

Interviewed by Lucille W. Brown
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As a young teenager living in her uncle's house in Uman, Mrs. Muraven was strongly influenced by her cousins' young friends who gathered under the trees during the summers to talk of reform and revolution, workers rights and a homeland for Jews. Later, at the age of 14, Jennie accompanied her younger sisters to America to join her parents.

Lucille Brown: Would you tell me your name?

Jennie Muraven: My maiden name?

LB: Tell me both.

JM: In Yiddish?

LB: Whichever you prefer.

JM: So my name was Sheindel and Altman.

LB: Altman.

JM: Yeah. And, of course, I was born in Russia - the Ukraine.

LB: You were born in the Ukraine? In what town?

JM: [Uman](#). Kiev is the name of the state. So I was born in Uman in the state of Kiev.

LB: And what was the nearest big city?

JM: Well, that was a big city itself. There were about 40,000 Jews that lived in Uman, and it's a city with a very, very interesting and tragic history, you know.

LB: Tell me something about it.

JM: Well, during the time of ... the big synagogue that was placed there... Jews were burned by the [Haidamaka](#), they called themselves. It's in the seventeenth century.

LB: Was that the [Khmelnysky](#) (Uprising)?

JM: During the Khmelnysky, and then in our city is buried the [Bratislava Rebbe](#). And he had followers, naturally. He was called "The Dead Rabbi" because even after he had passed away, generations and generations used to come to his grave and they followed his teachings.

LB: And that was the Bratislava Rebbe?

JM: Yeah, Rebbe. And then, even times when I remember, it was a very cultural city. They did a lot for the education. Like Jews couldn't enter schools by the government, so the Jewish community had a school for girls, a school for boys, they had hospitals, they had all kinds of institutions for the benefit of the community.

LB: You say the city goes back to the seventeenth century.

JM: Oh, it goes further.

LB: Do you know how far back it goes?

JM: Well, you see, apparently Jews first settled in Poland by invitation, but some of them left and went, and so that's about six or seven hundred years ago that they used to settle. And they settled there and they kept on, even though Jews weren't allowed, but gradually they came in. So

they moved into those and formed their communities and gradually they spread out. Of course, the wars between Russia and Poland were also, so Poland wasn't always stable, so many times it changed. But the community kept on growing and in fact there were so many shtetlach, if you know what a [shtetl](#) is. They used to come because this was offered so much more.

LB: You mean the city of Uman?

JM: Yeah, for everything. For the children to go to school, to educate themselves, and also it was a bigger community, so to work or go to a little business what Jews had was more opportunity in there. So gradually, this Uman was one of the big cities.

LB: Now if you say 300 years, that would be...

JM: Yeah, that was the time when the Khmelnytsky and his gangs...

LB: He started about 1648.

JM: About that. Those are the times, yeah. In the seventeenth century it was.

LB: But it was already an established city.

JM: It was an established community, with many Jews there, but gradually, every time there was trouble, Jews used to come into the bigger cities because they could get more help amongst their brethren and also because they felt more secure.

LB: In Uman, it wasn't just Jews. How many Jews were living there?

JM: About 40,000 they figured.

LB: Were there other people living there, too?

JM: Oh, yes. Ukraines, Russians, and also a lot of Polish people lived there because it wasn't far and it was a time when they used to own the land. Gradually they got from Poland there and they owned the land and the slaves - the people that worked for them and those are the peasants.

LB: Umani. I just finished reading [Sienkiewicz](#)'s three books, The Trilogy, and the first one, "With Fire and Sword", deals with the war and the Khmelnytsky Rebellion specifically. And that tells how at that time Poland owned that whole portion.

JM: Yeah, yeah, but the languages that were recognized were the Ukraine, mostly, and the Russian - because Ukraine is a Slavic language. And really, if you know one, you will know the other.

LB: What was the name of this synagogue that was burned?

JM: Well, they used to call it the "Grose Shul", the Big Synagogue, but it was a holy place. Many, many times there were fires there, because I remember even when I was 14, when I left at that time, they were remodeling it. There was some kind of a fire. I suppose, carelessness and then Jews always used to save - like a book was so holy that if it tore apart, they brought it to the [synagogue to be saved](#) because it was a holy thing, you know. So gradually, if there were so many loose leaves and things like that and it wasn't so easy to fight fires like it is here. So, I remember, before I left they were just finished up after a small fire had destroyed what they called "shamos", holy pages, they really didn't know where they belonged, but they were gathered. Now, if anybody had a Siddur or something that was torn up, he brought it there so it would be saved there.

LB: Would you tell me what year you were born?

JM: I was born in 1900, right on the century. I'm going to be 75 August the 27th.

LB: So you were born in 1900 and you grew up with all these stories and the history.

JM: Well, yeah, sure, it was the background of everyone. You knew where you lived, to where the Rebbe was buried, you could see that little building there and that was burned too, because our Jews -when they went to a rabbi - they brought a little 'quittal' what they called, telling the story, I suppose... You had a woman didn't have children, or a daughter didn't get married off so soon, or you were short of things for livelihood, so you went to the rabbi and asked, hoping that he'll tell you what you do to better your condition. So there were accumulation of so many papers there and of course you know there was always vandalism amongst [shkatzim](#) and Gentile boys. So I remember, it was burned up - that little building over his grave, and that time it was finished up too. There was always something to repair.

LB: What was the [Bratslava's Rebbe](#)'s name? Do you remember?

JM: Well, let's see. I can't think of it, but I do know.

LB: How many children were in your family?

JM: We were three. Of course, my brother was born in the United States, but three daughters and a son.

LB: And were you the youngest?

JM: I am the oldest of the family and then there were two more girls and when we came here my brother was born a year later.

LB: And you lived with your mother and father?

JM: Oh, no. Actually, when the [Russian -Japanese](#) War broke out I must have been about three years old and my sister was just born, and my father didn't want to go serve in the army. I can still remember that scene when my father took his tallis and took a little package of something - maybe a shirt - and he left. My father went without money, naturally, so he could reach as far as just across the border and he came to what they called at that time, Galicia, in Austria. That's where my father remained for several years. The dispute - my mother wanted him to come back and he was afraid that he would be thrown into jail for leaving; after all, he had to go report to the army. And my mother didn't want to go where he was, but he established himself there. He learned a trade because he had to live on something and my mother couldn't support him from Russia. So he worked about three years. He lived there and then we went over there.

LB: Before we follow you to Galicia, while he was living in Uman how did he make a living?

JM: Well, my father was a very handy man. A trade he didn't have, but he had some ideas, so he always used to work with somebody; it was either a carpenter or whatever it is, and the living - you can imagine - it wasn't ... There are many histories about my father's family. He was left an orphan very, very young. In fact, five children - they were left during the cholera, you know.

LB: What year was that?

JM: Oh, that must have been in the '80s. He was a little, little boy. If my father would be alive now, he probably would be about 100 years old. Yeah, he would be 100 years old because he's dead about 27, and he was 73 when he died. So they were left - five children without parents. They both died in a few days. In fact, he wasn't the oldest. His oldest brother was about 15 and

the next one, they came, those little ones, he was about three or four years old. So, naturally, living like that you didn't have much, but they were always studying in shul, always. You started cheder when you were three years old, and his brother, the oldest brother, kept house; kept them together in the house. Here, they'd be probably delinquent, but there they grew up so devoted to each other. I remember when my father came to America, the first money that he made he sent his brother that he should put a roof on the house - what they call the family house. The family house, I haven't seen a house like that. It was maybe 300 years old and was caving in and that was the only thing that was left after his parents were gone and that's where they lived. And in fact, with it he sent a picture without a [beard and payes](#), so when the family got it they said, "Look, he looks like a goy, but he still has a Jewish heart."

LB: That's remarkable, isn't it?

JM: Yeah. And always, all his life, I remember, my father never got to make money in America, but he always (sent money), there wasn't a holiday or anything. Of course, after seeing the Ukraine, right after the First World War, [there were terrible pogroms](#), and we never heard any more. They're talking about Hitler, but we lost our family right away - the ones that were left in Uman. We never had from them letters. We never knew what happened to them.

LB: You mean, during the Civil War you lost them?

JM: Yeah, because, of course, I knew. I had an uncle in Odessa who left. He was the only one that left, also because there was nothing, nothing, nothing for them. They were orphans. You had no outlook for better things, so they left home. Whether he remained alive, we never heard from our family any more after the First World War.

LB: So this was after the Revolution, then?

JM: Yeah, during the Revolution and the pogroms. If you know, there was the Civil War, and first thing they did was slaughter the Jews.

LB: So whatever family was left behind in Uman was decimated?

JM: Definitely. Nobody. I never heard anything or never knew anyone, neither from my father's side. I didn't know my mother's people because she didn't come from the same city and travelling wasn't so easy so we never saw them too much, except her brother and sister. But the other relatives I never knew. My mother's brother died, because he was arrested for reason that he was stassi regimna (?) that means he believed in the old regime.

LB: When was this that he was arrested?

JM: During the Revolution - 1917. He was supposed to be a rich man. A rich man maybe had \$1,000 to his possession. And they threw him in. Of course, he wouldn't eat non-kosher food and they took off his shoes, so that killed him. So he died. He never had a family; we were the only ones that he had, and her sister the same way. So that was lost, right after the World War. We never heard anything any more from my family.

LB: When your father went to Galicia, you say he learned a trade? What trade?

JM: He became a carpenter and he was there about three years. He finally convinced my mother to come.

LB: How was she supporting herself?

JM: Well, my mother always had a little grocery store. If I remember it well, it was maybe half of this room.

LB: So that would be about 5 feet by 10 feet?

JM: Yeah, and all she was selling was little things. I'm sure it's before your time, even here they had everything in sacks, like beans in sacks, and rice in sacks, little bit of things. So my mother was left with two small children but still she supported herself that way. But when we went to Galicia, she sold that little place, and that's how we came there and we stayed there a short while. I started school there. In Galicia, Jews went to school so I must have gone there a couple of months and we went back to Russia because my mother couldn't stand it. She didn't like it there at all. She went back to Russia and she was pregnant at that time, so my sister, the youngest one, the third one, she was born and my father never knew.

LB: He stayed in Galicia while your mother went back to Russia.

JM: Back... and she left him money and told him that for that money he should go to America because she found out that one of his brothers is here. But my father didn't want to go to America. He liked it in Galicia. He was a very religious man and there he wouldn't be able to observe Shabbos and Yom Tov and things like that. But my mother told him that if you want to, when there's a will there's a way. So he went to America and we went back to Russia. And it was years before we got together, because I was 14 when I came.

LB: And you were about seven when you went back to Russia.

JM: Back from Galicia, that's right. We stayed in Galicia not quite a year. I still can remember that little village we lived in.

LB: What was the name of the village? Do you remember?

JM: [Delyatyn](#). It was in the Carpathian Mountains. And people were very, very religious there. There were wonderful elements when I come to think now. They worked the land; they were the real people of the land. I imagine I would like it there, but my mother didn't like it at all because she thought they were so poor that they didn't have even enough to eat. And so she went back and then it took a long time before the family got together.

LB: In Galicia, in this little town of [Delyatyn](#), were there Hasidim there?



JM: Well, they were working, but naturally, yeah, most of them were Hasidim because they were very pious and the rabbis are what they call the *gutejuden*. That's what these rabbis were called.

LB: "Good Jews", but it has a special meaning?

JM: Yeah, it had a special (meaning) because if you went to him with a question or whatever, and ask him for something, you had hopes that he will bring it on, will help you.

LB: Almost like a miracle?

JM: Miracle, yeah. All this started with the [Baal Shem Tov](#). But my mother wasn't happy because Uman was a bigger city.

LB: She was an urban woman and this was a small town.

JM: A small town, and the opportunities. And then she was very lonesome for her brother. She had one brother and she and her brother were very, very close, although he was the oldest. She wasn't so close with her sister. She wanted to go back. So here, we went back and then my sister Cille was born and after that was years, because I am older - fifteen years older than my brother.

LB: So he was born once they became reunited here in the United States?

JM: Yeah. He was the youngest. Yes.

LB: Tell me about your life in Uman? What kind of a house did you live in?

JM: Well, see, my father's family was very, very good to us. They were nice people. So they had - the houses were different there. They had a big house. In the front was a big garden and we lived in the back. They had a little, what they called a *shtiebel* - a small little house. And we lived with him, with them.

LB: This is before he went to Galicia?

JM: Oh, no, this is after my father left. Before we lived in what they called the newest part of the city - "Novye Uman", and we had a nice house. But after my father left the police were always after my mother to tell where he is. So we moved out of that house and went to live with my uncle.

LB: In the *shtiebel*?

JM: No, we went to live with my uncle and he lived a few miles out of the city. But she closed up that big business and we lived there because it was going on winter. But then after my mother said she shouldn't live there, she should come to the city; so we came. When we came back, these cousins of my father had that big house, and they had the little house in the back that had only two rooms, a big room and a kitchen. Somebody must have lived there before; I don't remember the story now. We can come in and live there, and we lived there. And it was a very nice living, the reason was because newer times were approaching and the young people had ideas. They always used to have a lot of company. Things I used to hear, I didn't even understand, but I was always intrigued. Some of them were revolutionaries, others was Zionists, others was just interested in cultural things. And I used to listen in. So, I remember the things that I used to watch and these young people used to make me feel like I'm a part and by the time I was ten I was already given a [pushke to collect for the National Fund](#). Maybe it was the first. And then, by the time I was eleven, the business with [Beilis trial](#) was. And the youth was - something was always cooking, as they say here, and that was so interesting that most of them I was intrigued. I lived with these ideas.

LB: Did you feel as if you were part of something that was happening?

JM: Yeah, that it's supposed to come a better world for Jews. And amongst those young people, they had two daughters and two sons and they used to come home from school or wherever, and they all used to bring in friends and there were always there company and they used to sit and

talk and they used to tell me to move away because I don't belong there. But I felt I did belong there because I was so interested. And those are the things I grew up with, so I think my youth was very fascinating. I don't mean in material things. I didn't have those material things, although my father, as soon as he started to work he was always a good provider for his family. He shared with us, but there wasn't too much to share. And I wasn't interested, I didn't need it. The things I grew up with, to listen to these people and be part of them. Very few Jewish children could get in school, so I got in school and in fact I graduated school.

LB: You're talking about elementary school? How did you get in?

JM: I got in because I passed the exam and I was lucky enough. So I went in to school.

LB: This was in Uman?

JM: At Uman, yeah. I went in school and I graduated school before I came. And after that there opened up one of the first Hebrew schools teaching modern Hebrew with the Sephardic (dialect). And I was one. In fact, there was a man in Albany who also went. He was from a shtetl, the Birkins, maybe you heard about them. He's from not far from here and he remembers this new (school). Because I was so close to these people who were in different parties - Zionists and Bundists and things like that - I had a chance and I entered classes. So I studied from 12 to 14 Hebrew. In fact, I used to speak Hebrew; I forgot it when I came here. But I spoke Hebrew and it was because of that background that I had, listening and watching these young people. So I think I've had a very nice youth.

LB: What else did you learn in school? The school language was what?

JM: Well, the school - Russian. Geography, Arithmetic, Spelling, like most of them.

LB: Russian History?

JM: Yes.

LB: Okay so you studied in the Russian language. But you spoke Yiddish at home?

JM: Oh yes, we spoke home Yiddish.

LB: What other language? Then you learned Hebrew?

JM: Hebrew, yes, that's right.

LB: You went to a special school to learn Hebrew.

JM: Oh, yah, yah. That was after I graduated school and we made an attempt to go to the United States, but my mother's health wasn't good so we came back and I had the time, so what was I going to do? I studied Hebrew.

LB: Did you work there at all?

JM: No, not yet.

LB: You were too young yet.

JM: Children started to work, but I didn't work. There were many things, see. My mother opened up that little store again and I always was doing the house keeping and taking care of my two sisters. Yeah, in fact, my mother went to the United States before us because she thought if her health wasn't good and they turned her back, it would be better for her to be turned back alone. So she came a year before us and then I came with the two sisters.

LB: You came alone with the two sisters?

JM: Yes, well, actually at that age you were an old lady, not only grown up. I came to the United states myself with my two sisters.

LB: And you were fourteen years old?

JM: Yeah, I made that trip myself.

LB: That takes quite a lot of guts, you know.

JM: Oh, maybe I didn't know any better.

LB: No, no. That's quite interesting. So first you lived with your mother and father, then you went to live with an uncle, then you came back and lived with these cousins in the *shtiebel* and in between time, your mother had this little store, on and off.

JM: Yes.

LB: And then you went to Galicia for about a year. When you came back from Galicia, where did you live then?

JM: Well, we moved in with the cousins, then.

LB: That's when you moved in with the cousins.

JM: With the cousins because there we had that little house.

LB: About how old were you then? About seven?

JM: Oh, seven or eight. We left from there to America, from that little house where we lived. And I had all this time to observe the younger people - what they were doing, you know, talking all the time, listened to different arguments; there was always something going on.

LB: And then you left for the United States at the age of fourteen.

JM: Yeah.

LB: And your mother was already gone a year. So you lived a year there alone with your two sisters?

JM: Alone, yes. And I lived right in the same house with my cousins and they were the ones that helped us even to get a passport, which was a hard thing. I got a passport for ourselves; I have mine and my sister has it yet.

LB: She does.

JM: She keeps it, yeah. And the younger one, she never got married. She always lived with my folks. So they got a passport for us and we came to the United States ourselves. See, how it was arranged, a lot of Jews used to go through Uman because it was a big city and had all kinds of institutions for the Jews to help. So at that time, the big immigration started, so they had what they called the [American Committee](#). And everybody saw it was a good thing, that time they found out, and while we were going somebody else was going from the city and they were coming to Uman and their name was Plesser; they've changed their name to Sher. In fact, the woman is still alive, and we came together. But she was the kind that needed more help than I needed. She's still in the Jewish Home. So we were travelling together - she with her three children. She had small children, and we started the same day from our city, and we came together to Albany from our city.

LB: Both families arrived in Albany?

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The three of us - my two sisters and I and that Mrs. Plesser with her three little children.

LB: How did you travel? Did you travel by train or by wagon?

JM: We had to travel by train until the border.

LB: Which border?

JM: Warsaw.

LB: You went through Poland, then?

JM: Poland, yeah, and then we came to Rotterdam and we boarded the boat.

LB: Is Uman on the Dnieper or is it west or east of it?

JM: No, it's below.

LB: It's south of it because the Dnieper curves? Is that it?

JM: Curves, yeah. We had branches of the Dnieper that ran into Uman, because like a big river, there was always streams and formed different rivers.

LB: That's where the [Khmelnitsky campaign](#) started? Around there?

JM: Around there, yes. Yes, and there was [Balta](#)...

LB: Balta I don't know.

JM: Yeah, that's a famous city that always suffered from when the armies from Poland and Russia used to meet.

LB: Balta? I never heard that one. There was a lot of fighting; those borders changed very often, didn't they?

JM: Well, yes. The history of Poland, they were so many times under Russia and so many times they liberated themselves, but there always was fighting and the Jews were right in the midst of it.

LB: Let's go back to all the young people coming into the *shtiebel*.

JM: They really didn't come into the *shtiebel*, but there under the trees they used to sit and talk and, of course, I would listen in. I would run after to listen to them, especially during the

summer when they had their vacations, because most of them were students. And the way the students were there, they were better financially off, so they used to teach Jewish children that wanted to be taught.

LB: During the summer.

JM: During the summer... some for money, and some without money. As long as you had a desire to learn, these young people were always involved in all these things and their experiences were terrific. They used to come in the homes. I remember that's why I made up my mind which way I wanted... When the [Bundists](#) were saying to make life where we lived in Russia, and if you fight for Russians' freedom, you'll be a part of it, and we'll benefit. And the [Zionists](#) had another idea, that there'll never be anything different because even when they are better off there are the pogroms, because they're poor, too. But the Zionists had another idea: "Let's build something first for ourselves, and then maybe if we are strong enough and we build a better life for ourselves, we can do something for other people." So at that time, and especially after the Beilis trial, that affected me so. I can still see those scenes. Every time a paper - everybody didn't get a paper like here - somebody would bring a newspaper, and it was a great thing, they started to study the newspaper. And the quarrels between the Zionists and the others was so terrific, and they made such an impression on me that I can still remember it. I don't remember anyone that ever impressed me more in my life as these young people when they were talking. And the example of their own life - that you go and teach children without money, to remember everybody that is in need. So these people were really a basis for the things I've learned.

LB: There was a third group, at least, there was the Russian Revolutionary group.

JM: Well, the Bundists were the Jews mostly in this group. And there were Zionists. But I wasn't acquainted very well, I couldn't tell you.

LB: Okay.

JM: But these Bundists, they were a part of the revolutionary movement but they couldn't help but recognize after all, the Bundists were a Jewish national group. They couldn't recognize that the language among the Jewish masses was Yiddish. Their interests and their customs and everything was so Jewish that they couldn't fit into that. Even they realized that, but they all said they could have a good Jewish life, even if living here, if the others were free and had a better economic situation. That was the argument all the time, I heard.

LB: Which one did you choose?

JM: I was a Zionist. I was more impressed, especially when I got to the age when a lot started to immigrate to Israel.

LB: Was that the [First Aliyah](#)?

JM: No, no before. It was before the First Aliyah. They used to talk. When these Bundists would say... most of them never knew what a day's work was. They were students, I mean, manual work. They were students, although they wanted to do and they did a lot. They went to teach them, but not to live a life of labor. But these others, the Zionists, they were talking about improving themselves. They said, "A Jewish life will come only better when we are a part, when we learn how to live a good, healthy life. Build the land, do our own work, and then the world has also a dream." It didn't come out like that, but when we come and we'll start building and show the world that we can do things too; that a Jew doesn't have to sell a pair of pants for him, for each other. Even the businessman, how much business was there? The [groschens](#), not even pennies. So they said, to build, first you improve ourselves physically and then we're an example for the world, and then the world will see that Jews can be just as productive as the rest of the world. That was also a dream that didn't come out the way we thought it would. But I was very impressed with the Zionists. Then they started, many of them left for Israel- at that time for Palestine.

LB: Were those your friends or the older young people?

JM: Oh, they were all the older. After all, I was only about 14. And it started all the time since I was seven or eight years old, I listened to all that. My mother used a *koessel* (kettle) - was always cooking- like in a pot; it was always cooking there because at that time the young people were growing up, they used to come on their vacations home, and everyone was preparing themselves to go to higher education. If you couldn't get into a school - because in the higher (education) there [was no place](#); three Jews could come in when there was 100 Gentiles. You had to hope that there will be 100 Gentiles in school so you had a chance. You had to be brilliant and very few Jews had a chance to get into the gymnasium or the colleges. So they were called externa, that means they were (studying) through tutors, tutoring themselves. So while they were tutoring themselves, they were giving time to the people - some of them for money because, after all, too rich they weren't. But they were better off than these cousins of ours. But not only the cousins of ours, but their friends and the speakers that used to come there all the time. All the time there was someone talking.

LB: Were your cousins Bundists or were they Zionists?

JM: That's it, there was everything amongst them.

LB: Even amongst your cousins there was both?

JM: Yes they were... some of them were Zionists. To me the Zionists made a better impression because they just didn't talk, they did it. An example, no, Jascha went and left everything. He tried a couple of times to get in Kiev, into the university and he couldn't. He was a brilliant boy. He left everything, and I know that he went on land. He worked; he built himself over from a student who was really mentally and physically not fit. I heard he was working on bricks and everything.

LB: In Russia, or...?

JM: No, in Israel.

LB: He went to Palestine?

JM: In Palestine. Whatever happened, I guess he died very young. At that time many of them died from malaria and were also under-nourished. It was a hard life, but he never came back. Some of them came back.

LB: Yes.

JM: Yes, I remember, some of them came back. That was the time, already... It was about 1914 when we left. It was thinned out, that group. Some of them went away in the bigger cities like Kiev, Odessa, Moscow, under fictitious names or under all kinds of presumptions that they are not Jews. So it was a change, the group was thinned out.

LB: You mean these idealistic groups were thinned out? These Jewish idealistic groups?

JM: Yeah, well, I want you to know, I've only lived in a Jewish atmosphere there. There was no such thing... Jews and Gentiles didn't...

LB: You say, in 1914 you left.

JM: Yes.

LB: But even before that there were a lot of things happening in the world. There were political parties in Russia which were very active. You had the Socialists, the Revolutionaries...

JM: Oh sure, the revolutionary movement, yes. Well, as I said, Jews only associated with Gentiles much like in business. They never lived in the same streets; very few of them. Some

Jews never even learned Russian. They never knew. They lived in a world of their own. There were very few that were assimilated. Jews weren't assimilated. They lived in a Jewish world. When a Jew had a quarrel with another Jew, would he go to court? He took him to the rabbi. There the dispute was settled. A Jew that would try and trial somebody in a court was "in *goyishe* (?)" ; that means...

LB: "In Gentile hands". Yeah, right. Like a traitor, he would be.

JM: So if someone did you wrong, you went to the rabbi. The dispute was mostly settled among the Jews. The custom, the Shabbos was observed. Maybe they were in the [Galut](#) but they lived a full life of their own. The Jews fought when they wanted to create those schools, at first, you know. [Alexander the First](#), if you've read, he wanted Jews should be educated and that was the only way he would observe them. But Jews didn't want that. It's after the [Haskalah](#). The Jews that wanted to get out from the ghetto, they were the ones that started to say Jews should educate and go into the world, you know. They thought better times would come. But most of the Jews fought that. So I lived in a real Jewish atmosphere.

LB: Did you know any of the [Maskilim](#)?

JM: Well, in my family there were, yah, they were.

LB: They were *Maskilim*, right?

JM: Yeah, sure, *Maskilim*, they were. They knew the people that thought that we should go into the world, learn things, you know, and go into the work. Not live isolated from the rest of the world. Not that the Russians wanted us so badly. What they wanted, it was for a purpose. So, all these things, you know, it started to develop those movements. But the Haskalah was the first step. Jews were envious of the German Jews, the Haskalah, and what happened? The assimilation grew as fast as it could.

LB: But this was not true in your immediate group?

JM: Not in my time and so I never knew much about the Gentile world. All I knew was where we met on a pogrom. I remember a pogrom.

LB: You do? In what year?

JM: It was in 1905, right after the [first revolution](#) that was unsuccessful and the Jews were blamed that they wanted to throw over the Czar. *Batushka*, the Father he was called. Also I remember at that time, I was about five years old, and the Jews took their scrolls and they were

going to meet and show that whatever the revolutionaries did the Jewish community had nothing to do with them; they wanted peace. And I do remember that my uncle was in the front row carrying , and he was knocked down with his Torah and his head was split, I remember, and after that the mass of them started to run around. They went into houses, they broke and they took things and whatever they could.

LB: Who were they? Were they Russian soldiers?

JM: It wasn't only the soldiers. They brought in the *muzhiks* (Russian peasants), all these *muzhiks* were told to go and rob and they did anyways, so I remember that very vividly.

LB: This was in Uman that this happened?

JM: In Uman, yeah.

LB: And the Jews were coming to show how peaceful they were?

JM: They are, yeah, to make peace; the rabbi with some of the people went across to meet them, but they met them with sticks and they met them with the Torahs. So all these things impressed me and I never had too much faith in them.

LB: So you became a Zionist at fourteen?

JM: Oh yeah. I was all the time. I was mostly always a Zionist. It used to bother me when they used to say that Jews ... I couldn't believe it when I saw those scenes. After all, they come into your poor... What did the Jews have more than they? They had so little, come in and rob and break things up...

LB: Did this happen more than once?

JM: Well, in my life I remember only once, but during 1914, during the Civil War I know even here, friends and people that I knew, they left, not from my city, but close. See, this city was surrounded with little villages, and as I told you, Jews always used to come for everything, mostly to Uman. For instance, if they wanted to educate their children, there was more opportunity there, things like that. It was the big city that they went to. An old friend, he just died not long ago, and he came in 1921 because he was held up.

LB: My parents came. They were caught in the Civil War.

JM: Oh, your parents came. What part of the...?

LB: Do you know where [Vinnitsa](#) is?

JM: Well, that's the Ukraine. Oh sure, Vinnitsa, sure.

LB: Actually, that was the nearest big town. They came from Novaya Priluki.

JM: Priluka, I know where that is.

LB: You do?

JM: Sure. That's not far from me.

LB: It's not?

JM: Yeah, sure. So Vinnitsa, there was always these people around those big cities from the little towns. If anything happened, they felt themselves safer into the big cities, because there were more Jews, more institutions; you can hide easier in a shul or in a [beis medrash](#), or things like that.

LB: Sometimes we have asked people, well, did you yourself feel any anti-semitism? And they would, most of them, say no. They heard about it here, they heard about it there, but they say "no" they didn't feel it.

JM: But if they saw a pogrom, what action would they call that?

LB: Well, for example, my parents never saw a pogrom until the civil war. Then they recall they were caught between the [Streltsy](#). They were caught between the two groups coming.

JM: Shooting you - Streltsy is...

LB: So this one is coming from the west and the Russians are coming back, they're defeated from in Poland, and they were caught in the middle.

JM: Yeah, you were caught in the middle. But I do remember that pogrom.

LB: Yes, so you had experienced it personally, then.

JM: Yeah. I remember, Oh God, yes, I do remember because the Jews were peaceful. They went out from the synagogues or wherever they met. I know we kids ran after them. But when they started to beat them up and to tear up the scroll, we started to run back. And I remember my

uncle, my mother's brother-in-law, her sister's... he was amongst them. They were carrying the [sefer Torahs](#), and they were going in to meet them and that's how they met. They were met with sticks and with bricks and were hit. I remember that very, very vividly. But we had nothing. I don't know. I never lived amongst Russian Gentiles.

LB: So, on a day-to-day basis, you don't know?

JM: No, on a day-to-day basis we have nothing to do with each other. Many Jews never even spoke the Russian language.

LB: But when you went to school, Mrs. Muraven, you went to an elementary school where Russian was spoken. Were there Russian children there, too?

JM: Well, no, it wasn't a Russian school. It was by the Jewish community.

LB: Oh, that school was run by the Jewish community? So the language there was not Russian?

JM: Well, it was Russian. They were... because, to get a permit...

LB: Was that a [Crown School](#), then?

JM: Yes it was. I can even show my diploma.

LB: Yes, wait. I'll turn this off. Before you went to your [Jewish School for Women](#), you were tutored at home?

JM: Yeah.

LB: By your cousin?

JM: Yeah, well, see, I had a desire, and I was afraid. I wasn't sure that I would get in because there was not many openings there. And so there I was taught to read and to write and arithmetic...

LB: In Russian?

JM: In Russian, yeah, of course, Russian.

LB: What year was this school set up? Do you know?

JM: Well apparently this school was set up years ago and then it was closed for some reason. See, after all, they had permission from the government.

LB: When was it first set up?

JM: It must have been under Alexander I, yeah. And then the permit was taken up and the school was closed. And then it was reopened again.

LB: Under [Nicholas](#)?

JM: Yeah, that's why they set up. They said, not only they are teaching the girls all kinds of trades - mostly was sewing, supposed to be. That's why it is *Profesionalener*, but it was not... all the little things we sewed with a needle wasn't... You couldn't learn very much in sewing because it didn't have the facilities, but it was supposed to be by law they had to; on those grounds they were permitted to open. I went four years, 1912. By 1907 they started to open it up again. The first one was closed.

LB: It was after that abortive revolution?

JM: Yes, so they opened up. And my application - you had to go through an exam, what the requirements was. You had to know some spelling, some reading and arithmetic and then this place. And they also had a course in Yiddish, so I took that too.

LB: After all you lived through, you lived through the Russo-Japanese War, and you lived through the 1905 Revolution. Do you remember anything about feelings in the Jewish community during that time?

JM: Oh, yes, I do remember that very, very well. The older people were not so... I mean, especially the religious were, "What good is it?" No one liked the Czar, but they knew that it wasn't leading to anything, and most of them were afraid that the younger people are moving too far into the government: "Who are you to throw the Czar down?"

LB: You're talking about the revolution now?

JM: Yeah, during the revolutionary time, yeah. Most of the older people were scared more than they were against it. What Jew liked that regime? Nobody did, but they were scared. But the younger people, most of them I remember, weren't afraid. The things they used to do to get financial help; they didn't stop to go into a Jewish store and ask for money and if you didn't give them the money they threatened. They needed not for themselves, for to run the revolution. I remember that happened. But among these young people, most of them were talking about

educating the people to live into a better world. I don't remember of anything they would do drastic.

LB: You mean the ones that came to your house?

JM: To our house, yeah.

LB: Yeah, but I'm talking about others in the town - what else you picked up as a kid.

JM: Well, then I picked up like my mother's brother. He used to talk about certain people in the family, "*Er, ah ganzer macher.*"

LB: "He's a big maker." (He's a big shot).

JM: Yeah. "*Er denkt az er vet uber... der Tsar... avek.*"

LB: In other words, "So and so is such a big operator, he thinks he's gonna overthrow the Czar."

JM: Czar. Yeah. "And if he does - *Ver vet leiden?* We'll pay the price for it."

LB: "We'll suffer." Right.

JM: Yeah, yeah. That was the attitude. But that didn't stop - the movements were great and it was growing stronger and stronger all the time. I knew, personally, the Bundists. These Bundists were among the professionals like, one's a tailor... And these young people, themselves, they didn't do any manual work, but they worked among these, to enlighten them, to educate them to go into the revolutionary movement. That's the idea. To me, they didn't show. Themselves, they wanted to make an easier living, to educate themselves, that's why they didn't impress me. The Zionists impressed me more because I saw, when they were talking about it, they were ready to go. That was the element to go and to contribute to the upbuilding of a Jewish homeland.

LB: I heard a saying, "They voted with their feet." They went.

JM: Yes. They went with their feet. Yes. They went and they paid the price, for life wasn't so easy in Israel, I remember that. But, as I said, the Bundists and the other revolutionaries, the ones that I really knew, was the ones they were talking to go amongst the people and educate them that this regime is no good and it outlives itself and if we change the regime and we have a better life for everyone, the Jew will benefit. That was the argument. But the older people felt that...

LB: Who were the leaders of the general movement? Do you remember any names?

JM: Oh, well, I know Jascha Wolfsky and that he was one of the Bundists. He was educating. And I know the girls like Pesha Abramovna, she was the one that always was talking about a better world and if it's a better world for everybody we will benefit. She can't see it any other different, because people, why do they make pogroms? Why are they bitter? Why do they take it out on Jews? Because they don't know, they're not educated, they don't know any better. But once they'll see the light and when they'll have a better life for themselves, they will let the Jew benefit after. But the others, the Zionists, thought that there was no hope for it, there was no such a thing; it'll be a better world for them but not for Jews. They'll never share it with us.

LB: Did you know about [Herzl](#)?

JM: Oh yes, of course I knew about Herzl and I even knew of... I forget names. I'm getting just real old.

LB: You mean [Weizmann](#), maybe?

JM: No, Weizmann, at that time, he wasn't yet. Weizmann wasn't yet, wasn't the leader.

LB: What about [Nordau](#), is that the one?

JM: Nordau was later, too. But I knew the Jewish writers, all of them, like [Shalom Aleichem](#) and Mendel and all these.

LB: Did you read those or were you too young?

JM: Yeah.

LB: In Yiddish?

JM: We read. I read Das Messerl (The Knife Edge) when I was young. I read a lot, yes. In Russian, too, because

LB: You did? That was one of the things I had down here to ask you. What did you read in Russian?

JM: Well, I read [Tolstoy](#), [Turgenev](#) and [Pushkin](#) at a time that I must tell you, I didn't...

LB: You must have been so young, that's why I wondered.

JM: Yes, it was too much but I read because everybody read. And if you didn't read you couldn't fit - you weren't a part of the picture there. So now young people don't read so much because of television, but I read all of [Nekrasov](#) and all these Russians; some of them who were themselves anti-semites in their writing. That's another distrust. How can you trust when the cultural leaders are so anti-Jewish? You didn't trust them.

LB: Did you read [Dostoevsky](#)?

JM: Yeah, Dostoevsky, naturally.

LB: Did you read [Gogol](#)?

JM: Gogol, yeah, yeah.

LB: So you came in contact with the real anti-semites.

JM: Yeah, sure, and that's why you didn't believe. You couldn't trust them if their writers... I'll never forget the time when the pogroms - they were trying to influence Tolstoy and he couldn't understand it, or see it. But in the end he did come out against all these pogroms. But it was so hard, to me, how could anyone who writes so beautifully and can impress and is not touched by what's happening right in his own country.

LB: What year was this? Do you remember?

JM: Oh sure, 1910, 1911.

LB: There were pogroms then too?

JM: Yeah, sure.

LB: Where were those pogroms? Do you remember?

JM: They were all over the country. I remember vividly that happened when I was about six or seven years, that time when I told you...

LB: Yeah, that was in Uman.

JM: Uman, yeah but there were always uprisings and anti-semitic... The situation was such that you never knew when it may break out. It was always in the air.

LB: Who approached Tolstoy? What do you remember about that?

JM: Well, I do remember that he was approached, I guess, by Shalom Aleichem. Yes. At that time you couldn't understand that the Russian intellectuals could see that and do nothing about it when the whole thing seemed to be so built up. I always felt that the Jews had no ground there. That's the way we felt.

LB: You mean, even if Tolstoy couldn't understand...

JM: Understand it, yeah. Of course, he was a very religious man. That's all that mattered, and so you couldn't see the Jewish way out of it. If you gave up your Jewishness, then you were considered as someone that you listened to.

LB: Suppose you had given up your Jewishness, would he have ever considered you anything but a Jew anyway?

JM: That's what we always thought, yeah. Well, we thought that way and I didn't see any other way out.

LB: What do you mean? Which way did you think?

JM: We thought why give up? What hurts anybody if I live my life as long as I let the other fellow live his life?

LB: No, but let's say that the Russians said, "Give up being a Jew and become Russian Orthodox." Suppose you had done that. How do you think that the Russians would have looked at you? Would they have considered you a Jew or a Russian Orthodox?

JM: I think you would always be like an exile there; you'd never be trusted, because there was cases like that. You would never be trusted and how could you? How could you live their life? You wouldn't be true to yourself or true to them. That's the way I look at it and most of the Jews, I think, felt that way about it. But, as a rule, we lived our own life, our own customs, our own language, and everything. As I told you, when a Jew had a dispute, he...

LB: He wouldn't go...

JM: You would look down (on him), "*Er hat im arein gevorfen in goyishe hent.*" That means...

LB: "He threw him into Gentile hands."

JM: Yeah, you had a dispute, you went to the Rabbi.

LB: Did your mother [keep a kosher home](#)?

JM: Oh, of course, of course. My mother was very, very, very religious, very pious. And on many things she was too hard to live with. One of the reasons she was afraid about America, and everything else, also, even though she wanted to come here, because she knew my father never wanted... She was afraid she won't be able to live her own life. But they lived right next to the synagogue in Albany until no Jew was left there, my parents did. All the Jews moved out from that neighborhood, and all the children, when we were young, we were called by the Jewish names.

LB: In Albany?

JM: In Albany. Everything was just like. My mother lived like she would live there in Uman. She didn't change anything at all.

LB: Did your father change?

JM: Well, my father was more educated than her. He kept up, you know, he never worked Shabbos, things like that. But then, he read a lot and he knew a lot more than my mother. She could [daven](#) but she wasn't interested in... She lived in the same world that she lived in Uman, she hasn't changed a bit. That's why when my brother went to kindergarten he didn't know an English word because we always spoke Yiddish. He learned English when he started school.

LB: Before we go into that, tell me, your trip from Uman to Rotterdam was fairly uneventful?

JM: Yeah, it was uneventful, no. Well, I had a passport, so I didn't have to go to the border at night. That was taken care of by my father's family, the people that we lived with. They arranged that because, after all, we were young children who were going, so they made an effort. And it wasn't so easy, but I got it. She, Ceill had the passport, that's another document.

LB: What month did you leave?

JM: We left in June (1914).

LB: And the war (WWI) broke out in August.

JM: In August, yeah. We were only a month. In fact, we had time to write to our family and never got any response after that.

LB: After August? Once the war broke out?

JM: Yeah, once the war broke out. The war, I guess the 14th of August.

LB: Do you think there were pogroms in that city once the war broke out?

JM: No, it started once the armies met, not right after the war broke out.

LB: You mean, when the German armies moved into that...

JM: Yeah, the German armies moved and they started to fight amongst them, yeah, that's it. I wasn't there already, but I knew how it happened. [Haidamakas](#), they called them and they met up there on the way from Poland. Poland, they came in - that's the time before World War I.

LB: Yes, I know what we're talking about. Haidamakas. I'll have to see how to spell that in English. Were they Poles or Ukrainians?

JM: Well, apparently they were, at that time the national movement in the Ukraine was revived.

LB: Yeah, always revives during the war, right.

JM: Yes, and they took up with the Polish who always had it in for the Russians and in the meantime...

LB: The Jews got squeezed.

JM: Yeah, whatever happened to Jews, no one cared. That's how they fought. These armies met together on whatever ground they met, the Jews got hit, were hurt.

LB: So your feeling is that it was primarily like the Ukrainian national movement rather than either the Civil War or the Germans or the Austro-Hungarians coming in? Is that your feeling?

JM: You know, when they speak about Russians; I'm just thinking Gunther, you know he was declared as a hero by the Bolsheviks and what was he? Nothing but making pogroms on Jews. But he was a nationalist.

LB: What was his name?

JM: Gunther.

LB: And what nationality was he?

JM: He was an Ukrainian, and he was declared a hero by...

LB: Soviet hero?

JM: A Soviet hero because he was a nationalist. The Ukrainians declared him that. Of course, the Ukrainians are a part of Russia, so it was that he murdered thousands and thousands of Jews didn't matter, but he was a Ukrainian nationalist.

LB: So you came to the United States, and where did you land? In New York City?

JM: In New York City. From New York City we came to Albany.

LB: Did your father meet you down there?

JM: Oh, yes, my father and my mother, yeah.

LB: They met you and how did your father land in Albany?

JM: That's another thing. When my father landed in the United States, he had maybe 25cents in his pocket. And at that time the German Jews, or whatever they were, they believed that the Jews shouldn't be in one place. So he didn't even know that he had somebody here in Albany. He didn't speak the language and he didn't have money so he had to go where they sent him and they sent him to St. Louis. He landed in St. Louis. So they got him some kind of a job and it was to work on Shabbos. So what was my father going to do? So he worked a few days and on his own he thought, you know. He met other greenhorns like himself and they were talking about in New York it's better and things like that. So my father went to New York.

LB: He went back to New York, then, right?

JM: Yes, after he took his first week's wages he went to New York and he found out some *landsleit*, you know, somebody from our (town). Right away they formed an organization there. So she told him, "You know that your brother Itzhak (or Itzik as they used to call him) is in Albany?" He says, "How does he come there?" So she says one day he was sickly and he was looking for something to do so they told him (to go) to the Umanya; you go to this organization that there are some *landsleit* in Albany and the great thing they're doing. They're peddling with rags or whatever. So maybe he should go there and one of his *landsleit* will help him out. So my uncle came to Albany and the *landsleit*, they were doing that. So gradually for \$10 he bought

a horse and he started to do. So my father has a brother here. He came here. Money he didn't have. So he found his brother here and that's why we came and he started to work here in Albany. But it was a struggle not to work on Shabbos. It wasn't easy. And that's how he came to Albany.

LB: Yeah. (laughs) The German organization - what was it called? The Hilfsfereinde?

JM: Yeah Hilfsfereinde, I think at that time they started to work with the [HIAS](#). From that grew out the HIAS. HIAS, that wasn't the original, but from that grew out the HIAS to do something when the immigration got so big. But they were dispersing all those people, sending them out. When my father came to St. Louis, he didn't know anything. Language he didn't know. He didn't know anybody. A couple of them met him there, he couldn't even talk to them; they spoke some Jewish or German. So my father felt himself, he said, he's in a trap. Well, they got him right away some work, but right away he found out that he'll have to work Shabbos. Working Shabbos was something he didn't want. So, he worked a few days. He never told me whether he worked Shabbos there or not. I wouldn't even ask my father that. But he worked a few days, got his little money and a dollar or two, whatever it was. It's years ago, don't forget, and he started out to New York. And when he came to New York he found out through that *landsleit*. He had a hard time in New York to find people, but they lived always so close to each other. And this friend of ours, I even remember her, when I came she was still alive, she was a very old woman, she told him that she knew his brother got to Albany. Yeah, they helped each other out.

LB: Yes.

JM: So that's how my father came here. And he started gradually, but he didn't very long work for other people, because he couldn't observe the Shabbos or Yontov, so gradually he went in business for himself and he used to take small jobs.

LB: Did he have any political views, your father?

JM: My father was a good Republican, I remember. I don't know why he was a Republican at first.

LB: It was probably expedient to be one.

JM: Yeah, well, no, something, I don't know what president, when it was...

LB: Teddy Roosevelt?

JM: No, Taft, or someone...

LB: Taft?

JM: Yeah, that had a fight for the Jewish rights, and a Jew wasn't permitted to come into Russia and just because he did that deed, my father felt obligated that we should vote for (him). But I remember he changed his views. I remember and my father was afraid...

LB: Was he a Zionist?

JM: Oh, my father, sure he was a Zionist.

LB: Did he ever think of going to Palestine himself?

JM: No, at that time no. I don't remember my father talking about going but he was in sympathy and he always contributed. That I remember. And he wanted always to educate his children. Like my brother, they sent him to [yeshiva](#) and things like that. See, my brother went to yeshiva. Of course he didn't turn out as my father - instead he turned out a lawyer. It's what my father wanted him to be. But he has a very good background of Jewish education. He went to the first - what do you call it now? It's one of the biggest yeshivas, now it's college...

LB: The [Yeshiva University](#)? In New York City.

JM: Yeah, that's right. But at that time, when he went, it wasn't yet. See, my brother is 59 now, he's gonna be 60. So he went right after he was Bar Mitzvah. My father sent him there and he was there a few years.

LB: Let's see if there's anything else there that I wanted to ask you. Did your mother wear a [sheitel](#)?

JM: When she came to America, yes.

LB: Not in Europe?

JM: In Europe, yes. Oh, in Europe, sure, she mostly wore a kerchief, I remember. But on Shabbos and Yom Tov, she wore a *sheitel* and she even came with a *sheitel* to the United States. But my father persuaded her, and he says, "*Has a zelcher schoener hur.*"

LB: "You have such beautiful hair."

JM: Why do you have to cover it up? And what is it? So gradually she took it off.

LB: But she wore it even here?

JM: Yes.

LB: Now, your brother was born here, in Albany. What year? 1915?

JM: Yes, 1915, that's right.

LB: And was he dressed like an American boy or did he wear...?

JM: Of course, an American. He was born here, you know, that's one thing, sure. He went to school in Albany. He started school in Albany - the only thing, he had language difficulty.

LB: Did you have language difficulty?

JM: Of course, I didn't know English and I had a hard time, not that I'm such an English now.

LB: Your English is beautiful.

JM: I think in Yiddish.

LB: You do?

JM: Yeah, I do, because I always read so much Yiddish. My husband was such a [Yiddishist](#) that we spoke in Yiddish all the time. But I think in Yiddish.

LB: It's hard to tell because your English construction is beautiful.

JM: Well, I read in English too. Not all the time...

Tape Ends

JM: My mother's house was moved from Uman to Albany. That's what I always felt about it. I know my husband always used to say, "For the Yom Tovene in Ma's house." You know, it's just like you were there because my mother was right near the synagogue. They lived and they used to go to shul and come back and it was Shabbos and it was when [Rosh Chodesh](#), when the moon changes and everything. And even when the Rebbe came to Albany, she visited him and she went to New York to see the Rebbe. She lived the same pattern. She never changed.

LB: Was your husband born in Europe, too?

JM: My husband, yes.

JM: He's from Lithuania and he was born in Orka. Mogilevsk and Mogilev. That's right.

LB: Here. (Looking at the map.) He's in White Russia.

JM: Well, near Minsk. White Russia- that's part of Lithuania. Oh, you know, the map changed so much, so many times, but that's where he came from.

LB: Was he a [Mitnagid](#)?

JM: Misnaged. Yeah, yeah. Well, his mother was a (?) but actually they are misnagdim, his father was a misnaged.

LB: And he came to Albany when?

JM: He came to Albany in 1913.

LB: A year before you. And you met him here in Albany?

JM: I met him in Albany, yes. We belonged to the same groups.

LB: Was he a Zionist, too?

JM: Yeah. He went right from the United States to join the [Jewish Legion](#).

LB: This is during the First World War?

JM: Yeah, 1917 he went there and he was two years in the Jewish Legion. And then they dissolved his (unit). He wanted to remain there, but the Zionist organization had nothing for them and they were afraid if they leave all these young people without anything they'll have a revolution on their hands. So my husband always used to say, once in his life he took money from the Zionist organization. He felt so badly because they wouldn't let them remain there. They could have remained there. They gave them \$25 each and he many, many times gave it back to them after that. So for two years he was in the Jewish Legion.

LB: What do you mean if they stayed there would have been a revolution? Who was afraid?

JM: The colony.

LB: The British?

JM: No, not the British. At that time, Britain wasn't - there was no declaration yet. They were still under the Turks.

LB: Okay.

JM: Yeah. But during the war when [England got the mandate](#) - after that if he would have remained there (but) there was no work for them and no facilities for them there. So the Zionist groups, who also had all kinds of colonies over there already, didn't see that it was proper to give the Jews work. If you ever read about that, they used to employ the Arabs, and it was always a fight for Jewish labor. Because they used to say, "A Jew wants more money. He's gotta have a white shirt, he's gotta buy his paper. An Arab could work for nothing." But that was the time to build the country. They didn't see it right.

LB: It was short sighted.

JM: Short-sighted. So, my husband came, but I knew my husband...

LB: Were you married at that time?

JM: Oh, no, no.

LB: No, no, you were just 17.

JM: I got married in 1921.

LB: So actually, if he had stayed you would not have married.

JM: Well, I don't know. I don't think so. He said he would have brought me there. That's what he always used to say. But that was his idea. I once got from him a letter, and he said...

LB: You were corresponding at that time?

JM: Oh yes. Because we were members of the same organization. Not that we ever made plans of marriage or considered ourselves... Because when I got married, I was only 20 years old; I was a young girl. But as friends, we were corresponding so he was telling me that he hopes that he'll see me in Israel. When he was still hoping that - I don't know whether I would. I couldn't tell you whether I would go there because my mother, she was always scared that I'll leave because I was always in the Zionist movement. But he came back. I have a daughter living there.

LB: I know, yeah. But in other words, if they had found work for him he would have stayed?

JM: He would have remained, yes. He travelled by foot because after he was discharged from the army, all the British gave him, I guess, was a few pounds. And he travelled all through the country. Unfortunately, he was sick too, he had malaria, and it took him a long, long time to recuperate. So he was a little late, when he started to go from one colony to the other. And then they were talking that the English government will give to all these people that he probably could have gotten land. But he was too late to make those papers out and then it turned out that they didn't live up to all the promises they made to these boys. And so he started to look for a job in the colonies and what was there. [Petach Tikva](#) was there and he went and he had a *landsmen* (fellow countryman) that he knew and in [Rishon LeZion](#), he went there.

So in that colony he had a *landsmen* from his city. He knew that he went there. When he came he said, "Why do you wanna come here? A nice boy like you and your family - you were educated, what will you do? Arabs work for nothing, for *piastres*. Are you gonna compete with them?" So he was very disappointed. Then he started to go to the Zionist organization, they should create work for them, and they didn't want. So he came back to the United States. But at first he was disillusioned, not with the Zionists, but with the leadership and the short-sightedness. They couldn't see any further than their nose. He used to say that there'll never be built anything with such politics. And for dollars you could have gotten things. So he came back and he was always a Zionist. And we brought up our children that way too.

LB: Before you left, you were just a little girl then, really, and you had heard about the Bundists, you heard about the Zionists, you heard about the Jewish Russian revolutionaries, actually.

JM: Oh, yes. Sure, sure.

LB: But you did not know the name of [Lenin](#)?

JM: No, no, not those leaders, no.

LB: And you didn't know the name of [Trotsky](#).

JM: That was later, probably.

LB: Well, no, they were already active.

JM: Active, yes, but I didn't know it. Never reached me.

LB: Because your circle was actually Jewish?

JM: Yeah, Jewish. As I told you, we lived a full Jewish life because we weren't admitted in the other society.

LB: All right. But then the kids that came in, the young people that came in didn't bring these names in with them?

JM: No, they never, because I don't think they even themselves. Maybe when they went out in the bigger cities, or where things were planned they met up with these people, but I never heard.

LB: Did you know anything about [Bolsheviks](#) and [Mensheviks](#)?

JM: No, no, not at my time. I remember, the only revolutionary that I heard about was the Babushka.

LB: The Babushka?

JM: [Brezhkovskaya](#), yeah, she was of this revolutionary movement. I remember her, they were talking about she was a legendary figure.

LB: What do you remember about her?

JM: Well, I remember they used to talk how she came from a very aristocratic family and she devoted her time. The young people always used to take her as an example for the masses. She gave up her idle life to work amongst the people. But she was imprisoned and she was - even after the Bolsheviks, I think the Revolution is the one that freed her. I remember her, I never met her.

LB: No.

JM: Babushka Brezhkovskaya.

LB: You don't remember any of the activities for which she was known?

JM: No, no. I wouldn't know about them. I never had been in that circle. As I say, it was a very tight knit circle and small, and amongst the young people they used to bring in all these ideas.

LB: You never heard of Lenin's publication the [Iskra](#)? Iskra was his publication from London.

JM: No, not at that time, no. Well, then it didn't reach our... I used to remember the publications. They used to have all kinds of publications that they'd bring...

LB: Okay. If we could just talk about the Beilis affair a little bit more. How you said it created such a commotion. How was this manifested?

JM: The Zionists took it that way; they felt the insecurity of the Jew - that if there was anything- he was blamed for a thing that never occurred. And the others seemed that just because of ignorance...

LB: So the same arguments were used?

JM: Were used all the time. There was always, only that materially will be a better life for people. They couldn't be talked in, or moved into situations like that.

LB: But everybody followed the case?

JM: Oh, very. I still can feel that atmosphere. It was every night, and whenever they'd get together, and every little news, you know. Newspapers weren't like here now. One would get a newspaper and ten or fifteen people would read it, and if you had some news, you brought it, and everybody would read it. And how they followed it, I remember. Every time something occurred on that trial, the excitement amongst that group was terrific. And not only among young people, but amongst the older people too. The Jews would talk among themselves. You'd go into my mother's little store, the older people used to always talk. They used to follow, *hat ir eppes gelehut, het in eppes, gehest...*

LB: They'd hear something and learn something...

JM: Not the young people like that, because the young people were 18, 20. That's all they were because by the time you were 21 you either had to go to the army or something, you know. Or most of them already were married and they had everyday problems. You can learn something amongst the people, I remember. My mother was an ordinary woman and I used to hear her say, "*Es rikt es a tsur af im.*" "There's another something bad is coming."

LB: To the Jews.

JM: Jews, yeah. That was the reaction - if he's found guilty.

LB: It was an omen.

JM: Yeah, if he's found guilty then it'll be something for the others to follow - that all the Jews are doing this. So it was followed very (closely).

LB: It was known that the Czar proclaimed that he was guilty?

JM: Oh, yes. It was known, otherwise what kind of a trial would it be? It wouldn't have been no trial otherwise. Was all these witnesses, and I remember that atmosphere was so tense all the time.

LB: It was tense? Was it fearful then?

JM: Fearful and tense and everybody wanted to take out that his way of life and his thinking was the right one. They wanted to come to conclusions - the Zionists and Bundists, the revolutionaries that there were; everybody had if this is done, if life would be like that, it couldn't happen. And the Zionists thought different; that it happens because the Jew has nothing here. Although, when I come to think of it, he had his own life, he lived his own life, maybe not materially, he had very little, but otherwise Jews lived among themselves, they studied among themselves, they married among themselves, they had their own customs, and when you have friends you have no one else but Jews among themselves. They lived their own life and if they had disputes they went not to the government because they were scared of that. The fear, *hat im ubergegeben in goyishe hent*. That meant, somebody that had no principal at all. He's out of the community. It did happen, though, Jews did go to...

LB: But, you see, the whole, it seems to me, and you tell me if I'm wrong, this whole notion of Jews living their own lives was based on the premise that nobody would suddenly come in one day and beat them all up and kill them.

JM: That's right. Yeah, that's right.

LB: They were subject to the supposition the outside would leave them alone.

JM: Yeah, it either would be economic or otherwise an uprising. That's why everything that happened during war, revolutions and things like that, Jews would be hit because they couldn't help... Now, don't think that Jews didn't fight back.

LB: That's what I was going to say. Were there any...?

JM: They fought back, yes. I remember, these young people, and everyone and the working people, they fought back. They didn't have no armaments, but sticks, with whatever they had, they fought back.

LB: There was an organization for defending...

JM: Yeah, oh yeah, sure, there was.

LB: The Jews lived in one quarter of Uman?

JM: They lived among themselves so close that if they were attacked, they fought back. I wouldn't say that they didn't fight back. But they felt they weren't a part of the government.

LB: No, I understand, because they had to defend themselves. Nobody came in to defend them.

JM: Not that they didn't pay, you know, *zaklad* is what they called it. Like here, taxes you pay. They took your pillows away if you didn't pay what you owe. And as time went by taxes got higher and higher, and the Jews were supposed to be the middle class. I don't know, the middle or where they were, the middle of agony, and they paid even more. So they were taxed. I wouldn't say that all the goyim were bad, I wouldn't. Some of them were really friends, but if they went out to help a Jew, they were subject to the same cruel treatment the Jew was. That's why during Hitler's time very few Jews were saved by (gentiles). There were some, yes, that were saved, but not many.

LB: So there was a kind of [defense organization](#) in Uman?

JM: Yeah, oh yeah. Sure there was. There was those - all the butchers.

LB: Were there trade unions at all in Uman?

JM: No, at that time there was no trade union.

LB: Too early.

JM: No, it was too early. Yes, there were *zabastovka*, they used to declare strikes, I remember, like in shops. Tailors - they were talking, I remember, but very few.

LB: Because the Budnists were organizing the workers.

JM: Yes, they were, sure, yes they were. I remember a *zabastovka*; they stopped working and they beat up the tailor who was the boss.

LB: Was he a Jew?

JM: Yes, well Jews worked for them. Yes. The exchange was only the little stores that they had - the little businesses. But otherwise most worked among themselves.

LB: Were there any small factories owned by the Jews there? Or big factories?

JM: Well, I remember, there was a brewery that was owned by my father's cousin. In fact, he used to be called *Avrumfeh, fen de brewery*.

LB: Abraham from the brewery, right.

JM: He owned it. I remember, he had people work for him

LB: How many people worked for him?

JM: I couldn't tell you. It wasn't very large but he had several people. It must have been about fifteen or twenty people who worked for him.

LB: And did he employ only Jews then?

JM: No, he employed a mix.

LB: Russians, too?

JM: Yeah, Russian too. I guess he had someone who was a salesman. He had a Jew, things like that. I also remember a family that made seltzer. They had some carbonated water, they had a factory like that.

LB: How many people worked there?

JM: There, not too many - he and his sons. I guess he had a couple of gentile people that used to lift those big cans, or whatever.

LB: The casks. The barrels wouldn't it be?

JM: Casks. Yeah, yeah. They had that.

LB: Were any of these places organized?

JM: Not that I remember, no.

LB: What was the name? How do you call the strike? *A zabastovka*?

JM: *Zabastovka*.

LB: Where did the *zabastovka* take place?

JM: I remember there was a tailor in Uman. See, how it used to be, if you wanted to learn a trade you had to go and live with the tailor, the boss. Before they'd let you sew, you had to do the housework, take care of the child... So this tailor had a couple boys and apparently after three, or how many years, these poor kids were still doing the same kind of work. He wouldn't let them learn the trade. So several of the older men, already real tailors, the good tailors - masters already of the trade, they walked out on him. Whether they were organized, I just can't recall. But I think this was the beginning that they said that if he wasn't treating ... and you know what happened? They went to the rabbi to settle the dispute. That I remember.

LB: Yeah. That's real official unionism, yeah! (laughs)

JM: Yeah, yeah, they went to the rabbi and the rabbi wanted to know what was his agreement with the parents when the parents brought the children. They said, all right, for a while they'll do all these domestics, you know, what's expected of them, but then they'll start learning the trade. There they are years and years, still doing all that they're not supposed to do anymore. But they won. The rabbi saw that they were right.

LB: How were the rabbis in general, did you feel? Were they very conservative or were they open minded? How did you feel about rabbis?

JM: Well, it was felt that they were very conservative, but once in a while you struck someone who felt for the masses. But this one they went to, he was... See, there was always a rabbi that dealt with things like that. He was different altogether. And (there were) some that dealt with kashruth.

LB: Each one had his specialty?

JM: Specialty, yes, but that's where they went. So you see, how the trades were even...

LB: How primitive, yeah. Or, at least it's not primitive, but it was different.

JM: It was different, sure. Well, they had a gripe, and they went... I don't know whether anybody would come and take their jobs, but they took him to the rabbi and the rabbi said that right was on his side.

LB: On the young people's side?

JM: On the workers' side because he didn't live up to the promise. He promised this - they have to learn the trade. How many years more will they have to serve him as servants?

LB: Seven years for Rachel and seven for Leah. (laughs)

JM: For Rachel and for Leah. (laughs) Well, I remember because that was the talk of the town. Picus Zamvuh was his name, the rabbi. Zamvuh, yeah. He gave up his ruling on the workers' side that they were right. And so then he accepted. That's how it was.

LB: Did they have a real *kruzhok* there? It's a circle.

JM: Yeah, *kruzhok*, that means a circle of friends. Everybody had their *kruzhoks*.

LB: But some were already laying aside money against the *zabastovka*.

JM: Yeah. Oh, yes. Well, they were different. I would call that group that was coming into our cousins' - the young people, they were a *kruzhok*, but mostly they read together. They argued, but they were not...

LB: They were not trade union *kruzhok*.

JM: Not trade union, no. Maybe some of them, their activities were among those Bundists. I'm sure they were. But they came with the ideas because they were friends in other ways. Like they used to read together or used to listen to music together.

LB: Well, I think they started, if I'm not mistaken, as educational and social groups. And then gradually they made a little...

JM: Yeah, from that grew out different parties and different circles, yeah. But they were a group, yeah, they were.

LB: So that they could help the people within the *kruzhok* in case of a strike or whatever.

JM: Oh yeah, of course. These were the leaders, and these were the ones that first themselves they educated and then they passed their knowledge to somebody else.

LB: I see. Well, Mrs. Muraven, I'm going to stop the tape and say thank you very much.

JM: Oh, you're welcome, I'm sure.