not exactly paved like here, but so the mud shouldn't be so much. You step, you shouldn't fall in. In Kniazhe you fall in, you couldn't get out from there - but not in Kryzhopil. In Russian that's a mostavaya.

LB: A pavement?

MP: A pavement - the street - and we had trees from the station. In Kryzhopil we had a stanzia (station)- the train used to pass through there. The train passed through Kniazhe, too, but they never stopped there; they didn't have a station. But in Kryzhopil they had a station and there the street was paved. It was like the main street way up and then we had another street also, back and forth like a cross. Both streets was paved. And the main street was the main business there and the bazaar. In Kniazhe was also a bazaar, but Kniazhe bazaar was more interesting than Kryzhopil. Why? Because in Kryzhopil was more preparation; they built up more. They took away more ground for building of homes. But in Kniazhe wasn't so built. They had about 200 families - 200 homes. Maybe not even 200 homes because most of them lived two in a duplex. But in Kryzhopil it was entirely a different life. We had the pitovnik- they used to come down even from Odessa, actors, to play there.

LB: Pite, pite... That's to play, isn't it? No, pite is to drink isn't it? How do you say to drink in Russian?

MP: Pite. That's on the station when you're waiting for the train, you can go to the buffet. Then you can have a pite, a drink or whatever you want there.

LB: Then what's this? A pitomnik?

MP: Pitomnik - that was a beautiful garden. And that garden there really was paved. And in the Pitomnik they had a theater and all from Russia, from all kinds. I don't know from where, maybe some from Odessa, some maybe from different cities. They used to call them Lyubitelnis.

LB: Lyubitelnis?

MP: Yes, Lyubitelnis. It's not exact actors, professional, they themselves...

LB: Amateurs?

MP: Amateurs, yes, but more than amateurs. We also had amateurs. Also we used to play theater, but they would have a real... with music and all the pritzim, you know, the panes...

LB: The rich people then.

MP: Oh yes, they used to come there to see the play. For instance, they could go to Leningrad- at that time was Petrograd. Before I left there it was [Petersburg](#), really, then it's Petrograd. From Petrograd it became Leningrad.

LB: Yes. Let's go back to the players.

MP: Yes, and they used to come to the plays. We kids wanted to see also a play but we didn't have the money to go in there. Then we used to go around and we were like the slaves there. They let us in, providing we should do something on the stage to help them, you know what I mean. They would give us passes. Look, how many boys? We were maybe about fifty boys and

they could use only ten. What did they do? We were, you know, wise guys, kids. I tell you, I went in there and tell my friend he should stay outside. We used to go in the back, open the window and through the window one was laying on the floor and one picked him up and they used to jump in the theater. You know, that's also in the small towns. Could be that. But it was a very interesting life. It was not good that [the Czar](#), it was bad, but it still was better than after the Revolution. In the beginning of the Revolution it was very, very good. We could turn around and we could walk and we could see. We could go to Odessa and we could go to places like this. For instance, Jews wanted a lot to go to Kiev, only certain people had the privilege - very rich people or the remeshinkis.

LB: Say that word again.

MP: Remeshinkis, remeshnik. Why? Do you know anything in...

LB: I know some Russian, but I don't know this. This would be the businessmen or the traders?

MP: Working people.

LB: Oh. Rabochniks...

MP: Rabochinado, that's right. They had the privilege to live even in Kiev. We didn't. And after the Revolution we could go to Kiev, to Moscow, to Leningrad and anyplace we want to. But since with [Stalin](#)... It was terrible; it was worse than by the Czar. At least we knew that there we weren't allowed to go. We went to Vinnitsa and that's all; we were satisfied we could go to [Vinnitsa](#). We could go to [Zhmerynka](#) from there. [Paula](#) (Zollman - another interview subject), I believe she comes from there. We could go to [Odessa](#). We lived in Odessa. Go to Odessa? It was out of the question. It was a paradise there.

LB: The first question I want to ask you, you sound as if you lived in two towns at the same time. How could that be?

MP: That's also a good question. We have our home in Kniazhe. Then the children growing up and my father passed away and my mother said, "What are we going to do?" We were ten brothers and one sister.

LB: And your father died early?

MP: He was forty two years old and he comes out from a very, very - not from a rich family but from a very, very rich family. He, himself, was rich in children. But they drafted him... They were rich in everything. For instance, he had a brother in Odessa who was one of the (people) who had the privilege to go over all Russia because he was a perviguildi kupetz. He was a very rich man.

LB: Say that word again.

MP: Pervii. Kupetz.

LB: Oh, in the "[first guild](#)". Yes.

MP: Kupetz - it's just like he had a wholesale grocer. What do you call that, the merchandise, not grocery, is just a retail store.

LB: Wholesaler.

MP: But one of the biggest in Odessa.

LB: Like a distributing...

MP: Yes. They used to send practically all over Russia.

LB: Was his name Prince also?

MP: No, my name is really not Prince.

LB: What is it?

MP: My name is Khina - spelled C-H-I-N-A. But when I came here they said, "Don't say that here- 'China'- because here China is China." At that time, 1923, "They're going to laugh at you. What kind of Chinaman are you?" I didn't take out my papers yet. When I'll take out the papers, I'll pay the two dollars... I had cousins here. Their name was Shprince, so why should they think I follow them? Cut off the Sh and I had the name Prince. That's what it is. (laughter) For instance, he employed like sixty-five people in his office. Not exactly in his office, but in the warehouse.

LB: His place was in Odessa?

MP: Odessa. He himself was one of the directors of the Azovsky Donskoi Kommertseski Bank. That's the largest bank in Odessa. He was one of the board directors there. He had, for instance, like in Singapore, he had plantations for pepper. He had in China, plantations for rice. Then he had plantations for vanilla.

LB: This was an uncle of yours?

MP: My father's brother.

LB: Now, I'll mark down this is Mr. China, right? If he was this rich a businessman, where did he have his permanent home? In Odessa?

MP: In Odessa, sure.

LB: Was he an assimilated Jew?

MP: No! Very, very religious. A hundred per cent. Saturday, you couldn't... The boys in the offices - they used to call us even from the warehouse, "the boys". In the office, he didn't employ so many, but together with the boys from the warehouse about sixty-five people. But Saturday we weren't allowed to even a pencil to lift.

LB: Did you work in the warehouse? Did you work for him?

MP: I'm coming to that too.

LB: Okay. Did he hire only Jews in his business?

MP: Not only Jews. He was afraid, maybe strangers are going to rob him. I must admit that he had always the family. From his family we were very little because from my family, the very fact that they were rich, they didn't have to come to him. But from my aunt's side, they were very poor. It's sixty-five

people he employed. Maybe we were, from our side, about six and fifty-nine were from the other side, and they were stealing right and left.

LB: Anyway!

MP: See! He was making enough. But still and all, when you would tell B'ni Moisevich, that means for instance, my brother he steals, he'll say, "You don't know what you're talking about." He was thanked for that. It's impossible. He would never believe they're stealing from that.

LB: You mean, that a family person would steal.

MP: Yes. For instance, I saw once a thing which really, I was a kid... First of all, I want to tell you, my father, he should rest in peace... There's one thing, His family was very, very close. He went to Odessa. I had an older brother before me, you know, from the ten brothers... I have even the pictures and everything. There's nobody left; I'm left the only one. And he came to Odessa and he said to my mother, "Pessie, I want to go to Itzik." His name, of course, was Yitzhaki Abramovitch in Russian but we called him Itzik. My father called him (Itzik) because it's his brother. He said, "I want to go to Odessa." I said I had an older brother than I am - he could find a piece of paper when he was a kid, seven years old, he started to read... even he couldn't read Russian, a, b, c,... to put it together. A Jewish paper, he was studying by himself. My father also was - the whole family was - very religious. When it comes to Hebrew, my father used to... when he passed away...

LB: What did your father do? Did he teach you Hebrew? No.

MP: I just want to tell you that. When he passed away the mother was crying - the oldest brother was in the United States already - and she called us over and she said, "See, where he left us?" I start to realize now, when she said to us... Duvid, the oldest than I am, before was Yidden. They were Jews because they were studying; they knew that. He already had "*smichas*"...

LB: He could be a rabbi - he passed his test.

MP: My father could be a rabbi, he had the *smichas*. But he didn't want it because he said that in a small town everybody will say something to him; they *vill im zugen dais*. *Dem ruv*, they can say anything they want to because he'll listen then, but he didn't want to listen. He said to my mother, "Pessie, I want to take David - he's so anxious to read and to learn and to study. I'll go to my brother Itzik in Odessa and I want to see what can he do for him there?" Sure enough, she said "Why not? If you want to go to Odessa." And they went to Odessa and they brought the little kid, maybe he was about eight years old. Don't think he was twenty-nine years - about eight years old. And he brought him in and Itzik asked him, "Moishe" - my father, Morris, Moishe, that was his name - "*Vus ken ich eppes tun far dir?*" What can I do for you?

He told him plain: "You have two sons only, two daughters." They were educated. The two girls - one, in fact, committed suicide in the university because she was in love with a Gentile boy. He said he would rather see her dead than... Now it's a shame to say that. What do you mean? A Gentile - an honor, you marry a Gentile boy or a Gentile girl but at that time... You know it's sixty, seventy years ago. Well, then

what do you want that he should do? He said, "I brought you over David, you should make from him a *mensch*." What that means a *mensch*? He should give him the same *gymnase* as his sons were studying. Let him at least have one educated boy too. He said, "Yes, I'll do it for you." He left him there and he was working and at the same time he was going to school and he was in board. My uncle was paying everything for him, everything.

LB: So he didn't live with your uncle?

MP: He was living in twelve rooms and there were four of them!

LB: That's what I'm saying.

MP: There, when you're rich, you're rich. You know what I mean? They lived entirely different. He said, "Yes, you can leave him here and I'll make a *mensch* from him." Start to go, and he was really a genius, especially (with an) education. He took up very fast and they kept him in the gymnasium. He said, "Uncle, I don't want to go any further; I don't want to be a doctor. I want to study as an accountant, a career, a CPA. At the same time he was working in the office to earn something for himself and he said, "I want to become an accountant and I'll be able to work in the office and then I'll be something." He said all right. He became an accountant. We used to call him Duvid Moishe because in Europe, in *klein shtetl*, he would be Duvid Moishe, but there he was David Moisevich. And he was working for them.

One day, before the Revolution, I said to my mother, because I was very tired in that respect - business, business, business, business, since I was born. I had to go in business for myself with somebody and I was doing that. I said to my mother, "Why shouldn't I be in Odessa? Let me go to Odessa near David Moisevich, near my brother. Through him I'll go into Khina (China) too." He used to (be called) not Khina, but Khin. "I'll go to him; maybe he'll take me." Sure enough, I went to Odessa and my brother turned around. He says, "What are you doing here?" I say, "Nothing, nothing (is) wrong," because he got scared. I say, "I came to Odessa because I made up my mind I want to be in Odessa too. If you're in Odessa I don't see why I shouldn't be in Odessa. At the same time, maybe you could get a job for me here by Khin." He said, "It's possible - I got to talk it over with Khin." Khin had a separate *kabinet* to sit with the boys together. Then he said to come tomorrow and give him another day to go the same time. I couldn't stay with my brother in the same room. It doesn't look nice. You know - there an accountant, it's not like here an accountant - nothing. There an accountant was like a professor; God knows, they look up to him. Here I come from a small town and if you give me another day, I could stay. Overnight he said to me, "I'll talk it over with him and I'll see what I can do." Sure enough, (he) comes tomorrow morning. He said, "Nine o'clock in the morning." The following day, I came there and they said, "Yes, you'll be able to work here," and I started to work. And the business was so big - price *kurrenten* (current) - and they used to send out catalogs all over Russia. He employed three boys; we were three boys to go only to the post office three times a day to mail the catalogs and to bring out the mail. He had his own box, naturally, in the post office. I still remember it, the telephone, from the number... Maybe it was a little (coincidence) in the family - things like I used to follow my brother - I used to like to read addresses. You know, after all, I came from a small town. I could read and write Jewish or a little Hebrew but my Russian wasn't good for Odessa. But at the same time I liked to see where they're sending out... They used to send out three times a day, mail. And one just happened on my luck, they give me mail...

(Tape ends)

LB: You saw something in the mail?

MP: I was reading the addresses. I just happened to (see) one address, Vinnitsa. Vinnitsa is spelled with two “n”s . You should know the difference. But we didn’t know with two “n”s or ... Kryzhopil is the way I spell it and it’s all right. I came to Khin and I didn’t say anything. You know, I was working. But Khin had the habit, he was very, not because he was my uncle , at the same time not because he was rich, but because he was a clever man; he was a businessman.

Every morning, like a clock, when the boys were sitting everybody by the books, he used to come in from his office and he used to say “Good morning boys” - in Russian - *Zdavstbyute rebyate. Uchitse*. Three words: “Hello boys, study. “To me it was something. I said to myself, “What, are you crazy?” But I wouldn’t say anything (to him) and I wouldn’t ask because... One day, one week, two weeks, three weeks, six weeks. I said to myself, “Nu, I must ask my brother what does that mean: *Zdravstvyute rebyate. Uchitse?*” And he used to go and he used to mind his own business. I talked to my brother, I said, “David Moisevich, *Abisnet*, explain to me, what he means with that? What is it? He couldn't talk anymore?” He said, “He knows what he’s talking about.” I say, “Why?” He says, “Study the customers, he means. When a customer comes to buy from you a carload of sugar, five hundred bags, maybe you make twenty rubles, naturally. Try to sell only ten bags of rice, you’ll make just as much. Don’t forget, with ten bags of rice, accordingly you’ll make a hundred times more. If you make only ten dollars, you’ll make more than the twenty dollars on the five hundred bags. And nobody from the comparison, they wouldn’t talk that China sells carloads of sugar, you know what I mean?”

LB: No, I don’t understand that at all.

MP: What is to understand that? I asked my brother...

LB: I understand that part. I understand the difference if somebody wants to buy a carload...

MP: He’s going to sell it. But he wasn’t interested to sell you a carload of sugar.

LB: And you mentioned rice instead of sugar.

MP: He was interested to sell to you better only ten bags of rice.

LB: Why?

MP: Because in the ten bags of rice it takes a pushcart. They hire a pushcart and they deliver to them and nobody even pays attention to what Khina sends out from the warehouse. But if you send out a carload with sugar, that’s five hundred bags, it’d be ten trucks.

LB: So he’d prefer to sell in small quantities? Is that what you’re saying?



MP: You can sell even carloads of sugar too. But forget about sugar. Try to sell something else because there was enough merchandise of different types. For instance, like he used to buy by the carload, raisins; by the carload, zinc.

LB: Zinc is a metal.

MP: Try to sell better, zinc.

LB: In other words, don't keep selling sugar.

MP: No. In other words, you can make more money or just as much money, just selling ten bags of rice as you would a carload of sugar.

LB: That's what I thought.

MP: That's what he meant - *Uchitse*. Now I started to think to myself, he's not crazy because he explained it to me.

LB: I'm going to take you back to the village. I still don't understand - when your father died, your mother apparently must have taken the family from Kniazhe to Kryzhopil?

MP: And she sold the Kniazhe duplex; she got to have the money. And she bought ground in Kryzhopil. She built a new duplex we should be able to live in one side and one side we should rent out.

LB: And is that what happened? How many people lived in this house in Kryzhopil?

MP: How many families?

LB: No, on your side of the duplex, how many people were in your family? You still had the ten children, but it was only your mother now, right?

MP: Yes, but from the ten children we were already about six, seven.

LB: You tell me you were born in 1900 and you were born in Kniazhe, right? Did you go to cheder in Kniazhe?

MP: Yes. I was three years old going in cheder already until maybe seven years.

LB: Then did you go to any other school after that?

MP: No, only from listening to her because...

LB: You were self-educated then?

MP: Self educated.

LB: And how old were you when your father died?

MP: Maybe about nine years, I don't remember. I believe about nine years old.

LB: After cheder finished, you were about seven to eight years old...

MP: I don't remember exactly; I know that I was a young kid.

LB: Was there some reason why you did or did not go on to more schooling?

MP: Got to bring in a couple... the mother should be able to make a living... with what she's going to support...

LB: But your father was still living, right?

MP: When he was still living, also he wasn't making too much. But at that time I was going in cheder too. In fact, my other brother was...

LB: Let's stick to you, Mr. Prince. You finish cheder about seven or eight and you could not go on to school because actually the family needed for you to go out and make some money?

MP: Not needed. I tell you truth, I wasn't even interested at that time to ask my mother if she needed more money or not. I wanted to make money; all I wanted was to make money.

LB: Okay. What did you do after the age of eight?

MP: In Kryzhopil was a factory, a straw factory.

LB: Straw? What did you make from straw?

MP: Hats for wine bottles.

LB: Caps. Oh, I see. You worked in this from the time you were eight?

MP: In the straw factory they don't ask you. You can pull the straw, you can do something.

LB: How many people worked in this factory?

MP: There were working about fifty people.

LB: Were they all Jews?

MP: Only.

LB: Was it owned by a Jew?

MP: Yes.

LB: And was it hand work or was there some machinery?

MP: Certain machinery, but not exactly...Anybody in two hours they would show it to you. In an hour you would know how to do it. To any machine, you walk over, you know how to work. Everybody had his own place to work- one was pulling the straw, one was opening the straw. You know, the straw used to come in big bunches like you take it from the field and then they're drying out the straw and they used to pack it...

LB: Bale it.

MP: Yes, not exactly bale, but... And they used to bring it in the factory. We knew already which is easier to work on the straw.

LB: So that's what you did for about a year?

MP: Something like that. Then my mother's brother came in from a different town. He is also really from the lumber business; from my mother's side they're from generations in the lumber business. Not only in lumber - they had tar. Tar there is not for the roofs, tar is there for the wagons. They got to smear the inside of the wheels should turn. And leather, see. They were rich. He comes and says to Pessie, being my father passed away, he said...

LB: Wait a minute. Your father hasn't died yet. If you've only worked for a year, then your father hasn't died. How old were you? You said you were ten or so?

MP: I believe I was younger. I believe I was eight years or so. I can't remember exactly. I know I was a kid at that time.

LB: When you went to work in the straw factory, were you already living in Kryzhopil?

MP: Yes.

LB: So then your father had to be dead, right?

MP: Yes.

LB: So that makes it that you were quite a bit younger when your father died. Right?

MP: That's what I said.

LB: Your father and your family - were they very religious?

MP: Yes.

LB: Was your father a [Hasid](#)?

MP: Yes.

LB: Do you remember your father?

MP: Of course!

LB: Did he have pais?

MP: No, no, no, but he wouldn't believe to razor his beard. He wouldn't take off his beard. He wouldn't cut the beard.

LB: Did he wear a [caftan and a shtreimel](#) and all that?

MP: No, no. He wasn't so extreme. You see, his father, my grandfather, he was already the *Hasidisher*, the [Satamar](#), whatever is there. Yes. He was there. First of all, he was a rabbi. He really was a *ruv*.

LB: Your father?

MP: Yes, but he didn't want to be bothered with that. But then Khina, when he came to Odessa, he told him the story that he wants to make a living. He said that he should give me sort of agency.

LB: It's very confusing, Mr. Prince. I can't follow you so you just listen to my questions and answer them, okay?

MP: Go ahead.

LB: Your father was very religious -did he go to *shul* (synagogue) every day?

MP: Every day, twice a day.

LB: And your mother too? I mean, your mother was religious?

MP: She was wearing a [sheitel](#), but...

LB: She didn't go to shul.

MP: No. She was going [Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur](#).

LB: So she went when the women were supposed to go.

MP: Oh yes!

LB: First you were in Kniazhe and then you were in Kryzhopil. Were both towns religious towns?

MP: In Kryzhopil was more already lively. It was a town - they used to call it a small Odessa.

LB: Odessa was quite assimilated, but Kniazhe was much more Orthodox?

MP: Mostly.

LB: And Kryzhopil - if it was more lively, how would you describe it?

MP: I mean there were real stores there, real buildings.

LB: I'm talking about religion now.

MP: It was religious. And some of them didn't believe in that. We had already, for instance, like the drugstore, she was smoking that time already. And everybody was saying (so and so) smoked a cigarette on Shabbos. I couldn't believe it, myself. I must see that. I couldn't believe it! How can she smoke a cigarette? A woman, besides that? And she should smoke a cigarette. Ah! I was so happy, I saw the way she was smoking.

LB: You were embarrassed?

MP: I should say.

LB: So in other words the pressure in Kryzhopil to conform was not as strong.

MP: Oh, no, no, no. It's entirely different. You wouldn't see so many *sheitlach* like you would see in Kniazhe. My mother - for instance, on Friday night she got to *bentch licht*. What do you mean not to *bentch licht* (bless the candles)? In Kryzhopil they come and there's a Gentile delicatessen store.

LB: In Kryzhopil?

MP: Yes, sure. Hazir... because he used to own pigs, buy and sell. He used to kill and sell in the store. At the same time he used to make, like here, ham. It was his ham. They called it *vichinada*. It was out of this world but I was afraid to eat it. I'm a Jew, I should be eating it? I was afraid even to look at that. Of course.

LB: So you were raised that all these things were sins?

MP: Yes.

LB: But did you gradually get away from those feelings/

MP: Oh, yes.

LB: By what age?

MP: Maybe nine, ten years.

LB: Probably right after your father died is what it sounds like.

MP: Right, right, right. Then we were free. But in certain ways I must admit it, I still feel it. For instance, I wouldn't go every day and every night and every morning to shul, but to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, until I got sick, I was going in shul. I used to take a ticket and sit the whole day there. Yom Kippur, even now, I would like to. Here, I got a tape - when I hear a cantor I put it right on the tape. And I got the records on my hi-fi, most of the best cantors and I still love them.

LB: Did you have cantors in Kryzhopil?

MP: You heard about Belarski? The [singer](#) Belarski?

LB: No.

MP: Belarski was brought up with me together. He went in cheder with me together and he became famous. He just passed away - two years already. But he became very, very famous here. Belarski. In my time, when I grew up, we used to smoke already in the street- after the Revolution.

LB: We're not at the Revolution yet. You're only ten years old and the war hasn't broken out yet. I'm still back there in your childhood.

MP: It still was in me. Over there, on the next street, there lives a family - she's Jewish, she converted for a Christian. I was afraid to pass by the house, maybe she'll touch me.

LB: Is that right?

MP: Yes.

LB: It's very interesting. Those feelings are very strong. I don't think you ever get rid of them.

MP: You see, I learned a lot of things, as little as I was. I'll give you an example like Pesach. You couldn't duplicate our Pesach, what we made. That was a real, hundred percent traditional Jewish Orthodox, but not fanatic. Like the father was like a king and my mother was like a queen. And the children, they say the Haggadah with the ten plagues - we used to do it slowly (sings and illustrates the portion about the ten plagues). And then another thing. Then I'll jump to 19...

LB: No, don't jump. Tell...

MP: Yes, yes, I'll tell you why. We were invited for the first night of Pesach here to the Shochets for supper. He was sitting and saying the Haggadah. And I didn't see the Haggadah, God knows how many years, and then we come to a certain part, I still remembered it, the melody we were singing there. I said, "Eh, Israel, I want to sing that!" He says, "Yes." They, all of them, you know Mrs. Kaufman, what's her name, the sister in law?

LB: Bupsie.

MP: Yes, you know, she couldn't get over it. I said, "Yes, I didn't open the Haggadah for maybe about sixty-five years, and I didn't look, but I still remember the way they were singing by us in the ..." See, that's why I said that's it's in me. I've never touched ham, even today.

LB: What are some of the things that you remember as being very important in this respect? For example, one person said that they could never go past a church without spitting. That was one thing.

MP: Yes, yes, yes, especially when a priest passed. "*Ubervarfen ah shtraw.*"

LB: What's that?

MP: To pick up a straw and turn it over.

LB: Over your shoulder?

MP: Sure, because a priest went by!

LB: So a piece of straw over your shoulder, that was...?

MP: That was kosher. See, it's a lot of things.

LB: It's very interesting because almost all people have something like that.

MP: And I'm still believing in certain things...

LB: Yes, for example? Does your wife keep a kosher home?

MP: No. First of all she...

LB: She's from Odessa anyway.

MP: Besides that she's from Odessa, she's a very good housekeeper, but she doesn't believe in - we buy kosher meat not because it's kosher. First of all, the meat that we buy kosher, it comes to the house, it's traif. Because she doesn't make it kosher, salted with the water - then it's [traif](#).

LB: It's not kosher the way it's supposed to be, the way it used to be. Now let me take you back again. There you are in Kryzhopil and you're working in the straw factory. What are the other children doing? Are they working in the straw factory?

MP: No, they went to *cheder* yet.

LB: You were the second oldest?

MP: When we remained in Kryzhopil, I was the third from the oldest. David Moisevich was in Odessa and the other, we used to call him the *Khnyukerel* - we used to laugh from him because he used to daven like day in and day out.

LB: He was a *Khnyuk*? (a kind of fool)

MP: You know what it means?

LB: Yes, I know - sort of a foolish one.

MP: Yes, he was nobody's fool, but he used to...

LB: So what happened to him?

MP: He got killed. They all got killed. That's what I say. I'm left of all. We were four brothers. Three passed away, all the older three, and the other got killed and the mother and the... also in Odessa. All of them.

LB: During the Second World War you mean?

MP: By Hitler, yes, sure.

LB: By Hitler, so then they must have stayed in the Soviet Union.

MP: Of course, they were in Odessa. They didn't, I suppose, have a chance to escape from Odessa.

LB: And they didn't come here to the United States either?

MP: No, that was my fault. I don't blame myself - it's foolish to blame myself. It's too late now to think about it but I should think more than that. And then they weren't interested. They lived there. The youngest brother was a doctor. He's not only a doctor, but he invented, for instance, like a certain, he had his own invention...

LB: That kind of a life is hard for you to explain.

MP: I wish I should give you better from the tapes. (The subject had his own tapes which he'd made with his daughter.) You'd know more; you'd have a better idea than I'm talking to you now.



LB: But I might not know what I want to know.

MP: Then I'll stop, but you can listen to them.

LB: I see. Well, you let me do my way, okay?

MP: Go ahead.

LB: All right. The house that you owned, that you lived in in Kryzhopil, you were seven children and your mother left there, right? How big was that house? How many rooms was it?

MP: There is not such a thing. There are two rooms, that means a bedroom and a living room. The living room - they put up curtains and they sleep. There's not that the boys got to have a separate room and the girls got to have a separate room.

LB: And you probably had one big table...

MP: Yes, we were sitting all there. But one thing I must tell you. We had that time bigger respect than the children here with their education, for their parents.

LB: Yes, I'm sure that you did.

MP: A hundred percent; not only sure, but a hundred percent sure. My mother was saying something - was a law. Mama, see? No question. And when my father said something - when he said this, the king! You know, Saturday when he comes from shul, we got to be all by the table. You got to wash and make [hamotzi](#) (blessing over the bread) and everything. You're not supposed to say anything unless the father asks you.

LB: I've heard that before. Are you talking about at the table or at any time?

MP: At the table, everything.

LB: At the table you couldn't talk unless the father spoke to you?

MP: Because you're eating. If he asks something we'll answer him. And what do you think was the questions? What you were studying all week, what you were doing in cheder. Everything, but not from the street, what you're running around. A little episode, I must tell you that. Maybe I was five years only, we were going in cheder. We used to come out when the farmers used to bring out melons, honeydews. Three of us we went under a wagon- we saw the farmer not there, we stole a little melon. And I was the wise guy and I grabbed it from the boys and I runned home. And I said to my mother, "See what I brought you?" I thought she would be in heaven. My father said, "You'd better give it back if you want to be alive. I'll take off the belt." I couldn't make it out. I don't ask him nothing, I saved him a penny or whatever it is, which it was altogether. "*Gonevim!*" (Thieves!) You're a gonif - you steal. "You bring it

back!” I was crying for the boys they should take it away from me. You see, that’s how it was... That’s why it’s a different life over there. But not fanatic, that’s one thing, not fanatic.

LB: What do you mean, not fanatic?

MP: Oh, for instance, like some of them they used to daven - they used to shuckle (move back and forth in prayer) they used to break the wall. He davened beautiful. If he couldn’t go to shul - maybe he wasn’t feeling well or it was raining or something - he was davening in the house. Religious people, very religious people, they davened in [two pairs of tefillin](#).

LB: Oh is that right?

MP: See, my grandfather, he should rest in peace, he went to Israel to die there. He didn’t want to die here.

LB: He did die in Israel?

MP: Yes. He was from the high class Hasidim by his rebbe - the [Tolner rebbe](#).

LB: Tolner?

MP: He gave him a second pair of tefillin, he should have his tefillin. And I’m brought up that way; I can’t help it.

LB: No, well, there’s nothing wrong with it.

MP: It’s nothing wrong but, for instance, like, again the same thing... I got to mix it in now. My daughter should be well. He (her husband) got a big position; he’s the president from a certain company. He goes to Europe, he goes to Japan. About four or five weeks ago, my daughter calls me up; they got to go to Europe - to London, Paris, Germany, Rome, Milan. And then I said, “Lillian, how about to go to Israel? You will know at least something about Israel because you were brought up by me. She didn’t get the Jewish education by me, that’s also a reason, but at the same time she knows Jewish history more than average. “How about Bernie? What are you going to do? Let me see the impression you’re going to have from Israel.” Sure enough, they listened to me, they went to Israel - they had time to be in Israel a week. Then she wrote me letters. (moves to get up for the letters)

LB: No, no. Sit, sit, I understand.

MP: No, just a couple of words. She writes they couldn’t think any better; Bernie’s crazy about Israel but for his business, maybe he’s going to have a connection there with an inventor for his line. Now, (words missing) especially my older granddaughter...

LB: I understand the problems, believe me; I understand them very well. You come from a family where your grandfather was so religious that he had two pairs of tefillin and one pair was given to him by the rebbe. And here, you come with your granddaughter and you're lucky that she went to Israel. Right?

MP: That is true.

LB: I understand it and your son-in-law couldn't be less interested, but now he's interested. Before he was not interested.

MP: See, my daughter, I used to say to her, "Lillian, you don't want to go - send Mary to Israel. Oh, don't even talk about it. Don't even mention it."

LB: I do understand the problem. Now, let's go back. You're all living there in Kryzhopil and things are not so good for the Jews, or are they okay for you? How was life there...

(Tape ends)

LB: Between the Jews and the non-Jews, you say you didn't bother with them very much.

MP: On the average, it was very good.

LB: Did it change at any time?

MP: After the [Revolution](#).

LB: When the war broke out in 1914 - the First World War - did that affect you in any way?

MP: The day when the war broke out, we were in the station to go to United States.

LB: Is that right?

MP: It just happened that day, we were in the station.

LB: The whole family was planning to go?

MP: All ready.

LB: Your mother, too?

MP: My mother with the children. And it just happened, after me, Labe, my brother, he was wild. In what respect was he wild? He was different from all of them. I was shy in that respect. His best pleasure was horseback riding but he didn't have a horse. But then he, with his friend, they caught somewhere a horse, and they were riding the day - we're on the station already, you know, with all the packages. All of a sudden, my mother turns around and she says he's not there. Because first he was riding and then he went off and the other kid went up on the horse and they were riding. Then the horse hit him in the back

and knocked out four teeth and they took him to the doctor. And we didn't know nothing because my mother and the kids, for sure were were happy we're going to America. My mother was busy; she didn't know. They got to watch the company should be together and she sees Labie's not there. She starts to ask and then she asks a neighbor. She said, "What are you looking for?" She said, "What do you mean? I'm looking for my Labe. We got to go." If not for him they would be alive.

LB: They would be alive here.

MP: She says, "What do you mean? Labie is in the hospital." She says, "Labie's in the hospital? What do you mean?" She tells her the same story - he was riding with so and so on the horses and they gave him twelve stitches and he was three months in the hospital.

LB: Do you think if he hadn't run away, considering that war broke out that day, you still could have gotten out of Russia?

MP: That time? Oh yeah! Yeah!

LB: You had passports and everything?

MP: Everything.

LB: Ugh, that's terrible.

MP: Everything was complete. We were on the station to go - just waiting on the train. What I tell you is a fact. *Meiner landsmen* (my countrymen) whatever went, a couple of them went to the United States; they escaped from there just in time.

LB: So what happened after that? Then you had to stay there?

MP: Sure.

LB: And then the war continued and what happened to you? By that time you were already fourteen years old - fifteen, sixteen...

MP: Then I was working in the lumber yard with my uncle. That is what I started to tell you. I had an uncle, also my mother's brother - he had a lumber yard in a different town - Prostinyets ([Trostyanets?](#)). He came to my mother in Kryzhopil; he said, "Pessie, I want to take off from your hands a *esser*." You know what that means?

LB An eater.

MP: An eater. I'll take Mischa to me and I'll pay you and I'll dress him and everything and it will be a *piskele veiniker*.

LB: Yes, one less mouth to feed.

MP: And my brothers said, "What are you going to give him a (word missing)?" He said, he's going to give me three rubles a month - that means thirty-six dollars a year; with board and everything, couldn't be any better at that time. And he'll take me to Prostinyets. My brothers said, "Yes, but Uncle - give me first the thirty-six dollars because Milton, Mischele, doesn't need the money." Really, why did I need the money there when everything is taken care of? He gave them the money and I went to Prostinyets.

LB: And you worked in the lumber business?

MP: Yes. In six months I was a complete manager, so much I took into my head. This got to be, I grow up in the lumber business.

LB: What year was that?

MP: I believe in 1911.

LB: No, the war had to start.

MP: I believe that was before the war yet. Here I got more. (Points to own tape recording). See, when the war started...

LB: You told me that the first day when war was declared your family was ready to leave for America.

MP: This was before yet. And after the war it started the Revolution, then we moved all to Odessa. After the war, we all moved to Odessa because what's the use? We had a home in Kryzhopil, we sold it because we were supposed to go to the United States. We were living temporarily in a room there and a room here. There we didn't sleep. *Vie zoy zugt mann* (How do you say it?) We didn't sleep here, they didn't eat there. You know what I mean? It was no life. To my brother I talked it over, "Let's move to Odessa because there's less danger in Odessa." Whatever we'll do, they'll do and we moved there. And of course, my mother, what is she going to say? No? Where the children want to go, there she'll go with us. And then the Revolution started.

LB: That was 1917. So you were already in Odessa when the Revolution started?

MP: I was, I believe, since 1914.

LB: Yes. We'll continue. Go ahead. (Interviewer was having great difficulty keeping the time sequence straight and keeping the respondent to any chronological sequence of events in the telling).

MP: Next, I was working with my uncle.

LB: You're in Odessa and you're working for your uncle there?

MP: No, after the Revolution. Until the Revolution, I didn't work...

LB: What happened during the Revolution?

MP: During the Revolution? Oh, my brother, that fellow, Labe - Leon - he used to have charcoal to sell. He opened a store for charcoal and wood. Then he made a big success. He had about five stores. He was a young boy and he made a success. My head was flying; it wasn't in one place. I started to deal with foreign money, see, *Volutas*. Here to buy, here to sell, here to buy, through friends - I got acquaintances. Then I said to myself why should I stay there? One place I know where to go, because Odessa's big, I know one man who will buy from me. Maybe give me the right price, maybe not. But I was making out very good. I go back to Kryzhopil. I'll be alone there and I'll find out who'll buy the *voluta*, when I'll buy, from whom I'll buy. I'll go to these people, whatever they got.

LB: What is *voluta*?

MP: Foreign money.

LB: In a small town like Kryzhopil, who's going to have foreign money?

MP: You'd be surprised - not too much, but they have their own. For instance, like they have the five dollar gold pieces; I was buying that too. Everything. Because that time was [Kerensky](#) and Kerensky (currency) was only paper; everything was paper - *shmatas* (rags). We used to call it rags. But they had the gold. They wanted to sell it because they want that...

LB: The Kerensky ruble?

MP: Yes. So I say to myself, "I'm making money." Then I figure, why should I stay here? I'll go to different towns. Then I go in a town where I was managing already a store from lumber - a lumber yard I was managing when I was fourteen or fifteen years old - and I go there and I got acquaintances there with people. I'll go there, maybe I'll make it out there too. Maybe I'll buy there. If not, I'll go back to Kryzhopil.

LB: When the Revolution was going on, were you paying any attention to the political life? The political ideas of the Revolution?

MP: No, no, no, no.

LB: None of this touched you?

MP: No, no, no, I was young. First of all, I escaped from the army.

LB: How did you escape from the army?

MP: Escape is also a question. They put in the train so many boys, I sneaked out from the train and I walked away.

LB: And they didn't catch you?

MP: God forbid. When they would catch me they would shoot me.

LB: Where did you go? Was this in Odessa that they picked you up?

MP: In Odessa. We were about nine or ten boys that time when we escaped with what little money we had. It was in July. We weren't afraid, as young as we are. Whatever we'll leave, we'll leave. Let's walk to the small towns and on the fields where the wheat's growing (we) should go in the wheat, nobody should see us. We were walking about a week or ten days, maybe, until I came to Kryzhopil and then somehow got together with boys and started to deal with the *voluta* and then I came to Skifka ([Sytkivtsi](#)?). And I came home and I figured to myself, after all, I know a family - it's so good - let me go in to see the sisters. Because when I was in the lumber business - not I, because I was managing only - from Kryzhopil he had a branch in Skifka. Let me go to that family, because when they had a fire in the duplex all burned down. The family, it just happened, the father and mother, in three months time they both passed away. And the children, they were left with like nothing. There was a fire because it was cold, winter, and they were putting straw in the stove; they put in so much straw, it should be warm, and everything was burned down. Then I helped them out with lumber as much as I could. Naturally, it wasn't mine. I told them as much as you can give me, then you'll pay me off and I'll try to explain to my boss, this and that. Then we got very friendly. But now when I came to buy *voluta* I thought, "Let me go." And I walked in and I asked them maybe you got something to sell or what? They got scared. They see me; they know that I'm in Odessa. And I see packed in bundles, a couple of valises. I say, "Where you going?" One of the girls, she should rest in peace, she passed away, she was living in Philadelphia and made a big success there, and she was at my daughter's wedding here. She wanted to go to the United States; the whole family. I said, "If you're going to leave everything, I'm going with you." She said, "What do you mean? How's your mother? She's going to be off her mind. She thinks you're in Kryzhopil and all of a sudden you'll go to Rumania?" We couldn't go straight to...

LB: I know.

MP: I said, "Don't ask any questions. Let them think I'm in Kryzhopil" - because I didn't go every day back. Sure enough she said, "If you want to (go), then wait here tonight. At night time we'll talk it over with the smuggler, the guy who took them over."

LB: So you went with them?

MP: Went with them. Then I came to a small town and I didn't know what to do. I got to live...

LB: You mean in [Bessarabia](#)?

MP: I got to live from something. I said to them, "I know very well the lumber business." Really, like an expert I could sell myself, even when I was only seventeen years old. But I knew very well the line. I said to them, "How about I should find somewhere a lumber yard? I'll be able to work and I'll be able to earn something and I'll make a living for myself." Asked a couple of people there. They said no, it's too small a town but there's another town - Kalin (?). Maybe you heard of that - also in Bessarabia. It has a big lumber yard - tremendous. I said to myself, "I'll go tomorrow with my friend." And sure enough, we came there and before you're coming into the town the lumber yard is on the road. Tremendous - so many people - I was looking around, I couldn't count. About forty people were working there. I never saw that in my life - forty people in one lumber yard. I said to my friend, "How about tomorrow morning we'll go over there again and let's see. Maybe I'll find out." We went there and when we walked in the gate, three men stayed there by the gate and they're talking between them. And at the same time I see that the *poirim*, the farmers that are working there - you know, the Gentiles...

LB: Yes, the peasants.

MP: They don't need that money. They could use the money, and it's natural, but they have small farms. They're coming into the city selling what they bring up from the farm and at the same time they're working here and they're making an extra dollar. I said to my friend, "Max, see that lumber what they're carrying?" And I didn't pay attention to the men and they didn't pay attention to what I'm talking to my friend. I said, "Max, you see that lumber what they're carrying there? They don't know what they're doing." I said, "Where's the boss here? This lumber belongs over here."

LB: So, in other words, you had the thing all organized already, right? In your head.

MP: Oh, yes. Wait a minute, it's not everything yet. And then I said, "This lumber belongs over there." Then I saw a pile with lumber. In Europe they make furniture- not like here in the factory. The factory cleans and everything. There they make it by hand. I see that lumber that's laying there; this is a certain wood specially for furniture. It comes out like a steam. I say, "Max, see that lumber? It comes out like a steam from there and two weeks or a month later they'll have to sell it for a half to the carpenters and they wouldn't like to take it. Why? Because if it's raining and the rain goes through then the lumber gets blue and when you start to clean that, you can never clean out the blue.

LB: Mr. Prince, I'm going to take you off the lumber business, as interesting as it is. I'm sure that you're an expert on the lumber business, really, but what I want to know is whether once you got into Bessarabia, did you ever go back to Russia?

MP: No.

LB: That was it?

MP: The next thing, to the United states.

LB: So from there you came to the United States and you came in 1923? How long were you in Bessarabia?



MP: About three and a half years.

LB: So you got there in about 1919.

MP: Something like that.

LB: The Revolution came in 1917. Between 1917 and 1919 and the time that you crossed into Bessarabia, were you in Kryzhopil?

MP: Kryzhopil, Mosifka, all over. The small towns because I was buying ...

LB: The *voluta*, right. Did you, during this time, have any thoughts of the political situation?

MP: No, no. I was a young boy and I was interested to make money. Came to Odessa; here I had money, because they were starving there.

LB: Were you starving too?

MP: Yes, we - no. We had the best time - I wouldn't say the best time - we were better off than all the rich people that used to be.

LB: Who is "we"? Your family?

MP: My family.

LB: How come?

MP: Again, the same thing. For instance, if they were starving - they couldn't get bread - I got with the boys and said, "Where are you going? Where are you getting bread?" They said, "It's very simple, in [Kherson](#)." Another city- you go by boat. They're taking the ship to Kherson and in Kherson they still have flour there and they're selling it to Odessa. Who comes to buy there, they sell it. I say, "I'm going with you, too." And then we used to bring the bread and rolls, and we used to sell it on the bazaar. And we used to go every day. Same time, I used to have bread enough for my family, you know what I mean?

LB: What you're saying is that you were sharp enough to see.

MP: I was too sharp - that's the whole thing.

LB: It sounds to me that you seemed to have some sort of sense of where to find things and where things were happening and how to go about getting material to your family so that they wouldn't suffer too much. Is that correct?

MP: Right, exact. And I was for all of them the ruler; I was the advisor, above all of them - even for the older people.

LB: Why do you say you were "too sharp"?

MP: That's the whole thing. Before I'm doing something, I see already what's going to be. It's like we were going to Kherson to buy bread. We were buying bread as much as we could. We used to come with sacks; ten breads - as much as we could gather them. Once we came and the following week or two weeks later, or a month later to the same baker. He said, "No, there's a *ukase* - a law - come out not to sell out of Kherson because we are short. We're running short of flour ourselves."

LB: This is like a black market, almost, what you were doing.

MP: You could call this a black market.

LB: In times of a revolution, anything can happen. I'm not judging it. I'm just saying...

MP: The only thing was the black market. Everything you caught, whatever you bought or whatever you sold, it was black market, otherwise you couldn't get it. You couldn't go into a store to buy bread.

LB: Otherwise you would have starved. I understand.

MP: Right.

LB: What I wanted to know is that the Soviets at that time were not in full control because the Civil War was going on.

MP: Yes, but not in Odessa.

LB: Not in Odessa, so that's why you still had the opportunity to operate as a sort of independent businessman.

MP: Businessman, yes, right.

LB: But once they would move in, as they did - it had to be the Soviets. Was it, in Kherson, that issued the *ukase*?

MP: All over, they overlooked that because they knew that you're starving. They were overlooking a lot of things because they were starving. Everybody was starving. They didn't like the idea we go into Kherson to buy bread to bring it into Odessa, but once we came to Kherson, the baker says, "No, we have a rule - we shouldn't sell more than one bread." We start to turn around. One bread! The expense! I mean, not only we're going to lose; it doesn't pay. Then I said - they called me the wise guy, "I have an idea: one bread, yes, but do they mention the size of the bread? No! Make up in a pan - the dough for the bread should be ten, twelve pounds for one (loaf of) bread. They didn't mention it's got to be two pounds or twenty pounds - it's one bread. Make us ten pounds of bread in one pan." Then, we got to stay overnight.

LB: Until rises and all that.

MP: And we came in the morning and we got it. Yes, a ten pound bread and everybody was happy.

LB: And then you would cut it up...

MP: Yes, sure. And we came and we took that bread and we brought it to Odessa to the market there where we could sell it - black market, the way you said that. Everybody was glad to grab it. Everybody has his own customers already. And I sold that bread.

LB: Look at all the different businesses you were in: foreign currency, buying and selling bread. You certainly know quite a bit about the lumber company.

MP: Forget that lumber company. At that time you couldn't get any more lumber.

LB: I understand. What else were you doing in Odessa during this time period to keep your family comfortable? It sounds as if you were quite enterprising.

MP: I asked a friend, "What are you doing now?" He said, "We're working in the office. I'm selling [Georges Borman's Chocolate](#)." That's a well known concern; used to be in Moscow.

LB: George Boardman's Chocolate?

MP: Chocolate, like here Hershey's.

LB: It sounds like an American or an English name.

MP: I believe it's from Switzerland. Georges Borman. His chocolate was well known.

LB: Where did they get the chocolate?

MP: In the warehouse, they still had it. They used to come from Moscow; from Moscow they used to go and get it. He said "We're going to the wholesale place and we're buying a certain amount, then we go to the little stores and we sell it. We're making a living." Then I saw once, also from friends...

LB: Who are these friends? Where did you meet them?

MP: In Odessa, we were working. For instance, like I was working for Shechter and then I was working for Khina in the post office - you meet twenty boys there. We became friendly; not exact friends, but we became friendly especially Saturday and Sunday. The stores, the offices are closed, we didn't have what to do. Then we start to look and then I asked a friend of mine, "What are you doing?" He sells pencils. I said, "Pencils? What - are you going to become a beggar to sell the pencils in the streets?" He says, "No, no, no. There's a well known wholesale and retail paper business, Ivan Mach. You go over there, you'll buy by the gross and you'll go to the stores and you'll sell them to the offices. You'll make a nice living."

LB: So even pencils were in short supply.

MP: Everything! No such a thing. Even water was short. Pencils is gold already!

LB: Everything. And yet these boys were in business. How old were the boys?

MP: They were also my age - seventeen or something like that - maybe one younger, maybe older, but real Odessa boys.

LB: What does that mean, “real Odessa boys”? I’ve heard that before.

MP: Oh, yes, see: *Er geht a klein shteteldiker*. (There goes a small townner.) They recognize in your nose you're a greenhorn there. You know, like here you're a greenhorn. And there *ah klein shteteldiker* is from a small town. But I got acquainted.

LB: So an “Odessa boy” was a tough kid really?

MP: Oh, yes! Yes. Oh, with them you couldn't start - I wouldn't fight with them. Always I was the best one; I used to give in to everything they used to say. “No, you're right.”

LB: It almost sounds like a gang.

MP: No, no, no, no, but: “Don't bother me, don't step on my toes.” But otherwise they wouldn't bother you.

LB: Were they religious boys?

MP: No! I don't think so, no. Odessa boys were not religious boys.

LB: Were they Jewish boys?

MP: Oh, yes!

LB: All Jewish? What language did they speak?

MP: Russian, they used only Russian.

LB: They didn't speak Yiddish?

MP: No, you're a greenhorn!

LB: If you speak Yiddish you're a greenhorn.

MP: Like here they call it green and there, “*er geht a Poylisher*”.

LB: There goes a Polish one.

MP: Every one of them: *Poylisher idyut, Er geht a Poylisher.*

LB: If you spoke Yiddish they said you were a Pole.

MP: From Poland - even if you were from Kniazhe. They didn't know what Kniazhe means, they didn't know what Poland means.

LB: So to them Odessa was the whole world? Is that right?

MP: Oh! It is! In Odessa was a life. When, for instance, they used to sell Russian [kvass](#), you what that kvass?

LB: Kvass is a liquor?

MP: Not liquor. It's from...

LB: It's from potatoes.

MP: From bread.

LB: From bread? Oh, I'm sorry.

MP: Yes, and they used to sell it there by the paper stand. You could buy it for a cent. A piece of bread - even in the normal times - two cents. And for a cent you get a glass of kvass and you stand aside and drink. You'd enjoy that. The best thing you couldn't enjoy as much as you enjoyed that kvass. And they used to call Odessa, "Odessa Mama" - Odessa, the Mother. Why? Something that you see in there, you couldn't see nowhere.

LB: So there was a special feeling for Odessa?

MP: Absolutely! Absolutely!

LB: And here were, actually, a *klein shteteldiker*.

MP: But I came there, I didn't stay a *klein shteteldiker*.

LB: No, wait a minute... you're also, from a Hasidic family and you're very religious. You still, even to this day, have these feelings that go back to real Yiddishkeit. And yet, here you come in with this bunch of Odessa street boys...

MP: They never brought it up about Yiddishkeit. No, we never talked about it.

LB: That didn't come up?

MP: Never! I used to like a cantor. Shabbos, I used to go sometimes in the morning in a shul. Yes, and I used to go to daven, to listen to the best cantors. I wouldn't even tell it to them.

LB: So, it's not in their line, that you went to hear a cantor?

MP: No, no, no.

LB: In other words, you were careful what you discussed with them.

MP: In certain ways I was careful; otherwise I was open with them. I wasn't afraid because I was - like they say here, a boy from the boys. I was a kid between the kids. Like here they say a "yes-man". I was a yes man. What do I care, as long as they see he is right? For instance, when I quit Khina and I went to one of the boys and I said, "Maybe you know about a job?" He said, "Yes, go over there and there's Mr. Schechter. And they're also in the same line and they'll take you and they'll give you a job." And as soon as I rang the bell and I opened the door, I started to like the people and they started to like me.

LB: What kind of business was that?

MP: Also wholesale groceries; not in the same scale like Khina.

LB: So why did you quit Khina?

MP: It's too much already religious. I am in Odessa already - I'm Odessa boy and it just happened that family, Schechter, was one hundred percent assimilated. There were two daughters and two sons; they didn't understand a word of Jewish. In fact, it wasn't only Sarah and Izzie, a boy and a girl, they were the biggest anti-semites. See, Jewish antisemites. And it was Adolph and Emma was gold. You know what I mean?

LB: You mean the other two children?

MP: *Anti-Semiten.*

LB: Two of the children were antisemites and the other two were good?

MP: Too good, too good. They didn't know what to do for me.

LB: The two that you called Izzie and Sarah - did they make a problem for you?

MP: No, no.

LB: How did you know?

MP: But they hate you - I knew that. You can see. I couldn't walk to say, Izzie. When I come in the morning into the office, and he just happened to pass by, if I would say "hello" he wouldn't even answer me.

LB: Because you were a Jew, you mean?

MP: Yes, yes.

LB: Well, who were their friends then?

MP: Oh, from the gymnasium.

LB: They were gymnasium people?

MP: Ohhhh, of course.

LB: Well, were their friends Jews?

MP: Who the hell knows? Excuse me for my expression.

LB: So you had very little to do with them?

MP: I didn't want to have nothing to do with them altogether, but with Adolph...

LB: This is interesting, because I've heard this before. How do you know they *antiSemiten*?

MP: They didn't answer you right, and they wouldn't look at you. When they were talking to you, they were looking there. See, the mother, my boss' wife, Mr. Schechter's wife, I used to hate her like poison. From the first, she was an antiSemite like the daughter and the son.

LB: How do you know?

MP: Because she was a Jew hater.

LB: I want an example.

MP: She knows that she needs me more than I need her. I'll give you a little example: I was a snot nose-excuse me for my expression. Mr. Schechter used to call me, "vy" (formal, polite). I was ashamed for myself. Look, Mr. Schechter tells me "Vy". *Pozhalusta*, excuse me. I used to remember everything. Mr. Schechter used to come over to me, *Napishi adres* - write out the address. I say, "I'll remember." "*Nyet, nyet, nyet, chto darandas*. Why, there's not enough pencils for you?" He used to put his hands in the pockets, "Here buy some more." "And there wasn't by the gross. And so good natured. But with her, I

would be afraid even to tell her... Whatever she told me, I obeyed and that's all. The hell with her. Let her get out of the office.

LB: Did she come into the office?

MP: Oh yes, because Schechter had three stores in Kishinev from paper goods.

LB: Kishinev is already in Bessarabia. But I still don't see how you knew that she was an antisemite. Maybe she just didn't like the working people in there. For example, Izzie and Sarah, were they revolutionaries?

MP: First of all, they wouldn't like to even talk to a Jew. You could see that in their faces, their nose not smelling for a Jew. And Adolph was so good to me. He said, "Milton"... No, no, there I used to call myself "Shlomo". *Esli vy khochet*. Not, "ty". *Esly vy khochet*. She was playing piano - she wanted to give me piano lessons. Sarah, she didn't even look to where I was walking - none of them.

LB: But how do you know it was because you were a Jew?

MP: Because they expressed themselves. They were Jew haters - Jewish antisemites. How to explain to you? Like Gospodin Shechter, he was so polite. He was talking to you - if you didn't understand, he explained it to you. But Mrs. Schechter and the other two children - ugh! They didn't know what it means Passover to bring matzos in the house. He himself, he's a very, very good Jew and before Passover he said, "Shlomo, I want to invite you for supper and I'll bring matzos for you." I said, "Gospodin Shechter, yes." And I was there for supper and with the biggest respect. The servants, the girls, they should see everything should be for me kosher and everything. And she wouldn't even... she avoided Gospodin Schechter because he was good to me. So, Izzie, he brought me a Haggadah and I was singing there. He lit up. You could see. *Pozhalasta*. Sing again! You know. *Zhidovskay mordah*.

LB: Oh, she did say that?

MP: Sarah, plenty of times.

LB: Translate *Zhidovskay mordah*.

MP: *Mordah*, Adam's apple. "It looks like a Jew's..." Not like a person... it's hard to explain.

LB: Okay, now you've convinced me! Sometimes it's hard to know whether someone really doesn't like the Jews or maybe...

MP: Oh, they were Jew haters. I don't like a lot of people. I don't like some of them not because he's Jewish. I don't like them. But they were Jew haters.

LB: She did say those things to you.



MP: Not exact talking, but you could feel it. You could feel it the way they express and the way they're talking to you.

LB: You learned pretty good Russian in Odessa then?

MP: Not exact but better than here, naturally.

LB: When you first came to Odessa did you know Russian?

MP: A little bit.

LB: Only a little bit?

MP: That's the whole thing; that's what I started to tell you. When I came to Schechter with that letter, that address... They gave me a piece of paper, the manager, and said in Russian, naturally, I should write out an address in Vinnitsa.,

LB: You said that was at Khina's?

MP: No, that was at Shechter. I went away from Khina and I was at Schechter and I got the address and the boys sent me there and they asked me who sent me and said from the same wholesale grocer he knows. And he said that the manager, Mr. Gospodin, said I should write out the... Then he said, "You know Russian?" I said, "No." Why not tell him the truth? The best swindle is the truth.

LB: The best swindle is the truth?

MP: Yes, then you can never go wrong because if you'll swindle, then you'll forget. Just now you'll say this then ten minutes later you'll say something else. But if it's the truth, you can never forget if it's a lifetime. And I remember till today, I see you. "You speak Russian?" I told him right away, "No." I came from a small town but the work that I'll have to do here, the way they explain it to me, the boys, explain it, from Berele Kaufman - they used to call him Berele Kaufman... He said, "I see that you understand." I said, "Yes, I was working for Khina." Oh, then, he's all right. He didn't want to ask any more, see, so much had the name.

LB: So you learned a lot in Odessa, didn't you?

MP: Oh yes, yes. I got my whole life... I liked it so much, oh, I liked it so much.

LB: That was the best.

MP: For everything. For everything. For anything you think.

LB: Why did you leave?

MP: Again the same, it's hard to explain. In the small towns it was a different life - like here, went to shul. You didn't go to shul there Shabbos.

LB: Why did you leave Odessa?

MP: I had to run away because I...

LB: Well, first of all you escaped from the army, right?

MP: And besides that...and the food. That's what I wanted to bring out with that ten pound bread. Listen to what happened with that bread. We brought it to the bazaar; we sold it. Then we went again the following day. We used to stay overnight there. We came back and my couple where I used to sell them, I came over with a smile - "I got another bread!" He said, "No. You take that bread back." "Oy!", I said, "What happened?" When they cut the bread, the inside was raw because it was too big. And on the outside was brown and in Russian he started to tell me that the dough was runny.

LB: Oh, that's terrible. I can understand it. It would be like anything that was too big. A good idea, but it didn't work.

MP: It was a good idea, but then I figured not only me but the boys, also, they'll have with their customers. But it was funny with mine. He says, "You take the other bread back. Never mind you brought me another bread." I said, "What do you mean?"

LB: I don't understand that. What do you mean?

MP: The following day I brought him another bread to sell him.

LB: So he said take back the first bread?

MP: "You'd better take back the bread that you sold me the day before yesterday." I say, "Why"? He cut it in half - is the dough on the floor. That was the ten pound bread. (laughter)

LB: Oh, so you were too smart for yourself that time. But that's very interesting. It was a brilliant idea.

MP: It was - it was a good idea. You know, if you want to laugh at something - but I'm not acquainted with you - but I must tell you that. I'm sorry, a little not nice, but I must tell you that: rolls, they give us - selling - only half a dozen rolls. Even with a bread, half a dozen rolls. They wouldn't give you as much. I want to have more rolls. They bring it out from the stove, and this is July. You know what I did? I said, "Boys, I got an idea." The pants- we used to tie it up and we used to put it in the pants. And we used to go on the boat. We couldn't bend but we used to walk like that. (demonstrates a stiff gait) When we came to Odessa, excuse my expression, my mother had to take off the pants to take out the bread. All over. It's good. It doesn't smell a certain way. But they were glad to have that. Also was my idea. See I had certain ideas. Better ways.

LB: Because this is what helped you to survive that period.

MP: Oh yes, oh yes. That's why my mother, that time... but I don't know... would say that it was a failure or it was a mistake but maybe they had to get killed. But they could be here.

LB: You came over and who else came over?

MP: Me.

LB: I mean of your family. Did anyone else come to the United States?

MP: I had three brothers here.

LB: Three brothers? Who stayed there in Russia? Your mother...

MP: Seven more brothers and a sister and my mother. All were married there.

LB: Did they want to come?

MP: I tell you the truth, I was estranged already from them. You know what I mean...

LB: You didn't keep in touch with them?

MP: First of all, in the beginning when I came here my brothers, let them rest in peace, all three of them, I came over with money from there - a lot of money. I was one in ten million to come with so much money as I came from there.

LB: From Bessarabia you mean?

MP: From Bessarabia. After all my expenses and everything. I came with cash money, a certified check - eighteen hundred and fifty-two dollars. I went into business for myself and I made a success. But my head was working a little too far, too far, too far.

LB: What about your mother and your other brothers and sister? You said you got estranged from them.

MP: I didn't write to them. All of a sudden, I was here already a year, or five years or three years. But I remembered from the doctor. He was the youngest (brother). I received a letter from him in Russian and all of a sudden, in between, I'll never forget as long as I live. In between, he writes in Russian, actually Hebrew words: *Vayu kin maleh chodesh*. That means, "you shouldn't think that a new king has come up". To me he says you shouldn't think I'm the same Lazer...

LB: *Melech* is "the king" and *chodesh* is "new".

MP: That's it - a new one. *Zust nit denken az iz ungeshtunen a nayeh kenig vus is ungekimmen fun a ...* different world.

LB: Who was he talking about?

MP: Because I never wrote to them and (they) never wrote to me. All of a sudden I received a letter from my brother. What did it mean? Whatever he was writing in the middle, you shouldn't think I came to bother you - to ask you for something - a favor. Maybe you want to bring me over. Because I was in business and I was too busy with business here. You know, it's hard to explain the expression. Your father would know the expression better.

LB: Can you write it for me? Can you write it in Yiddish or Russian? Because Mr. Koenigsberg will explain it to me.

MP: I don't know how to spell it in Hebrew. It's Hebrew words written in Russian. (Tries to write it) It's an expression, it's not what that means.

LB: It's all right. Don't worry about it. So you found this in the letter.

MP: It's in the letter. He writes this and this and this... In the middle he said, you shouldn't think I came to bother you. That's how somebody from a different world came down and he bothers you. "I'm the same Lazer. I'm a doctor now but I'm the same Lazer that I was when you left."

LB: I understand.

MP: It's too much for me. When I want to talk about myself or my life - three weeks wouldn't be enough.

LB: Well, I won't be here in three weeks. What happened? Did you contact your brother then? Did you write to him?

MP: Yes, yes. I sent also contraband. There was here a man we used to give him fifty dollars extra he should pay out there. And I used send with them \$500.

LB: Did they get it?

MP: That's the whole thing, see? That was Stalin's time. I sent it and he sent it. He was reliable and that David Moisevitch, that accountant, he received from America \$500 cash and they put him in prison. I know that. That was my mistake; I blame myself. And why should I blame myself? I meant well.

LB: You mean by sending him the money? Did you know? You had no way of knowing...

MP: You think, "Who squealed when he received five-hundred dollars?" From the family - because that time - Revolution time - was nothing to kill somebody there.

LB: What year was this that you sent the money?

MP: It was in the late twenties.

LB: After you were here already?

MP: Oh sure, of course.

LB: I don't think you need to blame yourself...

MP: Why should I talk to myself now to what's gone? What my mother wrote me... the prison.

LB: She was able to write to you?

MP: My mother? She wrote a better piece than I.

LB: No, what I mean is that...

MP: Oh, on account of the censor? No, she didn't mention... They made like a cover up.

LB: In other words, they were able to let you know that something happened to him.

MP: And then for a year I couldn't... I was going around... because my conscience was bothering me. He was one of the nicest boys, really - not because he was my brother. And because he was David Moisevitch in Odessa, he was an entirely different person.

LB: Are you saying, Mr. Prince, that you were so involved in business here that what you should have done was first get your family out? Is that what you said when you had bad feelings?

MP: I don't know myself. It's hard to say. Then I find out my mother's brother lives in New Orleans. He also came the same time when I came, but he went to New Orleans and I met him there when he came. Naturally, he came to me: "Tell me Uncle, have you heard anything about your sister, my mother?" He said to me, "Milton, I must tell you the truth, I don't know about the brothers." I knew already what it means. "But I know your mother, my sister, she got killed."

LB: When?

MP: By the Hitler time, in the thirties, in the forties.

LB: When did this brother come over? In the twenties?

MP: He came as a guest to me from New Orleans.

LB: But he heard?

MP: From his brother, my uncle, from there. I suppose they wrote him.

LB: You didn't keep in touch with them?

MP: No, no. He didn't mention... because otherwise I could write to the uncles, to the brothers. I heard... somebody told me, I don't remember from whom, the Momma got killed; they killed her. Then I say, "Nu, how's the brothers?" He said, "I can't tell you nothing. I know only about the momma."

LB: But you don't know, though, do you? Because I know that my mother doesn't hear from her family but she knows that they're living.

MP: Oh, if you know they're living, that's a different story. But when I would know they were living, I would have a chance. My son-in-law was in Moscow - he could be in Odessa, too, already as far as that. If anybody should live from my family, I would get in touch with them.

LB: But what happened was that at some time when they had to say if they had relatives in the United States or not and they said "no". A lot of them said no. Then they could...

MP: I know all about it. There is always a way if you want it.

LB: Oh, I see, you're right. That's what I don't know, but you obviously know that there is a way.

MP: But now I don't want to talk about it. It's done, it's done. Why should I talk, even to myself, "My fault, your fault, or somebody else's?" It's foolish.

LB: No, no, that's not what I meant. I'm going to say thank you.