

July 21, 1948  
July 19, 1948

M, 53, married, Berezina, White Russia, Traditional Jewish education.  
In United States 35 years.

1 The informant lived in a small town called Berezina until he was  
2 eleven years old. There were approximately six Jewish families  
3 and 100 gentiles families in Berezina. When he was eleven his  
4 father and older sister left for America and the rest of the  
5 family moved to a larger village called Baravina. In Baravina,  
6 there were about 30 Jewish families and 100 Gentile ones. Both  
7 towns are in Minsker Gubernia, White Russia. ~~XXXX~~ The informant  
8 speaks English, but the interview was recorded completely in  
9 Yiddish because that is the language he uses everyday and finds  
10 it easier. (NC)

11 NC: Do you remember your home in Berezina ?

12 " Of course I remember. I think I remember things from back home  
13 in my childhood ~~thnx~~ better than when I became older. We lived  
14 in a large log house which belonged to my grandfather originally.  
15 At one time he was a very wealthy man. He owned and operated a  
16 flour mill. The house consisted of one large room and a "forhoise  
17 --an ante-chamber. (note Inf. #1 Int. #2 p.3; line 8.NC).

18 NC: What was kept in the "Forhoise " ?

19 "In the "forhoise" we kept everything.....cream, milk, butter,  
20 flour and all our other provisions.

21 NC: Did anybody ever sleep in the "forhoise" ?

22 "No, nobody ever slept there. It was simply a place to keep our  
23 supplies."

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1 "On one side of the forhoise was the yard. Behind the forhoise  
2 there was a barn where we kept the two cows, and behind this barn,  
3 was our garden. On the other side of the forhoise was a garden  
4 which belonged to somebody else."

5 At this point, the informant decided to draw a picture of the  
6 house to show me ~~in~~ exactly where everything stood and where every-  
7 one slept. NC

8 The stove occupied one large corner of the main room. From the  
9 stove to the opposite wall was a partition, ~~making~~ dividing  
10 the room into a bedroom and a room for eating and just sitting  
11 around.

12 Bedroom :

13 There were three beds in the Bedroom. On the bed near the stove  
14 slept my eldest sister F. and my sister H. Later, when my sister  
15 F. left for America and the youngest sister G. was no longer a  
16 baby, H. slept with G.

17 On the wall opposite the partition stood my mother's bed. She  
18 usually slept with the baby of the family. And there was always  
19 a baby because mother had a child every three years."

20 NC: Did mother sleep in the same bed with the baby ?

21 " No, certainly not ! There was a crib or as we say a "vigolsh"  
22 suspended from the ceiling by rope and the baby slept there. But  
23 this crib usually hung very close to mother's bed.

24 ~~mother's~~ Father's bed stood against the third wall, opposite the  
25 stove. I slept with father because I was the oldest son."

1 NC: What happened when father and mother wanted to sleep together?

2 " Frankly, I never ~~intimately~~ saw my father and my mother in one  
3 bed in Europe. I suppose they slept together when we were asleep.  
4 But when I became a little older, I think I was about ~~around~~ 7 or  
5 8, I was moved to another room, the main room, where I slept on  
6 the "canape" (a couch without upholstery) . Of course as a child  
7 I was very anxious to sleep on the "canape" alone, but now I  
8 realize that I was moved there simply because I was becoming  
9 a little older and I might understand what was going on between  
10 my parents. But, I never saw them together."

11 NC: I understand your sister F. is about 5 years older than you.  
12 Why wasn't she moved out of the main bedroom?

13 "The main reason for that was because F. left for America when she  
14 was quite young. At least I think so. At any rate, she wasn't  
15 moved out of the main bedroom."

16 NC: What else was in the bedroom?

17 "There was an open closet between mother's bed and the girls' bed.  
18 We hung our clothes there. It was a large closet and everybody  
19 kept their clothes in it. The Sabbath clothes were hung on top  
20 and the clothes we wore all week hung ~~under~~ at the bottom."

21 NC: Did the men and women hang their clothes in the same closet?

22 "Certainly. There are no laws against that. The only separation  
23 in the closet was between Sabbath clothes and everyday clothes.



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1 There was also a small kerosene lamp which hung on the wall  
2 and could easily be moved from one room to the other. There was  
3 nothing else in the room.

4 Main room:

5 There was a door beside the stove which led out to the "forheise"  
6 (anto-chamber). Beside this door was a bench where my mother worked  
7 There she did her cooking and kept some of the pots and pans etc.  
8 This bench was the "milchikeh" bench. That is, all the dairy  
9 dishes were kept there and when we ate dairy we ate on that ~~xxx~~  
10 bench. On the next wall there was another bench which was  
11 for "flaishike" i.e. meat dishes. On the third wall was the  
12 "canape" (unupholstered couch) on which I slept. Beside that was  
13 a bureau where we kept our fancy things such as silver, good  
14 linens, money and some very very good clothes. The rest of the  
15 room was ~~xxxx~~ empty except for a large kerosene lamp which  
16 hung from the ceiling near my "canape". If mother or somebody  
17 else had to work in another part of the room, they took the  
18 hanging kerosene lamp from the bedroom."

19 Q: Where did you play, sit around to talk or study?

20 "Everything was done in the main room. It was a very large room  
21 and you could sit on the benches, the "canape" or the stove. But  
22 there was absolutely no privacy because everybody sat in that  
23 one room."

24 "All around the house was a large yard, but the back of the house  
25 faced the road. So when you came in from the road you had to go

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1 right through the yard to the "ferhoize" in order to get into  
2 the main house. All around the house was a "pribezh" a sort of  
3 box which was several feet high and was filled with sand. We used  
4 it like a porch in the summer and in the winter it prevented  
5 the cold from coming in. That was the whole house."

6 Q: Why did you move to Baravina if you owned the house you lived  
7 in in Berezina?

8 " We moved because of us. You see my father's mill burned down  
9 so in 1904 or 1903, he left for America. My sister F. was already  
10 in America. My father was going to settle himself at some kind of  
11 work in America and then we were to join him. He was gone seven  
12 years. And all that time he worked here and sent us money.  
13 Meanwhile, I was going to Cheder. Our Shtetl was small and the  
14 teachers were old and not of the highest quality. But I was  
15 apparently a very bright boy and advanced very quickly in my  
16 studies. So the family began to urge my mother to send me to  
17 Baravina where there were better and more modern teachers. They  
18 were afraid that the ~~same~~ teachers in Berezina would spoil  
19 my head. After a good deal of urging, mother took me to Baravina  
20 to some good teachers and left me there to live with my aunt,  
21 her sister. I was eight or nine years old then and Baravina was  
22 only 3 miles from Berezina. But I was terribly lonesome for my  
23 mother. I was so lonesome that I thought I'd die. And my mother  
24 was very lonesome for me too. I kept running away to see my  
25 mother. And it wasn't because my aunt was bad to me. He was

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1 very good to me. But I was lonesome and I used to cry. Finally, it  
2 reached the stage where I absolutely refused to leave my mother. So  
3 mother packed up her belongings, sold the house and the whole  
4 family moved to Bravina. In America, such a thing would never  
5 happen."

6 NC: Why?

7 "In America they just wouldn't send a child away. For instance, it  
8 wasn't that I didn't want to study, I was just lonesome. So my  
9 mother disrupted her whole household in Berezhina and moved. In  
10 America, studying isn't as important. Whereas in Europe, Torah came  
11 before anything else."

12 NC: Where did you live in Bravina?

13 Mother rented a house. It was larger and nicer than the house we had  
14 in Berezhina, and there was a little more privacy. "

15 Here again the informant made a drawing of the house. NC.

16 " Like the other house, you had to pass through a "forheise" ( ante-  
17 chamber) in order to get into the rest of the house. The "forheise"  
18 led in to a kitchen which was blocked off from the rest of the house.  
19 That is, it was a separate room. There we had a stove, the two  
20 benches, one for meat dishes and the other for dairy, and also a  
21 table on which we ate. ~~Now~~ In the kitchen there was a door which  
22 led into two rooms. One was a "forent-tainer" or a front room and  
23 the other was a bed-room. In the "forent-tainer" stood my "cansape"  
24 (couch) and a table which was used only for special occasions like  
25 Sabbath meals, holidays, when we had guests etc. That's all that



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1 stood in that room. In the bedroom, there were two beds. My mother  
2 slept on one, and the baby's crib hung near it. The two girls, G. & H.  
3 slept on the other bed. ~~Against~~ Against the third wall was a small  
4 stove called a "ohrubeh" which was used in the winter to warm up the  
5 room. As I explained before, my father had by that time left for  
6 America, so there was no need for a bed for him. The same two  
7 bureaus we had in the other house were taken to this one. The bureau  
8 with the fancy stuff was kept in the "foront-tzimer" near my "canape"  
9 and the other closet was in the bedroom, like before. As you can  
10 see for yourself, there was a good deal more room in this house and  
11 also more privacy.

12 We had a yard all around the house, a gate that led into the yard  
13 from the road, and behind the "forhoise" there was a ~~what~~ "ehtel"  
14 (stable) where we kept the two cows.

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July 26, 1948

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July 23, 1948

1. 53, married, Berezina, White Russia. Traditional Jewish Education.  
in United States, 35 years.

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1 This is the second interview with informant #17. Previously he had  
2 told me all about his two homes in White Russia. This time he was  
3 going to tell me about his ~~relationship~~ family. The informant  
4 was rather anxious to talk and tell me all about everything. And he  
5 tried to make sure that I got every word he said down on paper.

6 NC: Were you closer to your mother or your father?

7 I was always closer to my mother than to my father. You must remember  
8 when I was a child, my father left for America and I didn't see him for  
9 over seven years. My mother in general was a much warmer person, she  
10 was "gaistik", she had a soul. I can't really put the feeling into  
11 words. When my mother told a story it was with every little detail.  
12 She could never just say 'it snowed outside'. No, she had to describe  
13 the shape, colour, kind and sort of snow that fell. My mother came  
14 from a family where there were six generations of famous Rabbis...  
15 one more famous than the other. You surely heard of the B. family?  
16 The seventh generation, who was my maternal grandfather, ~~stungat~~  
17 didn't want to make a living from being a Rabbi. He was a great  
18 Talmudist and although he wanted very much to be a Rabbi, he felt  
19 that it wasn't right for him to earn his living from that. One had  
20 to earn a living by working. So he rented a mill so that he could  
21 support himself and his family "by his own hands". He was still a  
22 Rabbi, and he gave advice to Jews and Goyim alike. But he never took  
23 any money for this. This grandfather became my model in life.  
24 According to the way they talked about him, he worked all day in the  
25 mill or in his garden, and then studied until 3 A.M. I tried to follow



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1 his pattern of life as much as possible when I grew older. For  
2 example, I could never write anything when I had money in my pocket.  
3 (NC: Informant is a writer). All the money I earned from any other  
4 work I did, I gave away. (Informant's wife who was working in the  
5 kitchen acknowledged this adding "he never had a decent suit until  
6 I married him").

7 NC: What was the point of giving away the money you earned yourself?  
8 "I had no use for it, whereas others really needed it. You see after  
9 I was married, and had several children and a wife to support, I  
10 could no longer do that. Then I needed the money myself. But as long  
11 as I had no use for it...why shouldn't others have it? Others who  
12 didn't earn as much, or who were hit by the depression and ~~financial~~  
13 the war. (Pause)

14 So you see, I was closer to my mother, but I was very close to my  
15 father's family as well. We all lived in one section of the country.  
16 Some in the same village and others in villages three or four miles  
17 away. And because we lived so close to each other, it is difficult  
18 to say to which ones I was closer. And with regards to being loved  
19 by them, there was no doubt about that. They all loved me. They had  
20 to love me and be good to me."

21 NC: I don't understand why they had to love you and be good to you?  
22 Were you different than any other member of the family?

23 "Yes, I was. I was a "gebentshter fun got" (blessed by God). You  
24 see, after my mother had my oldest sister F. she lost three children.

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1. Two girls and a boy. She was sure that she had sinned, had done  
2 something wrong and that it was God who was punishing her by stealing  
3 her children. So when she became pregnant with me, she sent my  
4 father to a Rabbi to find out what to do in order not to lose me  
5 as well. First, my father wasn't allowed to name me after a dead  
6 person. When I would be born and they would have to name me, he  
7 should go to shul that Saturday and the first name he hears from the  
8 bible, that's the name I should be given. Then I must not wear any  
9 bought clothes for six years."

10 HC: Why?

11 For a Jew to wear clothes made out of wool mixed with linen is a  
12 crime. And when clothes are bought ready made, this happens very  
13 often. I had to wear pure linen clothes and everything had to be  
14 made by hand and my mother had to supervise the whole transaction.  
15 The linen had to be bought separately and be spun at home. Then a  
16 woman came to the house and sewed all the clothes herself, with a  
17 special kind of thread. Then, I wasn't allowed to scream, cry,  
18 climb trees, pick berries, tell a lie. In short I wasn't allowed to  
19 do anything. And because of this, they spared the life out of me.  
20 But it worked both ways. Nobody was permitted to scream at me, to  
21 hurt me, or to say anything bad to me...because I was "blessed by  
22 God". That's why the love of my family, aunts, uncles, cousins etc  
23 towards me was very intense...or at least it appeared to be so.  
24 If somebody should say something bad to me they would always yell:  
25 "Vai is meer, zacht sich treuen. Er is a gebentechter fun Got"  
26 (Woe is me, you are looking for troubles. He is blessed by God).

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1 They were afraid to do or say anything bad against me. And a strange  
2 thing; I am not a religious nor a superstitious person but it  
3 never happened that if somebody should hurt me, they should not be  
4 punished afterwards. They "chap a finsteren sof" (catch a dark end)  
5 There is something in it...something mystical. Can you believe such  
6 a thing ? "

7 NC: Do you believe it ?

8 " Yes, I believe in it (informant hesitates...it appeared as if he  
9 didn't want to commit himself).

10 NC: Why do you believe it ?

11 I can't say why. It's in my subconscious mind. But it has never  
12 failed to happen."

13 NC: Whom would you go to when you needed advice about something ?

14 "The only person I would ever go to if I needed advice would be to  
15 my oldest sister F. who really brought me up. But it never happened  
16 In Europe, you don't ask advice and you don't discuss your personal  
17 life with anybody. To elders, whether they are relatives or not, you  
18 show respect...you don't sit when they are standing, you don't answer  
19 back etc. To people your own age, you act naturally."

20 NC: What is acting naturally, and whom do you include in that  
21 category ?

22 "By acting naturally, I mean, you play with them, you sit and talk  
23 to them, and you just don't pay them the respects you would pay a  
24 person who is older than you. They are your friends, your playmates,  
25 you play ball with them, you read with them etc. In this category,



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1 I would include all my cousins who were my age or a little younger  
2 or older, and the other children in the village with whom I was  
3 friends."

4 Where would you put your sister F.? The one who brought me up ? NC

5 " My sister was different. She was about 6 years older than I. Then  
6 she really brought me up, she was a mother to me. But, she was  
7 also a friend. I could never talk ~~xxx~~ to her or ask for advice,  
8 because it just was not done."

9 NC: Which of your aunts did you like best ?

10 Well, I liked my mother's sister very much. But I also liked my  
11 father's sister. I can't really say. "

12 ( The informant appeared rather uneasy whenever I asked him to speak  
13 his relationship with other members of the family. Somehow, I could  
14 never get a definite answer from him.)

15 NC: Did any cousins in your family marry ?

16 "Yes. It happened only once."

17 NC : Was there any reaction from your family ?

18 "No. It is perfectly alright according to Jewish law to marry a first  
19 cousin."

20 NC: Did they marry because they fell in love ?

21 "Well, yes and no. They were in love, but I think the main reason for  
22 it was because the girl was no longer young and they were afraid to  
23 have an Old Maid in the family. It's quite a shame for the whole

July 25, 1948

1 family, not only the immediate family. But of course, everybody  
2 said they married for love."

3 NC: How old was the girl?

4 "Oh, I imagine about 23 or 24. And at that time, she was an Old Maid.

5 NC: Was there any feeling in the family that if two cousins married  
6 the children might be born abnormal?

7 "No, I don't think so. If it was permitted in the Bible, then there  
8 should be no reason for abnormality. The only reason for that is  
9 sin. If one of them should do something bad, then the children might  
10 be born sick, abnormal, or dead etc. But otherwise, I don't think  
11 that was feared."

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M, 53, Married, Berezina, White Russia, Traditional Jewish Education.  
In the United States thirty five years.

1 I had interviewed informant no. #17 twice previously. I went over  
2 to his home to make an appointment with him for a formal interview.  
3 He was surprised that I was still working at the same thing and was  
4 very pleased to arrange another interview with me. That day was  
5 inconvenient for him as he had a previous appointment, but he  
6 agreed to meet me again. However, I did spend a while speaking to  
7 him about the Shtetl in general. And he repeated a story to me,  
8 one which he had told me several times, but which was never  
9 recorded, which occurred in his shtetl, Berezina.

10 Informant #17 : This what I am going to tell you, could only happen  
11 in a Jewish community. Only Jews can act like that, can take an  
12 interest in everyone. So now you want to know the story ha ?  
13 It's like this. Picture for yourself, if you can, a small shtetl  
14 with a market place in the middle. There are little stands and ~~sh~~  
15 shacks all around the place with people selling all sorts of things  
16 to eat, to wear and to use. Peasants from all around come to bring  
17 their stuff to sell.

18 We boys used to love to roam around the mark (market) on those days  
19 when there was so much going on. There was a little boy my age  
20 who lived in the shtetl. He was an orphan. ~~12~~  
21 (?) Were both parents dead ?

22 Inf. #17 : No, just his father was dead and his mother wasn't a ~~strong~~  
23 strong woman and she couldn't take care of him very well. They ~~was~~



1 were very poor and I remember how that boy used to walk around in  
2 those cold winter nights with torn boots. So he comes to the  
3 market ~~market~~ on one of these busy days and he goes over to one  
4 of the stands where a man is selling these heavy boots that we  
5 used to wear in the shtetl. They were called Shtivel. The man  
6 has a small shack which he calls a Kreml (store) and he has dozens  
7 of boots hanging from the wall and over the door way. So the  
8 orphan stole a pair of boots. All of a sudden the storekeeper  
9 rushes out of the store into the market and starts yelling "A ganev  
10 a ganev" ( a crook, a crook). And people start rushing from all  
11 sides and the policeman comes and naturally they find the orphan  
12 boy who stole the pair of shoes, and the boy doesn't deny it. They  
13 return the pair of boots and the policeman is ready to take the boy  
14 to jail. All the Jews stand around and the women weep and cry  
15 " what are we going to do, how can we let the police take away a  
16 Jewish boy. They'll make a Goy out of him yet. And he is an  
17 orphan, what will happen to his mother ? We have to do something  
18 about it. and so on". So one " Fetei mark Yideneh" (Fat market  
19 woman) who is ~~market~~ selling ~~market~~ some sort of bagel, picks up  
20 one of her dozen skirts ( you know, they wore two or three skirts,  
21 one on top of the other to keep warm.) And the money was kept in  
22 a pocket sewn into the last skirt so nobody should steal it. She  
23 takes out some money and offers it to the storekeeper and soon  
24 a collection is taken up and about \$2.00 in our money is collected.  
25 The policeman puts his hand in the back and the money is clipped

1 into his hand and he lets the boy go. This the policeman always  
2 expected. Whenever he is called in to an affair like that he knows  
3 that he will be ~~extremely~~ bribed to let the "criminal" go.

4 When the policeman goes away, then the real fireworks begin. The  
5 people start yelling that if the community took care of the boy,  
6 he wouldn't have to steal a pair of shoes. But the rich people are  
7 all too busy giving money to those who don't really need it instead  
8 of taking care of the orphans and the widows. So a committee goes  
9 up to speak to the big shots in the community. And the Gabai  
10 begins to apologize that he didn't know that the widow was so poor  
11 and if somebody had only told him he would have seen to it that  
12 she and her family had enough to eat and to wear. And from that  
13 incident ~~on~~, the boy was always decked out in good clothes, <sup>and</sup> they  
14 always had food in the house. Now, I think, that could only  
15 happen in the Shtetl. ~~Only~~ Only Jews could act like that. Goyim  
16 somehow just don't seem to care about what happens to their people  
17 but Jews do. I could tell you dozens of stories like that which  
18 happened in our shtetl, but I have to go now. But don't forget  
19 this story. I think it is very significant. Did you get every-  
20 thing down?

21 NC I said I got the story down and I would send him a copy of it  
22 when I had typed it out. If he wanted to make any corrections,  
23 he could do so because I wouldn't hand it in until he had seen it.  
24 There were no corrections on the finished copy.