



Selets

An Oral History of the Life of Rose Silbert Rifkin

*Interview with grand-daughter Donna Spiegelman,
with comments by her daughter, Rhoda Rifkin Spiegelman*



Side 1

Donna: I want to know like where you were born...

Nana Rose: I was born in Russia in a very small town. In (laughter) "Uncle Tom's cabin". It was a very small house.

Donna: What was the name of the town?

Nana Rose: Селец (Selets)

Donna: Where is that?

Nana Rose: That's in... White Russia [today's Belarus]. And we had a one-room schoolhouse, which is true. And that's where I went. till I finished that school.

Donna: First of all, let's just get this straight, 'cause I want other people to hear this, OK? And so they don't really know like where White Russia is or like... All right so how small is this town, like, how many people lived in the town?

Nana Rose: About 350 people.

Donna: OK

Nana Rose: Families, I mean.

Donna: And were all the families Jewish?

Nana Rose: It was about 7-8 Jewish families and the rest of them were gentile.

Donna: And they all lived in the town?

Nana Rose: Right

Donna: How far was this town from like the nearest city?

Nana Rose: It was about thirty-five miles from biggest city.

Donna: What was the name of that city?

Nana Rose: Новозыбков (Novozybkov)

Donna: OK

Nana Rose: Is it on, Donna? Is it being recorded?

Donna: Yes, it's on now. OK so, first tell me what your house looked like, the house where you were born.

Nana Rose: I'm telling you, it was a very small one-room house.

Donna: Your house was one room?

Nana Rose: Yes. And since I remember we were four children and my parents. The rest of my brothers and sisters were out of the house already. Some of them were in America, and some of them were working in bigger cities, and I and one of my sisters and two brothers were at home at the time I was growing up.

Donna: Who build your house?

Nana Rose: Gentile people. We rented it from gentile people.

Donna: Did you have heat in the house?

Nana Rose: No, we had a stove. Wood, we used to warm it with wood. It's like a reguar...like you see on the farms... those brick stoves, and you put in wood on one side and on the other side you cook or bake or whatever. And that warms up the house, that gives heat for the house too.

Donna: Did you have a bathroom in the house?

Nana Rose: No

Donna: Where did you go to the bathroom?

Nana Rose: Outdoors.

Donna: And was it on the street?

Nana Rose: It was not on the street, it was in the back of the house.

Donna: No, I mean, was the house on the street?

Nana Rose: Yeah!

Donna: And what about the houses next to it?

Nana Rose: Right

Donna: So were all your neighbors Jewish?

Nana Rose: No

Donna: So on your street it was a mixed neighborhood.

Nana Rose: Right

Donna: Was this typical? Would you say, for most Jewish families, that they lived in a situation like this?

Nana Rose: What do you mean by typical?

Donna: Well do you think that the majority of the Jewish families that were living in that area, at that time, were living, you know, in a small town like that, and they lived on the street and there were Jews and non-Jews...

Nana Rose: It was typical in the small villages. That was really a village, where we lived. And that was typical because there was a few Jewish families, and they were like the grocers or butchers, you know, the businesspeople, and the gentile people used to come and buy, like, grocery things like sugar and flour and kerosene. Those days we used kerosene for light, we didn't have electricity, so we used to use kerosene lamps. And all the other things, you wouldn't even know what it is, for the horses, we didn't have cars in those days, for the horses and the buggies, they used to oil the wheels, so they used to call it "nepta." And that's how the Jews lived, they were the businesspeople in the small villages.

Donna: Is that what your father did?

Nana Rose: Yeah. Oh, we had big businesses! We had a grocery of this type, and then my father used to make wool hats from sheep wool, and he used to make boots from the wool also, which used to go in the leather boots, because then it was very cold.

Donna: Right, liners.

Nana Rose: Right, that's probably what they would call it here. But in Europe they used to call that *valenkis*. And, what else did we make...

Donna: You made them too?

Nana Rose: I used to help my father. Used to roll it in, and have a form.

Donna: So you had your own store, too?

Nana Rose: Yeah.

Donna: Was your father the only person who worked in the store?

Nana Rose: Well we used to help him, I used to help him when I was not in school, and my sister used to help him.

Donna: But your mother didn't work in the store?

Nana Rose: My mother worked plenty hard. She had plenty to do in the house, we used to bake our own bread, and... what else we used to... you know there you can't go in and buy everything. Like we had to make *gritz* [ground cereal: oats, rice, kasha] they used to make it in... I wouldn't know how to call it...

Rhoda: Mortar and pestle?

Nana Rose: No, we used to have a big wooden one. With a wooden...

Donna: Well what did you call it?

Rhoda: A grinder?

Nana Rose: No, not a grinder... Wait a minute, I have t think...Don't (unintelligible)

Donna: You want me to stop?

Nana Rose: Yeah, is it working?

(Tape is stopped, continued at later point in time)

Nana Rose: Толкушка (Tolkushka). And we used to have a wooden... толкач (*tolkach*) we used to call it in Russian. And you know, it's a wooden, a big, a heavy thing! And you keep on poking till they come out from the shell. And that's what we used to make, каша (*kasha*), or soup or whatever you used to use the *gritz* for.

Donna: Where did the Jews get things like kerosene?

Nana Rose: We used to go to Novozybkov and buy it. It used to be a whole journey for twenty, thirty-five miles. We used to go, so you used to mark down a whole list; what you need for the store, and then probably my father and my sister used to go with a peasant, used to have the horses. Used to take two days till they go back and forth. Thirty-five miles! And they buy everything and they bring it to the store. And then we sell it...

Donna: Who did they buy it from?

Nana Rose: In Novozybkov, used to be stores, like, wholesale places. So you used to buy in different stores different things, what they carry. And then they used to buy whatever, the amount they needed, used to bring it to the grocery and sell it to the peasants.

Donna: So were these stores in Novozybkov owned by Jews also?

Nana Rose: Oh yes. The businesspeople, ninety-nine percent were Jewish.

Donna: You didn't grow anything, right? You didn't have a garden, or...

Nana Rose: No, we didn't have any land. Jews were not permitted to have land. In the czar's time. So we had no land. So we didn't grow anything.

Donna: Did you wish you did have land?

Nana Rose: We didn't know, because we didn't know how to handle it. We never did... Oh! Another business my father, I almost forgot. In the summertime, he used to rent, like, I wouldn't know, how many acres of land from... What would you call Помещик (*pameshchik*) [landowner] over there? Also were Jewish families.

Rhoda: Managers?

Nana Rose: No no no. They had an estate. A Jewish... a few families, like it was... Is it working?

Donna: Yeah, go on!

Nana Rose: It was a family that they had inheritance. Probably a hundred acres of land, and they used to rent it out to people who wanted to do gardening or things like that. So my father would rent let's say three or four acres of land, and he used to get seedlings from our big city, from Riga, that was interesting...

Donna: He went all the way to Riga?

Nana Rose: No, he was mailed a catalog, and they used to send them to us. And he used to make samples. So before it gets spring warm enough, he used to make samples, put it in soft cloth, and make it damp, and keep it in a warm place, and see how many seeds come out all right. So if they come out, all of them, he knows that it's good seeds. And then we would get peasant girls... First we would get men and they would... what you call it...till the soil. They would have a horse and a plow. And they would dig up the soil for us, and make it good. And then he would get about twenty or whatever gentile girls, and they would come and they would dig it up all over, the soil, with rakes and other things, and make little holes and plant the seeds.

Donna: What kind of seeds were they?

Nana Rose: Cucumbers, carrots, string beans, what else... radish, and black radish, and...I don't know how to call it here, in Russian it's called брюква (*brewkva*) [Swedish or yellow turnip] you see it in the... it's like radish but it's in yellow, yellow color.

Rhoda: Turnips?

Nana Rose: Turnips, but it's not the white turnips that we eat. Those turnips are...

Donna: Well, it doesn't matter. So what did he do with those?

Nana Rose: And then we used... Oh! And cabbage! And then we used to take it off in fall and sell it. Look how many businesses we had!

Donna: How did this Jewish family have land? You said that Jews didn't have land.

Nana Rose: That was an exception, you know, the father and the mother had some kind of permission. Like certain people had priority to get the permission to have land. And that was inheritance from their parents. And then a few brothers and sisters remained to live there. They had their own homes there and they lived there.

Donna: So why don't you tell me about all the people in your family and what they did for a living, and what they were like and stuff like that. You know, your mother and your father, you can start with them and then your brothers and your sisters.

Nana Rose: Yeah. My oldest brother..

Donna: Tell me their names and...

Nana Rose: In Jewish?

Donna: Yeah!

Nana Rose: I could tell them in English.

Donna: No, no it's better in Jewish, that's what their names were, right?

Nana Rose: Well my older sister Chana, when I was born, she was married the same year, so I didn't remember her much, only when I grew older I felt towards her like a stranger. In Russia if you very close to a person, you say "du" in Jewish. But if you, you know feel strange, you say "ir", like "we." So I used to call her "ir," because I was (same unintelligible word as above) because I didn't remember how being close with her. So she was married the year I was born. Then I had another brother, he was married near Gomel in a small city. It was Речица (Rechetsa). And he lived with his family.

Donna: What was his name?

Nana Rose: Shmuel-Yoshe. In English it's Joseph. And I had my brother, Archie's father, was Barreh. So he was in this country, maybe I was two years old when he moved, so I didn't remember him. And my sister, Aunt Ida, she also went to America maybe two years after my brother, so I hardly remembered her too.

Donna: Her name was Ida in Russian?

Nana Rose: Ita-Risha.

Donna: Yea tell me the real names.

Nana Rose: Ita-Risha, that was her real, Jewish name. And my sister, the one that remained in Russia, she lived with us till she... a couple years before we went to America she was married, and she moved out to Ocexa (Oseha -- couldn't find this one on google maps), a different city.

Donna: What was her name?

Nana Rose: Etta. And my brother Nechemiah, you know, that's Uncle Nathan, he was home, he used to go out for like, to yeshiva to different cities. Like, he was a number of years in Gomel, and he also was hardly, barely at home. Then when he finished yeshiva he came home, and the war broke out and he went into the army. And then he was captured and he was in Germany. For six months. You want me to tell you when he came home from Germany?

Donna: Sure

Nana Rose: I was sitting doing my homework; it was a very cold winter night. The windows were covered with snow, you know, and you couldn't even see. All of a sudden, I see something through the snow (I'll never forget it, if I live to a hundred) all of a sudden I see a nose like sticking through the window, and I got very frightened. And he started... I don't know how he knew where we lived!

Donna: Why wouldn't he know where you lived? It's the same house, right? You didn't move?

Nana Rose: I don't even remember, maybe we did move from one place, he was away a couple of years. So then when I saw somebody at the door, he started poking on the door. So I asked him who it is, and when he said, I couldn't even believe it, I woke up my father and mother, (they were asleep and I was doing my homework). And he came in, and he was in shreds! I really mean in shreds! He ran away from Germany.

Donna: How old was he?

Nana Rose: He must have been then about... nineteen? And he came in, he was all pale like a ghost. He used to run by night and sleep by day in the pastures, so nobody should see him. It probably took him months till he got home. And then he started to speculate. My sister Etta and he, I'm telling you I get the chills whenever I think about it, they used to buy like, crosses for the peasants, and they used to go to Украина (Ukraine) where there were mostly richer peasants and they used to trade it for flour, and all kind of *gritz*

and things like that. And most of the time by the time they got home they used to arrest them, and take everything away, what they had.

Donna: Why were they arrested?

Nana Rose: Because they were not supposed to speculate.

Donna: What does that mean, “to speculate?” How is that different from what your father was doing?¹

Nana Rose: Well that was permitted, he had a grocery and he worked. But if you buy things, you go to Украина (Ukraine), and you exchange it from the peasants, it’s like robbing the peasants, you give them a little cross, and you get from them, in Europe they used to call a Пуд (pud) [unit of weight equal to 40 pounds], like 40 pounds of flour, or whatever it is, and, like for one cross, which is worth maybe a quarter. So it’s like cheating the people. So you were not permitted. And at the time there was the revolution, and we had the communists, so they used to catch them and they used to put them in a prison for whatever length of time...

Donna: How long?

Nana Rose: A week, three days... and Uncle Nechemiah was a very unlucky guy. He always used to come with bare hands, it wasn’t even funny. And Aunt Etta was the one used to provide him with stuff, cause he started that night when he came home. And she used to buy materials very good, and they used to go also and speculate and trade for the materials. Like, cotton material that they make dresses out of and blouses or whatever. And they used to go also speculating and they were afraid to carry it, so you know what they did?

Donna: What?

Nana Rose: They used to roll it around the person. But you used to be like a fat person. And on top clothing, whatever they had, and cover it up like that. And then we used to speculate (that once I went, I’ll never forget that) when I was out of school. So I went with them to speculate, so we used to buy tobacco and we used to go to the trains where the soldiers used to go. So we used to try to go into the train, we shouldn’t have to pay for the fare. So we used to see when the guy comes in and checks, so when we see him coming out we go to another train, then we would run and get into the train that he was in already. And we used to come, it wasn’t a passenger train, but a freight train. So it was like shelves, you know. So we used to go on top of the shelves, sit with the soldiers they used to lie next to the tobacco, and they start sneezing a lot. (laughter) And they used to say “what’s happening?” (more laughter)

Donna: You never laughed?

¹ - In this context means to profit from an unfair price difference; used as a negative characteristic – Mira Kaufman

Nana Rose: Uh huh

Donna: They never discovered you?

Nana Rose: No! Unless they would... so, Aaron used to go with us. You don't remember Aaron. Chana's older son. So he was the kind, you know, he was a very easy-going person, so he used to put his stuff in one train, and go in the next train, and they'll take it, they'll take it, he'll be lucky enough or he'll find it. So, that was the way we made a living then.

Donna: Weren't you scared that you were going to get caught?

Nana Rose: I'm scared now when I think about it.

Donna: Did your parents think you were doing something wrong?

Nana Rose: They didn't think... We had to make a living! But I didn't finish yet. When I was going to school, so, in the morning there was a distant relative was our landlord, where we lived. So he gave me a job to work in his office. He was... He used to work for Пищевкус (Pishevkus, a trade union of food industry workers) they called it in Russia. They used to give out flour and sugar and things like that, so you had to have a card, and every week they would give you a pound of sugar, two pounds of flour...

Donna: This was after the revolution, right?

Nana Rose: Right. And they used to be lined up, you know, to get that much... Lines and lines, maybe hundreds of people. So I used to work in his office. I used to get five pounds of flour for bread, that was the big pay I used to get.

Donna: What kind of work did you do there?

Nana Rose: Office work. I used to write out whatever he used to dictate me and...

Donna: You wrote letters in Russian?

Nana Rose: Yes. So that was one job I had. Then I used to go to school for... at twelve o'clock and used to come home at four o'clock, and then I used to go... we had... they used to sew, Aunt Henya used to work there, she was a very good seamstress. So she gave me a job and she taught me how to do it. So she took me in there. That was also for the government. We used to make the quilted jackets. Like the... sleeping bags you have, but they would make them for the soldiers, quilted jackets. So I used to work there till twelve o'clock at night. And then we used to walk from the station, probably at least two miles. Twelve o'clock at night used to be cold, like I'd feel like with the snow is crusted under your walk. And then first we used (Listen how many businesses we had!) we used to sell... papa, my father used to sell cigarettes to... like candy stores do here where they

sell cigarettes, so he used to sit down and make a box of cigarettes, about a thousand cigarettes. When we moved in to Novozybkov from Selets, we had people that they used to call them “беженцы” (*bezhentsi*) [refugees] that ran away from the territory when it was taken over by the Bolsheviks. But little by little, the Bolsheviks reached Novozybkov too. So they, then they were permitted to go back where they lived. So the girl used to make the cigarettes, so she taught me before she moved.

Donna: What girl?

Nana Rose: The family, a couple lived in our house.

Donna: In the one-room house?

Nana Rose: Not the one-room, in Novozybkov we had already three rooms.

Donna: But you're not saying everything in order, so when we left off you were living in a little town in a one-room house! When did you move?

Nana Rose: After the revolution we moved to Novozybkov.

Donna: Why?

Nana Rose: Because we were afraid of the bandits. We used to have bandits in the small towns, they used to come and kill Jews. In fact an Uncle of mine, my father's brother and his family were all killed in one night. And a lot of neighboring...

Donna: What year was that? Do you know?

Nana Rose: Probably 1920 or something like that...

Donna: Really, 1920? They were having pogroms in 1920?

Nana Rose: Yes! It was the changing of the government. First was the (?Denikins?) took over, the was the ... Who else was there...?

Rhoda: Mensheviks? Bolsheviks?

Nana Rose: Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, there was different governments every so often, and then the real Bolsheviks took over. So the Jewish families were afraid. So we moved. The peasants helped us to get to Novozybkov. One night...

Donna: Who were the bandits?

Nana Rose: I think once I remember, it was on a Sunday afternoon. And young men, peasants, came to our house. And we used to sell soda (I'm telling you we were such a big business, it was unbelievable!) so they came in and drank soda, and then they

started... When I was working we had not everything yet, we used to make from the... we had machines. Two. And we used, by hand they used to work it, and from the sheep wool, they used to soften it, I don't know how to call it. And then you could spin it and make it into thread or whatever. And then the peasants used to bring the wool, and my mother used to make for them stockings. Woolen socks or stockings, and they used to send it to the soldier's sons or brothers and whomever, into the army. And she used to make woolen gloves. That was at night work, by day she had other things to do. So that was our occupation.

Donna: Weren't you going to tell us something else about that Sunday afternoon?

Nana Rose: Oh, when the peasants, the young people came, and they were banging away and they wanted to kill the Jews. And my father was at the... he always used to fix the machines. And he was there and we were afraid that he... I'll never forget that night when I said "papa don't come into the house." And a night later, we had these guys come in, I recognized them. And he came over, one came over to us, we heard somebody banging around (I'm getting numb!) So my mother and my father woke up and they start looking around, so two tremendous big husky men (And I recognized them from the night before) And they only wanted that we should give them whatever we had. And we really didn't have too much, we had a couple hundred dollars or whatever, I didn't remember. So papa buried it, and the next time he was looking for it he couldn't find it. It was a tragedy! He dug so long until he finally found it! So when they came in we had little, so they took it away, and we were glad that they left us alone. My father had a little beard, so he took him by his beard, and I'll never forget that knife, it was a triangle knife, they called it the German knives. And he says "Dirty Jew" they called it in Russian. He says "Whatever you got, give it to us in a quiet way or else we're going to kill you." So after that we went to Novozybkov. And we were afraid even to start, so peasants, neighbors that were very friendly so they took us all the way, almost down, halfway down to Novozybkov. We were rich but the Germans...

Donna: They took you in a cart?

Nana Rose: No, we rented from them a horse and buggy. Not a buggy, it was wagons. It's not a covered wagon, it's an uncovered wagon. And they were going with us. They took their horses and they took us to Novozybkov. That already was the Germans. The Germans were rotten as they are but they wouldn't... not like the bandits, the bandits used to kill families! The Germans used to come in and store guns in Novozybko. My father opened a store too. He used to sell herring and flour, (the same things) and kerosene or whatever. So one German... he came in once so he wanted to take a gallon of oil. So then I was helping out at the register, I said "Bezahlen Sie, bitte (please pay)" so I gave him a smack with my hand and took the gallon of oil and he walked out.

Rhoda: Where did the Germans come from?

Donna: They attacked already to Novozybkov.

Nana Rose: There's different wars going on and I don't even know what they are...

Rhoda: This is after World War 2? World War 1?

Nana Rose: One, yes.

Rhoda: I though the revolution was after WW1 or before WW1?

Donna: Before WW1.

Rhoda: So you were in captured territory!?

Nana Rose: Yes!

Donna: So you're saying that the problem was more terror, being terrorized with violence, not that you were hungry or starving, that kind of thing...

Nana Rose: Well we didn't have too much to eat, but we did have flour. The flour wasn't even well-ground, you know? Roughage! So we used to get so constipated, it was really horrible.

Donna: So what happened, where there doctors there? What happened if somebody got sick?

Nana Rose: Well, in Novozybkov we had an epidemic of typhus. And while I was sick, I still remember, you know I was in such a terrible fever, that I... through the fever I felt like I was producing glass. You know, you just... you don't know what's going on. And the doctor came to see me, and next time I wake up and the doctor was dead.
(laughter)

Donna: Who was the doctor?

Nana Rose: It's no joke, we had seven doctors, was left three! They all died!

Donna: Were these Jewish doctors?

Nana Rose: So then I got sick, my mother got sick, and my father got sick. And Uncle Nechemiah (Nathan) was (unintelligible) in the army, and he was Gomel, so he came to visit us, and he took sick. So we were all sick, and that is very contagious. So nobody would want to open the door. So Aunt Henya, she was keeping company with my brother Nechemiah so she used to come and bang on the window or on the door, where we want. So she would shop and bring it, and we wouldn't let her in even.

Donna: Were the doctors Jewish, or were they gentile?

Nana Rose: I think mostly Jewish. I don't even remember gentiles. I think they were all Jewish.

Donna: So tell me a little bit about your education. Like first in... What do you say that name that is?

Nana Rose: Selets. That was the small town where I was born.

Donna: Tell me about what kind of education you had there. Did your parents have education?

Nana Rose: Hebrew. My mother didn't have much education.

Donna: Did she have any?

Nana Rose: Probably could write very little in Yiddish. My father was educated in Hebrew and Yiddish. He had a beautiful handwriting. Did you see his handwriting on one of Rhoda's pictures that he wrote in? I have Rhoda's picture when she was a baby, so he wrote down the date of her birth.

Donna: Who taught him how to do that? Where did he learn that?

Nana Rose: He went to cheder I suppose. When I was born my parents were forty-seven years old. So I didn't remember them as young parents. And I was so envious if I see children walk with young parents, but I had to grow up with my parents, and I really loved them and they loved me. In spite of everything, that I was the fourteenth child!

Donna: You didn't mention fourteen people, did you?

Nana Rose: A lot of them died!

Donna: So why didn't you tell us about the ones that died?

Nana Rose: Six died and we were remained eight.

Donna: Who were the six that died? What happened to them?

Nana Rose: I don't remember them, they were all older than me.

Donna: What did they die of?

Nana Rose: I don't know Donna.

Donna: You have no idea what your brothers and sisters died of?

Nana Rose: I wasn't born!

Donna: But didn't anyone ever tell you?

Nana Rose: No, I never asked them. Any epidemic, there were typhus, and there were measles, and at that time we didn't have any prevention of any kinds of ailments!

Donna: Were they little children when they died?

Nana Rose: Yes. Little.

Rhoda: Were you born in a house?

Nana Rose: I think so.

Donna: Was there a midwife or a doctor?

Nana Rose: Midwife mostly.

Donna: Ok so your father went to *cheder*. Was there a *cheder* in Selets?

Nana Rose: We had a *cheder*..

Donna: With seven Jewish families there was a *cheder*?

Nana Rose: Yes. Right over... he had seven kids or eight kids or ten kids. Some families had to close so they went to *cheder*. So we were not allowed to have a teacher from another town.

Donna: By the law?

Nana Rose: By the law. Because we were Jews. So when we knew that (we called it урядник (Uryadnik, pre-Bolshevik chief of local police) like here comes (it's not police, it's higher than a policeman) used to come from bigger city, check certain things up. And they would notify us. Nice gentiles would let us know. So the teacher used to hide, and all the kids used to run away, like, and get lost whatever place they can till he would go away from the town. Beautiful isn't it? That's why when I came here and I saw my children going to such a beautiful school, it was so much freedom, I was very happy about it.

Donna: So you went to a *cheder* too? That same *cheder*?

Nana Rose: I went to *cheder* but not...

Donna: And you ran when this guy came? Do you remember doing that?

Nana Rose: Yes!

Rhoda: There were girls in *cheder*?

Donna: Sure, but we didn't... later on girls already come to the *cheder*. But I went two times.

Rhoda: And then what?

Nana Rose: And then I start learning the Russian. Selets had a one-house school. So peasants, whatever, who wanted to send... not too many were going there... and a few Jewish kids. And then I finished this school, so I went to Boyd that was a bigger school. That's where Aunt Chani lived.

Donna: You lived with Aunt Chani when you went to that school?

Nana Rose: Yea. And from there we moved to Novozybkov, then I went to regular school and I got my higher education.

Donna: So did you learn Russian from the school, or did your parents speak Russian?

Nana Rose: Mostly in the house we spoke Jewish. But to learn how to speak Russian, we were always with Russian people. So we learned to speak Russian... but I learned my education in school and then I went to... in Novozybkov I went to here it would be called high school Гимназия (*gimnaziya*, school).

Donna: So what was your relationship to the other Jewish families in the town, Selets, were they friends of yours? Did you have a *shul* there?

Nana Rose: No, not in Selets. We had to go to that... estate place, they had a *shul*. So they used to come from little towns around, and go there for *shul*. On holidays, during the week my father used to pray at home. I would love to have a picture of him with his *tallis* and *tfiln* on.

Donna: You want to tell me anything more about the schools that you went to and stuff?

Nana Rose: Well the Jewish children didn't have so much freedom even in these schools in Novozybkov where we lived. They were... tragedy. Mostly they paid attention to the gentile kids. And one Jewish girl, she came from a family of very wealthy people, businesspeople, and they never even would want to give her (because it was revolution time, and because she came from a rich family) they would hate her, you know. They used to call her "Напудринная" (*napudrinnaya*), that means she used to have make-up. The other kids never, didn't have money for make-up, but she used to come in with... now I understand it, blush on, because she looked so beautiful, I can see her now. So they called her *napudrinnaya*, like a nickname, they would call her. They called her to the desk, to answer something. And that's about all about education...

Donna: Well what did you take? What did they teach you in the school?

Nana Rose: They taught us Russian, and we learned ancient history, Russian history, and I took up French, and I took some German, I was very good in German. And geography, and arithmetic, algebra and...

Donna: You just sat in one place and different teachers came in, or you walked around different rooms?

Nana Rose: No, no, we had different teachers.

Donna: And everybody was in the same classroom, the whole school?

Nana Rose: Not everybody in the same. Like for instance like here departmental. Well, Novozybkov was a bigger city already...

Donna: How many people?

Nana Rose: We had two big *shuls*, we had three schools; *gimnaziya*, for boys one and for girls, and then a coed.

Donna: Did your parents think it was OK that you went to this Russian school, or did they want you to go to the Jewish school?

Nana Rose: Well we couldn't afford to have a Jewish school for a few people, and we couldn't afford to pay for cheder all the time. But for the Russian schools you didn't have to pay.

Donna: That was after the revolution?

Nana Rose: Right, and I wanted to have education, I wanted to get education in the worst way.

Donna: How religious was your family?

Nana Rose: Very orthodox.

Donna: So what does that mean?

Nana Rose: They were orthodox people, they were religious. How could I explain it to you...

Donna: Well like what did you do that made you orthodox? Like, say, different from what we do?

Nana Rose: We never rode on Saturday, we never did anything on Saturday, like Friday night everything was closed like in the orthodox places in Jerusalem or whatever. In Israel. And my father used to go to *shul* on Saturday. And we used to pray...

Donna: Only the men went to *shul*, not the women?

Nana Rose: It was too far to walk for ladies. So on high holidays my mother would go, we would go all, the whole family would go. What else do you want to know?

(Tape stopped, continued at a later point in time)

Donna: So, let's see, would you say, you just started talking about how you felt, like did you feel scared all the time? Was that like, the way you felt?

Nana Rose: You mean in school?

Donna: No, just like in your life in general, like you were saying like...

Nana Rose: In my family I was loved and all that, but not there, they had the atmosphere, the environment to grow up like that was under pressure!

Donna: Well did you always feel afraid?

Nana Rose: In what respect you mean? For instance when I went to school, I still remember (I dream sometimes, you wouldn't believe it, Donna!), we had a teacher, algebra teacher. So when he used to come into the classroom he wouldn't even give us a smile, he used to go in with that moustache. If something funny, that somebody would say something, he wouldn't *fargin*² you to smile. Just, you know, to show that he... And when he comes in he was so strenuous with us that we were afraid, we were shivering! And we couldn't even concentrate; we knew the answers when we had a test. And then we had a German teacher in the German language. So he also, he was the same way. He was so rotten to the Jewish kids! They were scared out of their wits! So that, you know, a pressure in it for children. It's not that you come into the schools and you... especially now, the way they carry on with the teachers, the teachers are afraid!

Donna: So did you feel like being a Jewish person, right, did you feel very separate from... like mummy was saying; were you Russian or were you Jewish?

Nana Rose: We were Jewish Russian. First Jewish, then Russian. Like you say here, American Jew.

Rhoda: But the "American" comes first. You're putting the "Jew" first.

Nana Rose: We were Russian Jews. Or Jewish Russians, whichever you want.

² Yiddish word without exact English equivalent: to be happy for someone else, to rejoice in another's good fortune.

Donna: Well did you have friends that weren't Jewish? Did your family have friends that weren't Jewish?

Nana Rose: No, They wouldn't allow you to associate with gentiles.

Donna: Who wouldn't?

Nana Rose: My parents. Or any Jewish family wouldn't allow...

Donna: Why?

Nana Rose: Because it was a big difference between Jews and gentiles. Because they were afraid that we shouldn't get involved and get married with Christians, which is against the religion, and people, in those days especially, were very religious, and they were afraid of those things. It was a very horrible thing if a Jewish girl married a gentile man.

Donna: Did that ever happen?

Nana Rose: One. One family I remember, and they just... like somebody died, they sit "shiva," that's what they did. The family would sit "shiva" for her.

Donna: So do you feel angry about these things? Like the way you were afraid and stuff? Does that make you angry to think about that?

Nana Rose: That makes you angry! Isn't it better to grow up and be free than under pressure all your life?

Donna: Was there like separate government for the Jews than there was for the Russians? Or was it the same government?

Nana Rose: The same government.

Donna: So you didn't have your own laws within the Jewish community.

Nana Rose: No. The Jews only stuck to their religion. But the law, they had to obey the government law.

Donna: What about things like socialism; did you feel like Jewish people were socialists?

Nana Rose: My brother there was a socialist, and that's why my father tried, my mother tried him to go to America. Because if they caught a socialist there it would be goodbye Charlie.

Donna: Who was he a socialist with, what kind of organization was he in?

Nana Rose: Socialism.

Donna: A Jewish socialist organization?

Nana Rose: Yeah, they had a few friends like get together and they used to sing. When I grew up older and I could read already, I found that book, who told socialist songs. Like revolution songs.

Donna: Is that all they did, just sing songs, or did they do other things?

Nana Rose: Well they tried to do undercover things.

Donna: What kind of things?

Nana Rose: Like to organize... but they couldn't go to far...

Donna: Organize who?

Nana Rose: Against the czar.

Donna: In what way, though? What kind of things did they try and do?

Nana Rose: They wanted to better the workers live.

Donna: For strikes, you mean?

Nana Rose: For strikes... but they couldn't strike! They just tried to... little by little, don't you see, that's how the revolution broke out. Little by little tried to work and work until finally it blew up!

Donna: So how were people workers though, if everybody had their own little businesses, though? Who could they strike against?

Nana Rose: Well in the big cities they had businesses that they had workers. In small towns they didn't have workers. Every family they had their own business and they stuck to it.

Donna: And that was your experience, right?

Nana Rose: Right. But in the big cities they had workers, and the workers tried to better their condition.

Donna: Did... were there Zionists? Did people ever talk about Israel?

Nana Rose: Yes. There were Zionists. But there was so few people, that it's really hard to... they could hardly get organized, you know what I mean?

Donna: Well what did they say about Zionism, or Israel?

Nana Rose: I don't know that, in those days when I was young and little in Russia, I don't remember anybody working for Israel. Few people that I knew in the small town, I don't think they even knew anything, how to go about it.

Donna: So what was your social life like, did you have parties?

Nana Rose: We used to get together, we used to play ball just like here, we used to go in *cheder*. Before we went to Novozybkov, We had the *cheder*. And then we used to get together, Jewish families or Jewish children. We didn't have a movie house or we didn't have a radio or Victrola or anything, or a recorder like you have. But we socialized, you know, just by talking or singing or whatever.

Donna: Where did you do that, at somebody's house?

Nana Rose: At somebody's house.

(tape stopped, continued at later point in time)

Donna: What did people say about America?

Nana Rose: Well they thought that America, you come here, you just go with a shovel, you shovel gold. That's what they called it, golden land.

Donna: Did you think that too?

Nana Rose: I didn't think that, because I knew what my brothers used to write to me. And then for ten years we didn't have mail, when the revolution broke out we had no connection with America. Aunt Chani was there with five children and she didn't get help from Uncle Moshe-Feivel. Anything at all, so she used to go on, speculate like that, and make for them a living. What a sad ten years. And then finally we were permitted to come to America, we all wanted to come.

Donna: Why?

Nana Rose: Because... to better our condition. It was a free country, and Jews were free ere. Not under pressure, which everyone understands is a better way of life.

(tape stopped, continued at later point in time)

(tape is continued in the middle of a conversation)

Rhoda: I'm talking about how you felt as a child. Did you feel that your life would have been much easier if you weren't Jewish? And were you angry sometimes at being Jewish, because you suffered so much more...

Nana Rose: We suffered and we took it like ports. We knew that we have to be Jews and we have to pay the price for it. We didn't want to become converted and be free of Judaism.

Donna: Did you think of it as mostly a religious thing? Is that why you thought you were Jewish, because you had the Jewish religion, or was it something more than that?

Nana Rose: Because the Jewish religion, we lived in our religion.

Rhoda: Did you pray all the time too? Were you an observant Sabbath Jew? Or did you sneak around behind your parents' back?

Nana Rose: No, I didn't sneak around. When I had tests on Saturday, I didn't go to the tests, and somehow they gave me the tests on another day.

Rhoda: You had school six days a week. So you never went to school on the *Shabbos*.

Nana Rose: No. Here already I started to cheat a little. When I was working on Saturday, they needed me to come in for some kind of special... and I wouldn't come in, I would work the job. So Saturday morning I used to come out of the other door. We had a fancy apartment, we had 2 doors. So I didn't want to hurt papa's feelings, so he shouldn't even hear. So I used to go out of the other door and go out to work.

Donna: What kind of job?

Nana Rose: I used to work in a factory where they used to make shirts. So I used to make the cuffs over here, just the two little things. We used to work parts. Everybody did something else. They used to make, over here the... not the cuff, the cuff is the whole thing. What do you call this, facing they used to call it in the shop.

Rhoda: What about how your sisters and brothers had (unintelligible) husbands and wives. Were they, like, fixed marriages, arranged marriages?

Nana Rose: No, no. Aunt Chani married Uncle Moshe-Feivel, they were in love! They were second cousins, the families knew each other. They lived in (place name sounding like "Boide") and we lived in Selets. They used to visit us. Cousins! And they fell in love.

Rhoda: Cause the stories I read about Russia at the turn of the century, there was all, you know...

Nana Rose: Aunt Eta married a cousin.

Donna: Everybody married cousins?

Nana Rose: Well, not everybody, but it happened this way.

Donna: Was that common?

Nana Rose: It wasn't common, but in some families, it was thought that way. It was such a fancy family that they stuck to their own.

Donna: So how were you like compared to the other Jewish families, were you rich or poor or in the middle or...

Nana Rose: In the middle.

Donna: So there were families that were a lot poorer?

Nana Rose: Oh yeah. We used to have a Jewish family that he was a horse thief.

Donna: What's that?

Nana Rose: He used to steal horses!

Donna: Oh, horse thief!

Nana Rose: Yeah, so six months he used to be away, I didn't even understand what he was (you know I was a kid, and I didn't know what it was all about!) And they used to catch him and used to put him in prison, and he used to sit like six months, come back... And so, you know in Russia, it was different, like, there was classes. Like for instance we were businesspeople, and the workers were a different class. It's like a lower class. And naturally the one who's a thief is the lowest. So when the revolution broke out and then they used to have elections, so they used to send in leaflets. So this family from the thief father, they got an invitation to come to election, so one of the girls says (?she was my sister says so she says?) "See! We got popular! We get now our own invitations to go to the election board, or whatever they call it.

Donna: Did you ever go to Vilna or Warsaw?

Nana Rose: No. We went to Moscow once.

Donna: What was that like?

Nana Rose: Moscow was a very big city. And... we were speculating, we didn't go for pleasure god forbid. It used to take three days to get to Moscow by train.

Rhoda: You had money to go on the train?

Donna: We had a few dollars, so we used the train. You know, if you're lucky you come home with a couple extra pennies.

Rhoda: Where did you stay when you went to Moscow?

Nana Rose: In Moscow I had a cousin. We found out that cousin was my mother's nephew. We used to sleep by such a handsome guy. And he was so nice and so happy to meet... we used to sleep in his house.

Rhoda: How did Zayde to get to that little town... Selets?

Nana Rose: That part I don't even know.

Donna: You have no idea at all?

Rhoda: What about his brothers and sisters, did you ever meet them? Do you have any Aunts or Uncles you can remember?

Nana Rose: Yeah one sister, papa's sister, I remember, she was such a beautiful lady.

Donna: What was her name?

Nana Rose: Rifka. And I remember funny thing, she used to cook a soup with milk, and it used to come out so delicious, we used to come there, she used to treat us with that treat. I still remember the taste... She lived also in Selets, then they moved to Cypax (Surazh). He was a teacher. A *Rebbe*. So when used teach in different towns, like for instance, like a semester, he used to go for six, seven months. So I suppose she got tired of it and then they moved to Surazh. So I had a cousin that was a son of hers. And she had another daughter, which moved, she was someplace like I was telling Aunt Blance. When she went to visit her sister, that was my cousin who moved.

Rhoda: Argentina?

Nana Rose: Argentina. But she was married and I wouldn't even know her last name.

Donna: Well didn't the people in White Russia speak a different language, not Russian?

Nana Rose: Russian.

Donna: I though they spoke White Russian, I thought that was a different language.

Nana Rose: No, it's Russian also, but it's like here, like you come from the South, you have a different dialect. And that's the same thing, White Russians speak with a different dialect. The Ukrainian people speak differently... but it's the same Russian, I mean, the same spelling or whatever.

Donna: Is that the kind of Russian that you spoke? The White Russian dialect?

Nana Rose: Yeah.

Rhoda: Now is this all part of the Pale of Settlement that they called only that certain area Jews could live in?

Nana Rose: Where? After the revolution?

Rhoda: No, before the revolution, it was like a territory called the Pale of Settlement, and only Jews could live in that area, and they couldn't live in other places in Russia?

Nana Rose: No, after the revolution, they had a place in Ukraina, they gave... what was the name of that...

Donna: I know what you're talking about.

Nana Rose: Birebirzhon.

Donna: Right.

Nana Rose: And that's where they have a... they gave the Russians a settlement with a certain amount of acres of land, but they didn't succeed.

Rhoda: The Russians or the Jews?

Nana Rose: The Jews, Russian Jews.

Donna: So did you ever think of going there?

Nana Rose: No. We went to the States while they were organizing that. We wanted to go to America. I had here two brothers already, and my sister was here, and I wanted my parents to have a little rest in their old age.

Rhoda: That's not what you told me when I was a kid.

Nana Rose: I didn't want to come.

Rhoda: Ah, but you didn't say it, you said you...

Nana Rose: But my parents wanted to come, and because of them I came.

Donna: Why didn't you want to come?

Nana Rose: Because I knew it was the age that I couldn't get my education, whatever I... In Russia I was educated enough, but when I came here I had to start like a three-year-old. Like from the alphabet. And I felt very depressed. It was very unpleasant.

Donna: What about papa Vic's family? Where were they?

Nana Rose: They also lived in a different town. СМЯЛЬЧ (Smyal'ch)

Donna: What did his parents do for a living?

Nana Rose: His father died very young.

Donna: So what did his mother do?

Nana Rose: And when he was twelve years old he was the breadwinner for the whole family.

Donna: So how did he earn the bread?

Nana Rose: He used to do the same thing; speculate, whatever he could, he was in a bigger form, he was... he used to deal with... you know the... Oh! Керенский (Kerenskiy) ³I forgot to mention. That was another... revolutioner. But he was before the Bolsheviks. So he took over, he didn't exist too long. So that time, the ruble was more expensive than the Kerenskiy. So he used to buy for Kerenskiy money the Russian ruble, and go to different cities and sell it for the bigger amount, you know. And that's how he made a living.

Rhoda: He was a banker!

Nana Rose: Yeah. A banker! (laughter)

Donna: Did he go to school?

Nana Rose: He went to school, but he didn't have high education. He went to *cheder*, he was well-educated in Hebrew.

Rhoda: Did he have a Bar Mitzvah?

Nana Rose: Yeah. In Europe we all had Bar Mitzvahs! The girls didn't have Bat Mitzvahs there. Even in Israel they don't.

Rhoda: How old was he when his father died?

³ Prime Minister of the Russian Provisional Government in 1917. The Provisional Government issued money people called 'kerenki'. In a very short time, 'kerenki' devaluated, and cost next to nothing. People used the money as wallpaper. – Mira Kaufman

Nana Rose: Twelve years.

Rhoda: Oh he was twelve years old when his father died!

Nana Rose: Yeah. They were all young kids.

Rhoda: and where was Uncle Sam?

Nana Rose: Uncle Sam went to Gomel, and he worked for a... what do you call when they sell...in a dry goods store. In a big dry goods store.

Rhoda: Didn't you live in Gomel at one time?

Nana Rose: Never.

Rhoda: Never?

Nana Rose: Never. In Novozybkov. Gomel is our, like they say Brooklyn-New York. We were like New York City, you know what I mean? Novozybkov was the Brooklyn and Gomel was the New York, like city and state.

Rhoda: Gomel was not a state, it was a big city!

Nana Rose: A city. And what is Brooklyn?

Donna: Was it the capital of something?

Nana Rose: Gomel was a губерня (*gubernya*, major administrative subdivision of Imperial Russia). You know what's a *gubernya*?

Rhoda: It might be a county seat. Like the capital of the territory.

Nana Rose: Right.

Donna: So did you feel like the peasants liked having the Jews in the area, or they wanted to get rid of them?

Nana Rose: Some peasants were very nice with Jews. You know the richer peasants liked the Jews.

Donna: And what about the speculating? Didn't they resent you for speculating and tricking them?

Nana Rose: No, they didn't. We didn't trick them, we tricked other people. It's not really tricking, it was the price, like for instance, here is the price of a pound of bread, let's say a penny, and if you go to Ukraine there it's cheaper, because they produce it. So you

bring it from there and sell it in your town, where it's more expensive. Needles are the cheapest things. In Ukraina they didn't have needles. So they would take needles and the little crosses, and what else... little things like that, and they would come home with...

Rhoda: They traded! That's what it was, it was a barter system!

Donna: So how could you tell, like if you were just walking down the street? How could you tell if somebody was Jewish or if they were Russian?

Nana Rose: Well it's a town like that, you know... First of all the Jews were dressed differently.

Donna: How were they dressed differently?

Nana Rose: They were dressed more.. appropriate or whatever you could say... The Jews were... I can't even explain... They used to make their own make-believe shoes. They used to knit them. From... it's like straw, but it's heavier. And then they used to put through cord, which they used to make everything themselves. And put on *shmates*, I'm not joking!

Rhoda: That's what you wore?

Nana Rose: No, the peasants used to wear that. The Jews had shoes. And that's why you see the difference.

Rhoda: How come you had shoes?

Nana Rose: We had a shoemaker in three... in another town, three miles away. And by the time he used to make our shoes we used to outgrow them! (laughter)

Rhoda: Well why didn't you wear those poor shoes? You had more money, you could afford shoes?

Nana Rose: We had more money and that's where they start. They used to make their own linens, they used to make their own linens and the used to make their own quilt covers, everything it's... how do you say... weaving! They used to weave everything! And their linen I still have one towel, I will show it to you. And you know how you make, so they used to come out dark, so they used to take it and spread out near the... near our lake. They used to wet it, and spread out on the grass, and from... the sun used to bake it through and make it pale. It's come out white.

Donna: So that's the only way you could tell the difference between a Jew and a Russian was by their clothes?

Nana Rose: Their speech, and their religion.

Rhoda: No no no, you wouldn't tell a person's religion by the way...

Nana Rose: And their clothes... Mainly clothes. Mainly clothes, you could tell.

Donna: So you don't think that Jews looked differently?

Nana Rose: No! The looks is... I don't know, the goyim looked heavy, and they used to eat different foods. A lot of pig meat and ham and pork and all those things. And they used to fry it, and potatoes and kasha, and all those starchy things, but they used to be very healthy. In the fresh air all the time, and on the fields they used to do all the work...

Rhoda: What about Russians that weren't peasants that worked in the field? What about like middle class Russians? Could you tell them apart from a Jew?

Nana Rose: They still wore different... Their behavior was different...

Rhoda: Did you want to dress differently so people would know you were Jewish?

Nana Rose: I really don't know, maybe... That was trend or the habit or...

Rhoda: Did you wear, that what the Hassids wear?

Nana Rose: No. We would wear dresses made from material. They would make their own linen. They would make a skirt that they would weave themselves.

Rhoda: I know, but like other Russians, they had like money to buy fabric like you did.

Nana Rose: The Russians wouldn't dress that way.

Donna: Were there Hassids in your town?

Nana Rose: No.

Rhoda: Did you know about Hassidism?

Nana Rose: I don't even remember if I did or I didn't. I don't think I did know.

Rhoda: What about in Novozybkov?

Nana Rose: No, there were religious people but no Hassids. (laughter) The face she makes!

Donna: What, you don't like them either?

Rhoda: Mixed emotions.

Donna: You never went to Warsaw, and you never went to Poland?

Nana Rose: I never went to Poland. The only big city I ever went to is Moscow.

Donna: But you don't think... I don't know, I just think it's funny, because I think Jews look differently from other people here. Even though everybody dresses the same, I could still if somebody's Jewish.

Nana Rose: Not always. A lot of Italians resemble Jews. A lot of Italians.

Rhoda: But there was so much intermarriage, like nana said: "This cousin married this cousin, and her brother married that cousin, it was a lot of intermarriage, it was the whole town! Especially in the small towns, you know, you didn't have too many choices as far as a Jewish mate was concerned.

Nana Rose: See Uncle (?Shmeloshe?) was married...

Rhoda: So where was the matchmaker from... Anatefka?

Nana Rose: Anatefka? In our town I don't know anybody who was a matchmaker...

Donna: There was no *shadkhan*.

Nana Rose: Not that I know of.

Rhoda: None of your friends were *shadkhan*, nobody, no cousins or anybody was *shadkhan*?

Nana Rose: No. True love!

Rhoda: I thought they didn't allow that.

Nana Rose: Even my father and mother were cousins. And my mother said, she was so in love, she says if she wouldn't marry my father she wouldn't get ever married. He must have been a good-looking guy when he was young.

Rhoda: Is that the only criteria for true love?

Nana Rose: No, but I mean rather that he was an educated man. And in Europe you look for *yichas*? You know what's *yichas*?

Donna: I don't.

Nana Rose: Well, tell her what's *yichas*.

Rhoda: Family background.

Donna: What does that mean?

Rhoda: Were they honorable people, were they orthodox people, were they honest and respected in the community? It was like your... status. The status that your family had. And if you had that kind of status, and you had *yichas*, and that was something that...

Nana Rose: Respect.

Rhoda: Yeah, and respect. Did the community respect you instead of laugh at you or poke fun at you or look down upon you or frown upon you or....

Nana Rose: I'll give you for instance. My Uncle Shmuel-Yoshe, your Uncle Shmuel-Yoshe married a lady from Rechitsa as I mentioned before. That was a *shadkhan* my father had a stepbrother, and he lived there, and he made the match. So they knew that in our town was this guy that used to steal horses, was the same first name as my father. So they came to investigate. That's not the right man. And then they liked the *shiddukh* and they made the match and they went there for the wedding. And they went on a sled. And they had in a box their shoes, In Europe shoes are family, and I didn't go and Uncle Nechemiah, Uncle Dave went and Aunt Eta. And they went to the wedding, and somebody there tore off or they lost the box of shoes. They came to the wedding, they didn't have any shoes! And in Europe to buy a pair of shoes was a fortune that day. So they were in trouble. Little things like that you remember.

Rhoda: Did you talk to your friends in Yiddish or did you talk to your friends in Russian?

Nana Rose: In Novozybkov we spoke Russian.

Donna: Really? All the time?

Nana Rose: Among our friends, at home we spoke Yiddish.

Donna: Why was that?

Nana Rose: With my parents we spoke Yiddish.

Donna: Why was it that you spoke Russian with your friends?

Nana Rose: Because from school we already more...how you say it? Secularized? Like here you're Jewish but you speak English. The same thing.

Rhoda: But she never learned how to speak Yiddish.

Nana Rose: You know how to speak Yiddish and you speak English.

Rhoda: It would be more if you said to me that when I was a kid I spoke English to my friends but... I didn't even talk Yiddish that much in the house, cause that's not... the language that was encouraged.

Nana Rose: Especially the kids of your kids, they've never heard much of Yiddish at all. Or any at all.

Donna: No, I heard some.

Nana Rose: Yeah? Where?

Donna: In your house, I heard it.

Nana Rose: Oh, in my house.

Donna: I heard it a lot.

(Recording Stops)

Side 2

Donna: When did you decide to come to the United States?

Nana Rose: Well, we always wanted to come to the United States because times were very bad, and in Russia, you couldn't do what you wanted to and you were always under pressure, and we wanted to go. But my parents were afraid to go, so I told them if they're not coming, then I'm not going. But then they didn't want me to remain there under the conditions were in, so they made up their minds that we were all going – my brothers and my sisters – and they sent us out visas...

Donna: From the United States?

Nana Rose: Right. We had to go to Moscow to approve it, and get other papers so they would let us out.

Donna: Ok, wait a second. So, why were things worse after the revolution than before the revolution?

Nana Rose: Because it was not a stable government.

Donna: So what happened that made things worse? Like, give me some examples of how things got worse. Was there no food? Or was there violence?

Nana Rose: There was not food. There was danger for the Jewish families. The Jews were always in danger. Whenever anything happened, the Jews were the first ones to pay the price. And that is what made up our minds to come here to seek our fortune.

Donna: But I thought the revolution was an improvement for Russia...

Nana Rose: It takes time to organize a revolution and a new government. It was a complete turnover, so it was not that easy to get organized. So, it wasn't right until they could get organized. And they are still not organized now in so many years.

Donna: So, were you happy? Did you think that a Communist government would be a good thing for Russia?

Nana Rose: We thought it would be better for Jews; we didn't talk about Russia. The Jewish families tried for their own good to have a little more freedom. A Jewish kid was not allowed to go to a higher school, they were not allowed to go to medicine schools... They had to be a certain grade-like, a certain degree. They used to call it in Russian: *Tera gilde* - третья гильдия (third guild), *vtoraya gilde* - вторая гильдия (second guild), and the big merchants were the first guild – and they were allowed to go.

Donna: You mean there were three types of Jews?

Nana Rose: That's right. And that was from the Russian government – that's how they handled it.

Donna: So, which kind were you?

Nana Rose: We were middle.

Donna: What's that called?

Nana Rose: *shtera gilde* - вторая гильдия (second guild)

Donna: And what was Papa Vick?

Nana Rose: I don't know, he was probably the same *gilde*, but we were not millionaires, they were not... poor people, I mean, we made a living, that's what the second...It's like a middle class person here.

Donna: But who would be the lower *gilde*, or that bottom one?

Nana Rose: Like the one that we were telling you – like stealing horses.

Donna: Do you think anyone in our family was in that one?

Nana Rose: Not that I know of

Donna: Was it something to be ashamed of?

Nana Rose: No...we didn't have in our family anyone we should be ashamed of.

Donna: But if somebody was...

Nana Rose: We were decent people, and they made a living in a nice, honest way.

Donna: If somebody was in that third *gilde*, um, would they be ashamed of that?

Nana Rose: Positively!

Donna: And what... can you change it?

Nana Rose: Even you wouldn't want to marry into a family like that, you don't... your own children, you wouldn't want your daughter to marry a young fellow from a family like that!

Donna: Mhm. And was that like on a passport or something, how did you know what category you were in?

Nana Rose: Well you knew the people in the town. Like for instance there is seven families in your own town, you know how they're living, who they are and what they are. In fact, we wouldn't associate with their children, we wouldn't have them as playmates...

Donna: So among the seven families you were divided into three categories?

Nana Rose: That's right.

Donna: And then what's the families that were in that high category?

Nana Rose: Well we were in the better class, that we were social, we were socializing with the better... it wasn't too many, it was one, two families so we were in that... but this family that's what she was so independent when she was invited to come to vote, because they were never invited to anything else.

Donna: I never heard anything about these three categories!

Nana Rose: That's right!

Donna: So um...

Nana Rose: Don't you have here? Like I'm not talking just about Jews, I'm talking general... there is a lower class, a first class, second class, and... and third class... but now it's not as much, you know?

Donna: Anybody can say they're anything, it's not like the government tells you "Well you're middle class, you're upper class."

Nana Rose: I know, but who do you associate with? Everybody sticks to their own class, right?

Donna: I suppose...

Nana Rose: But not here anymore, I think here it's..., now especially... now is a different way of life completely. People mix more...

Donna: Yeah. OK so you would say mainly... You think that... like when you were saying that in Novozipko when the Russian revolution came around that all the Jewish people were singing to Lenin and Trotsky like they were God, did they believe in socialism, or did they just...

Nana Rose: They were just hoping for better days!

Donna: Do you think that it was a disappointment?

Nana Rose: In certain ways it was a disappointment, because I didn't stay that long to see the difference.

Donna: So you decided to go to the United States. So then what did you do? So you got your visas... and then what happened?

Nana Rose: And then we got all our papers that was required to have for the trip, and we went to Riga. And from Riga...

Donna: How did you get to Riga?

Nana Rose: We went by train.

Donna: And what did you do with all of your belongings?

Nana Rose: Well Uncle Nechemiah was left there, so whatever we didn't need we... it was left for him, he was in our apartment.

Donna: How did you feel? Were you scared?

Nana Rose: Not scared, but nervous. You had to go through by boat, but I enjoyed it around the boat, but I enjoyed it. I figured I had nothing to lose, and I figured it would take me a while until I could get organized in the United States also: you have to look for education all over again, you haven't got your language, and you really feel very depressed.

Donna: So were you thinking that your personal life would be better in the United States, or, like, well, were you excited about going?

Nana Rose: Oh yes, I was excited.

Donna: You thought it would bring you new opportunities? What kind?

Nana Rose: I figured it's a better way... it's easier to make a living, you're not under pressure, you're not afraid so much, now here too many things that scare you, you know? But then it was something else, you came home, we used to walk with my friend, we used to walk all hours at night! We used to come home from a movie, the two of us, and we used to get involved in telling stories, and we couldn't finish it (she lived probably about ten, twelve blocks from where I lived) so we wouldn't finish the stories, she would walk me home, and then we still didn't finish the stories, so I would walk her home. And two, three o'clock in the morning or 12:00 we were never scared!

Donna: So you took the train to Riga, and then what happened?

Nana Rose: And then from Riga we took the boat. And from the boat we went to Ellis Island.

Donna: So what was it like on the boat?

Nana Rose: I had a lot of fun, we had a lot of people my age, and Aunt Chani went with her family, but she had her own five children, they were not babies anymore, I think Rayseh was about twelve years at the time. And, we made friends, we stayed for two weeks in a place with the same people, so you made your own friends, and we used to have a lot of fun.

Donna: Were they from all over, or were they all from your town?

Nana Rose: No, different towns, different places.

Donna: Like where?

Nana Rose: Like there was from Gomel, from Riga, from... you know like from all over Russia.

Donna: Were the people all from Russia and none from Poland?

Nana Rose: I, I don't remember... oh yea, from Poland too! Because one fellow we met and he was with our crowd all the time. He was a Polish fellow. And about ten years later I met him in a trolley car. The trolleys were leaving and rolling at the time.

Donna: You're kidding!

Nana Rose: Yes! So I met him and I recognized him, it was fun!

Donna: So what did you do on the boat? You just talked or...

Nana Rose: We talked, we sang, we carried on like young people! We discussed maybe some things, what our future may have been. So some people, you know, they were coming to their fathers, so they were full of hope, and everything will go easy, their way, and everything else. But I was coming from my brother, so I wasn't selfish and I never liked to take anything from anybody like you know, now. So I figured that I have to start on my own. And my parents were elderly people too, so I had to help them. So Uncle Nathan (Nechemiah) wanted me to go to a business school, and I should become a secretary or something like that in the office, but I knew that I had to help my parents, I couldn't look for luxury, that would be luxury for me already. So I went... one week here, and then I went to look for a Job. And I got a Job for \$8 a week. It wasn't far from where Aunt Molly and Aunt Ida used to live on Rockaway Avenue. I still remember it.

Donna: In Brooklyn?

Nana Rose: Yes. And I was working, I was very depressed, I had no friends, and I was really lonely, like, you know, anybody else would be in my position. So, and we had the foreman, he was a very nasty man. So if anything went wrong he used to holler at you, not try to be helpful in a nice way, so I was very sensitive. So once I broke the needle, I never worked on an electric machine, so I broke the needle and I start asking him to help me to fix the machine. So he gave me a rotten bawling out, fresh! And, I began to cry. So he says "look at her, she left the Bolsheviks here! So she came here, and she came to cry on our shoulders!"

Donna: So how long did you stay there?

Nana Rose: Where?

Donna: At this shop where you were working at.

Nana Rose: Well I worked there until I got more experienced, and then I left that place and I looked for another job. And already I could travel on my own, and I got a job on Larimer Street in downtown Brooklyn. And there I worked, there I had a nice boss and he was sympathetic and intelligent guy, so whenever he needed something, to help him out in the office or whatever, he used to call on me, like, giving me a treat. And then I worked there until I got married. Oh, we used to have slack, you know, we didn't have enough work. So I used to walk from Larimer Street to the house we lived on Osborn street that time. Probably around... a few blocks, I used to walk home and... and look again for jobs. And then we'd strike.

Donna: This was at the second place, you went on strike?

Nana Rose: Yeah, yeah.

Donna: What union?

Nana Rose: I don't remember, probably the Amalgamated.

Donna: So you went on strike? Did you belong to the union the whole time you worked there?

Nana Rose: Yea, well, the place was unionized, I couldn't do if I want it or I didn't want it.

Donna: Were you a steward?

Nana Rose: What do you mean by steward?

Donna: A person who represents the union.

Nana Rose: No, not me, I wasn't involved.

Donna: Did you go to union meetings?

Nana Rose: No. We had like one representative from our shop, and he was the one that used to go to the meetings and bring requests of the workers.

Donna: How many people were there in your shop?

Nana Rose: It was a big shop, it was seventy-five.

Donna: Really? And there was only one representative for the whole shop?

Nana Rose: Yes.

Donna: So then... when did you go on strike?

Nana Rose: What do you mean by when?

Donna: Well, what caused it?

Nana Rose: Well, the workers were not satisfied.

Donna: Did you want a raise? Did you want to change the...

Nana Rose: They wanted a raise, they wanted less hours.

Donna: How many hours did you work?

Nana Rose: We used to work from eight... to six.

Donna: Did you get any time off?

Nana Rose: Lunch. An hour...

Donna: You got an hour lunch... so that was like an eleven hour day... no, it was a ten hour day.

Nana Rose: The people before me, you know, they worked all hours! They used to carry the machines on their shoulders. It was great before the first foreigners used to come.

Donna: Why did they carry the machines on their shoulders?

Nana Rose: Because they had to have their own machines.

Donna: Ohh...

Nana Rose: And, um, I think Uncle Sam, I don't remember what he was doing, I think Uncle Sam was... not Uncle Sam, papa Sam used to...or that wasn't your... Papa Sam but men used to carry their machines from Brooklyn to New York if they had jobs in New York. It was not great to begin with...

Donna: So how long were you on strike?

Nana Rose: A few days we used to settle... sometimes they won, sometimes they didn't win.

Donna: Did you feel good about going out on strike?

Nana Rose: We weren't too excited about it, but if the union told you to go, you had to go.

Donna: Did you walk on the picket line with a sign?

Nana Rose: I did walk.

Donna: And you carried the sign?

Nana Rose: I don't remember if we all had signs, or a couple of them had signs, but we had to have signs.

Donna: So how many strikes did you participate in?

Nana Rose: Two I think. While I was working we had two strikes.

Donna: So was everybody in the shop Jewish or was it all different kinds of people?

Nana Rose: No, they had Jewish, they had Polish, they had uh... Italians. In front of me was working an Italian girl and she was so gorgeous. I just used to sit down and look at her. Every part of her face was just like a beautiful painting, unbelievable. She was so gorgeous.

Donna: What was her name?

Nana Rose: Maria I think.

Donna: So did you all socialize with one another, or did you only talk to the Jewish people?

Nana Rose: No, we socialized. I mean, socialized, we didn't go out to nightclubs together and whatever, but we were friendly there.

Donna: So, did you like your job?

Nana Rose: It's not really what I wanted for my future, but you had to make a living, you had to do it.

Donna: But didn't you think that the work that you were doing in Russia was in a way more interesting than the work you did in the United States?

Nana Rose: I wasn't in Russia, but (unintelligible) a job, you know, this is your job. And you could figure out if you do like it or you don't like it. But whatever I did, it was not really my bread and butter, what I planned to have in my lifetime, you know what I mean?

Donna: Well what did you plan?

Nana Rose: Because I didn't have time to plan then. Don't you see how many things I was doing just to survive? So you can't be choosy. It wasn't that you could go "I don't want to work here so I go to another place. Or if I don't want to be a teacher I could be something else." Then you really had no choice. Because you lived in a small place and you didn't have too many things to pick from. Is that clear enough?

Donna: Yeah, yeah that makes sense. So, when you got to the United States, you went to Ellis Island. Now, did the Russian government mind if you left? Did they try and keep you there?

Nana Rose: No.

Donna: They didn't care if you came or went?

Nana Rose: (unintelligible low muttering with a general negative connotation), over here they had a quota list, and we came in the last (?quarter? or ?quota?).

Donna: How did you make it?

Nana Rose: If we didn't make that list... we were just lucky! The last quota... if we didn't make it we would have to go back! And then Chani said she's not going back. With five children, to get organized again! She said she's not going, she's going to jump in the river.

Donna: Really?

Nana Rose: She really meant it, she was very depressed.

Donna: Were you worried that you might get sent back when you got there?

Nana Rose: It's not that you... The (unintelligible), the ship does not take any more people. They were not sent back they just...

Donna: Oh, so when you got to Riga you had to make sure that they would let you on the boat. And that's where they made the decision, whether you could go or not.

Nana Rose: Exactly, right.

Donna: So you were nervous when you were travelling from Novozybkov to Riga that you might not make the quota. But you did make it.

Nana Rose: Yea

Donna: And then you went right to Brooklyn, so you never lived, like, in New York?

Nana Rose: No. That was my place when I came to, and that's where I remained.

Donna: So where did you live when you first got to Ellis Island? Did somebody come meet you at the boat?

Nana Rose: Aunt Ida came, and Uncle Dave and Aunt Donnie came to pick us up. They had to have some representative to take us off the boat.

Donna: Really?

Nana Rose: Oh sure, you can't just get off and go whenever you want.

Donna: So how did they know that the boat even got there? You didn't have telephones, did you?

Nana Rose: It was not telephones but they give you the time.

Donna: Oh, so you wrote them a letter before you left Riga?

Nana Rose: Yes, Right. Maybe they could read in papers here I don't know then how it was. Now for instance here if you want to find out about a boat or a plane, you know where to call up or find out, that the plane or the boat is coming in at that hour, but probably they had some kind of information then, too.

Donna: When the boat got there, were they waiting right there or... they were there the minute you got off?

Nana Rose: Yes! It was funny. I'll never forget that when they take us in Ellis Island, we're not supposed to get off, we got to wait until our names were called, and our relatives would meet us on the deck or whatever, so... Aunt Donnie or Uncle Dave... no, it must be Aunt Donnie, and I thought that she was somebody from my family. Without thinking, without asking, I jump up and I go! And a black man, he probably was... six feet, and he took me down like a little... like a cat takes a little kitten, and he put me back in my seat and I had to sit till my time came. And when I was told.

Donna: Were you afraid that they wouldn't be there?

Nana Rose: I don't even know... you're nervous in general, you know...

Donna: Well Aunt Chani hadn't seen her husband for a long time, right?

Nana Rose: Ten years.

Donna: Was she afraid that he wouldn't be there?

Nana Rose: Oh, she must have hoped! Well I mean his children!

Donna: I know but didn't some husbands desert their wives in that situation?

Nana Rose: But they didn't ask for them to come.

Donna: Oh. So what did it feel like when you got to this strange country, what did it look like?

Nana Rose: Strange!

Donna: (laughs) And what did it make you think of? What kinds of thoughts were going through your head?

Nana Rose: They were much richer than we lived.

Donna: The minute you got off the boat you could tell?

Nana Rose: You could see, sure!

Donna: How?

Nana Rose: Uncle Dave took us into his apartment, he lived at the time on Alabama Avenue, he had a five, a six-room apartment, two of them, and he was... comfortably fixed. And I thought that he was doing very well. You know, you could see how things are Donna.

Donna: Mhm

Nana Rose: And Aunt Ida had a grocery store, she worked very hard. And just happened when we came, it was just after a fire, they had a fire in the grocery. So papa, my father used to help them out and fix things over and put labels on different cans of salmon and things like that. But, otherwise, they worked very hard for.

Donna: Aunt Ida did?

Nana Rose: Aunt Ida with Uncle Nathan. They were very hardworking. They used to keep the grocery open practically 24 hours.

Donna: Really?

Nana Rose: Six o'clock in the morning they were in the grocery already.

Donna: Till what time?

Nana Rose: Till ten, twelve, who cares?

Donna: And they just sat there all the time?

Nana Rose: They sat there, behind the counter, and people came in and they didn't come in. There was a lot of competition. So everybody was watching for their own piece of bread and butter.

Donna: So where were their kids, if they were in the store?

Nana Rose: Aunt Ida had one child. She had one son, and then that son died. And she couldn't conceive for a long time. And then Arthur came, when we came out there he was about two and a half years old. So they leave him at the store. He was in the store, it's not like now, you having maids and things to take care of... No matter how hard they worked they didn't make so much money. A lot of people used to take and never pay. They used to take and... a lot of people were working men. So, for instance they would get rye

bread and (unintelligible) for it. So they would come in and pay the grocery men. Many of them never came to pay. So Aunt Ida and Uncle Nathan moved to Washington. They had a set like that... of people who had not paid. So one time she sent me to a man, to a family, to ask them to pay their... order, whatever they owed her.

Donna: How old were you then?

Nana Rose: Twenty-two. They almost throw me off the steps. They didn't want to pay. So I never went again, I was so scared, I ran faster than I could.

Donna: So everybody in our family had their own businesses, right?

Nana Rose: Well Uncle Dave was in the installment business, he used to give out stuff, and they would pay monthly or weekly or whatever. And Uncle Bereh had a laundry with Archie's father. And Uncle Bereh was partners with Uncle Moshe-Feivel at that time. In the laundry. That's it!

Donna: So how old were you when you came to the United States?

Nana Rose: Twenty-one, Twenty.

Donna: I thought you were younger than that!

Nana Rose: That is on the passport. Don't ask no questions anymore. How they say, I'm going to be incriminated!

Donna: Oh, it was younger on the passport! On the passport it said you were how old?

Nana Rose: Donna, I'm not talking anymore.

Donna: You're still afraid?!

Nana Rose: No, I'm not talking about that.

Donna: Well, why was it that you would have to worry about something like that?

Nana Rose: Because it was half-price if you're a certain age.

Donna: Only just because of half-price, but not because of the quota.

Nana Rose: No... well if I was the older I would have to be on my own passport, I wouldn't be able to go with my parents. That's how Uncle Nechemiah was left in Russia.

Donna: What would you have to do? Why was he left?

Nana Rose: Because he was married already, and he had his own family. And they couldn't take him over.

Donna: So when did he come?

Nana Rose: He came six months later.

Donna: So how come they could take him then, but they couldn't take him at that time?

Nana Rose: Don't ask me these rules, I wouldn't tell you, I wouldn't know. He came when Vicky was about six months old.

Donna: So did anybody in your family end up staying?

Nana Rose: My sister and my brother.

Donna: What were their names?

Nana Rose: Shmuel-Yosha and Etta.

Donna: (interrupting) Oh ok. And why did they stay?

Nana Rose: Because... I don't even know. But my sister I don't think wanted to come, and my brother didn't want to come. And my brother also he was established already, he didn't want to come.

Donna: What did he do?

Nana Rose: He... They had a bakery. They baked their own bread.

Donna: Mhm. In Novozybkov?

Nana Rose: No, they lived in Речица (Rechitsa). That's about sixty miles from Novozybkov.

Donna: And where did Etta live?

Nana Rose: Etta lived in... I can't remember the name of the town... Honestly.

Donna: Did you feel sad leaving though?

Nana Rose: Sure, Etta came to see us before we went away. But the brother I didn't see. I think he went to visit us about two years before. He lost a son and a son-in-law in the war.

Donna: Which war?

Nana Rose: (Very low)(?Well the second one, when we weren't there already?)

Donna: So, what happened to them?

Nana Rose: No, my brother died, my sister is (?at home?).

Donna: She's alive?

Nana Rose: And her husband was killed.

Donna: Killed when?

Nana Rose: I don't remember exactly the year...but not so long after we left. They took him away, he was an office worker, a white collar man, and they took him away and she never knew for what and when, and they just told her to come and take the body.

Donna: And you have no idea why they did that? None at all? Who did it, the government?

Nana Rose: Bolsheviks. Yes, he was such a nice guy.

Donna: So did she marry again?

Nana Rose: Never.

Donna: And she didn't want to come to the United States?

Nana Rose: She didn't want to leave the children.

Donna: Oh, they had children.

Nana Rose: Sure. They had I think four children.

Donna: So is she still alive?

Nana Rose: No, she died. She died the year... because I wrote to her daughter, I was corresponding with her daughter and... she died, I think a couple years before (?Daddy?). We were planning to go, to visit them, Daddy had a sister in Moscow she's alive. And when Daddy retired, so he had all the plans set out to visit. So the week that he wasn't feeling so good, Uncle Dave came to visit with him. And he had all the papers ready that would be required to find out about going to Russia then. So he gave it to Dave and he said "Go and find out all the information and we'll go to visit into Russia, our family." He never lived to go.

Donna: Oh I didn't know you were planning to go to Russia.

Nana Rose: Sure! Daddy was very anxious to go.

Donna: Oh. So you got to the United States, but you never lived on the Lower East Side?

Nana Rose: Never.

Donna: Did you know people who did?

Nana Rose: I don't know if I knew then, but now I know I know my friend Martha lives on the East Side. And there's a lot of people in this building that lived on the East Side, and were born on the East Side. What, does this make any difference?

Donna: Well just because when you read in the books, or all the movies about Jewish immigrants coming to the United States, and they all lived on the East Side, you know, that kind of a thing, so it's just you think "Oh, well everybody did that," but it's not true, people did different things.

Nana Rose: No, no when Papa moved, they came to Yonkers, because his family was in Yonkers. But they were friends with my brother. And they used to come, they used to socialize together, used to make dinners. They didn't go to Opera in those days or things like that, but I mean they used to come visit each other and go to dinners, and be friendly.

Donna: So you worked in the garment industry?

Nana Rose: Right.

Donna: For how many years?

Nana Rose: Six years, 'till I was married.

Donna: And so during that time, what else did you do? Did you take classes, or...

Nana Rose: I went to night school.

Donna: The whole six years?

Nana Rose: Not the whole six years. 'Till I finished.

Donna: How many years was it?

Nana Rose: Four years, I think.

Donna: And you got a high school diploma?

Nana Rose: Not high school, I only finished public school. But they had, they didn't have public school, they had higher education in the... It's special courses for adults. So they had not only like for babies, you know, we would learn different things like, for adults.

Donna: What would you learn? What did you learn in night school?

Nana Rose: Well we didn't learn geography or things like that, but we mainly specialized to learn the language. Read, write, and arithmetic we learned.

Donna: Was everyone in the class Jewish? Or were they all different people?

Nana Rose: I don't remember anyone being non-Jewish.

Donna: So it was a special night school just for Jewish immigrants?

Nana Rose: I don't think it was special but there was no immigrants Russian at the time, I suppose.

Donna: But like you said, there were a lot of Italian and Polish people that you worked with. Did they speak English?

Nana Rose: Brooklyn, or Brownsville they used to call it, was ninety-nine percent and three quarters Jewish. So that's why in the night school you had only Jewish people.

Donna: Well then how come there were different people at your job?

Nana Rose: Because that part of Brooklyn. They had like neighborhoods. I don't know how to place it...

Donna: There was other neighborhoods close by?

Nana Rose: Neighborhoods! For different, like German neighborhoods or Italian neighborhoods, and in Brooklyn you wouldn't find a gentile if you need one.

Donna: In Brownsville?

Nana Rose: Brownsville, yea.

Donna: Oh, I see. So did you like going to night school?

Nana Rose: Yes, it was a lot of fun, it was all our kind! So we were socializing, we made friends that way, we belonged to a club...

Donna: What club?

Nana Rose: I don't remember the name. It was all immigrants, and we used to meet there second evenings on weekends when you had time off. And like all your younger people, we used to socialize.

Donna: Were you religious?

Nana Rose: Yes, in the beginning I was religious. I was not orthodox like Donny, but I'm telling you, because my parents were very orthodox.

Donna: So what customs did you follow as an orthodox Jewish woman?

Nana Rose: We didn't ride on Saturday, we didn't... what else could we do? We didn't eat *treife*...

Donna: Did you cover your arms, so you didn't wear short sleeves?

Nana Rose: No. We didn't have to be like, it would... Even when we went to Arnie's wedding, I'll never forget that he kept on telling us that wouldn't fit into the whole thing. But I'm jumping in. Arnie told us before he was married that we should tie or wear long sleeves, and we shouldn't have exposed our chest... And then we come to the wedding, one of his sister-in-laws from Shoshanna's side, was wearing a sleeveless dress with one string. We thought we're going to do something for him. And we knocked ourselves out, we bought the dresses, and then we went to the dressmaker and she was supposed put in things to cover our chest, to make sure that we bought dresses with long sleeves...

Donna: But you didn't follow that yourself?

Nana Rose: No, not exactly.

Donna: Did you go to *shul* on Saturday?

Nana Rose: No. High holidays we used to go.

Donna: Did you celebrate the major holidays? Like did you build a *sukkah* on Sukkot?

Nana Rose: My father did.

Donna: Where?

Nana Rose: In the back of the house, we used to have a *sukkah*.

Donna: Did he build it with other people who lived in the building, or just him?

Nana Rose: The others didn't want to, he did it on his own. And we used to decorate it with all kind of trimmings, make our own, like from all different colored papers, like birds, and then, blow out eggs and stick in different colored papers, and the wind would

blow it and it would be so colorful. I used to love to eat in the *sukkah* with my father. I was the main thing. We used to... I can remember those evenings -- it looked beautiful.

Donna: And the other people from the building didn't eat in there?

Nana Rose: Nah. There wasn't too many Orthodox like my father.

Donna: So you were the most religious ones!

Nana Rose: Among those people... My father was, I wouldn't consider myself that religious.

Donna: Was your mother?

Nana Rose: My mother too. Sure...

Donna: So what did your parents do for a living when they got here?

Nana Rose: They didn't do anything. Except my father got himself a little job. A wet wash laundry.

Donna: And how long did he do that?

Nana Rose: Until he couldn't do it.

Donna: For how many years?

Nana Rose: Maybe... five years, I don't remember that too.

Donna: So all the children supported them?

Nana Rose: And then we all chipped in, we supported them.

Donna: And they had their own apartment?

Nana Rose: Before I was married I lived with my parents.

Donna: But they could pay the rent and everything and buy the food with all of your brothers and sisters chipping in?

Nana Rose: Yeah.

Donna: They must have given them a lot of money.

Nana Rose: But those days it wasn't that expensive. It was a nickel a pound of bread, and a quarter a pound of meat.

Donna: So then, did you have political views, like did you believe in socialism, were you involved in any of the parties?

Nana Rose: I was not involved in politics.

Donna: Were a lot of other people around you?

Nana Rose: Not that I know of.

Donna: Cause you always read in the books, like in the twenties and thirties, that the Jewish people were so politically active and they were all socialists and belonged to all these different meetings...

Nana Rose: My brother Bereh was a socialist, and he had friends, I suppose, the same kind. But I was never mixed in politics...

Donna: And the people at night school?

Nana Rose: Excuse me (unintelligible)

Donna: Oh, OK.

(Recording stopped, continued at later point in time)

(The rest of this side of the tape is a recording of a conversation of no relevance to the Oral History)

Transcribed by Greg Malkov 11/23/2008- 1/8/2009

Dates: Rose Silbert Rifkin was born on Erev Shuvos, 1902. Rose Silbert Rifkin immigrated to the United States via New York City in 1923. Victor Rifkin was born on April 4, 1893 (date made up by Rhoda and Doris). Victor Rifkin immigrated to the United States via New York City on ?

Google Maps link:

<http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?ie=UTF8&hl=en&msa=0&msid=100581774263503340357.00045e0a594f0668cc22e&z=9>

Transcribed by Greg Malkov 11/23/2008- 1/8/2009

Comments

Mira Kaufman, Harvard School of Public Health work colleague, relatively recent Russian Jewish immigrant to U.S.:

1/19/2009

Hi Donna,

I enjoyed reading your grandma's story. You were so right to tape a conversation with her. I bet you have more questions to ask her now.

Your grandma went through much hardship. She was not just smart, but "street smart" in order to survive, and also focused on creating a better future for herself. I assume that her life in America was much better.

I think that Greg did a great job.

Thank you for sharing your grandma's story.

- Mira

Transcription - Google Maps - Windows Internet Explorer

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Probable residence of Rose's brother's family
- [Новозыбков \(Novozybkov\)](#)
Probable point of departure of Rose's family's trip to tr
- [Russian Federation, Province of Bryansk](#)
Деревня Селец (Selets Village. Probable birthplace o
- [Сураж \(Surazh\)](#)
Rose's aunt (her father's sister) moved here from Sele
- [Смяльч \(Smyalch\)](#)
Папа Vick's family lived here.

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