Oct. 2, 1963

My grandmother **[Chaya Breina Gillin Raikin]** was a widow. My grandfather **[Zvi Hirsch Raikin]**, a fur dealer, while traveling through the forest from one town to another, had been waylaid by robbers and murdered **[this must have been in the early 1870s]**. My grandmother was left with two little daughters **[Feiga, born about 1865 and Pesha, born about 1867]**. She remarried **[to Simon Kahn]** and had a son **[Avraham, born 1876, who used the name Cohen when he came to America]**, but the marriage was not a happy one and she separated from her second husband.

When it came time for the older daughter (my mother) to marry, my grandmother made the necessary arrangements with a matchmaker, and the man who was to become my father **[Nathan Polotovsky, name changed to Reiken when he came to America]** came to the house. He really fell in love with the younger daughter, who was very beautiful, vivacious and full of good spirits. **[I was told by Pesha's youngest daughter, Shirley Raiken, that years later, when they were all in America, and Pesha would visit Nathan and Feiga, Nathan would sit for hours discussing business with Pesha, while Feiga (who did not have a head for business) would keep bringing them food, and smiling, because she admired Pesha so much.]** My mother was the opposite, very pretty but quiet, reserved and shy. When she was told that a suitor was becoming, she hid behind a cupboard. But it never occurred to the suitor that he could possibly marry the younger one. The older daughter always married first. And so they had a betrothal.

Now the circus was coming to Vitebsk, their town. My mother never asked for anything, but she did ask her mother if they could go see the circus. Her mother answered, "When you will be married, your husband will take you to the circus." And eventually the marriage took place.

The first year they were married, the circus did come to town. My mother, hesitatingly, repeated the promise her mother had made to her, and asked my father whether he would take her, and he answered, "Sure, why not?" So they went to the circus.

But by now, my mother was already pregnant, and the belief at that time was that if a pregnant woman looked at an animal, the baby would be born disfigured, with some features of the animal. Therefore, every time an animal appeared, my father covered my mother's eyes with his hands. When she returned home and was asked what she had seen in the circus, she replied, "I didn't see anything because my husband covered my eyes. But maybe it will come again."

Oct. 9, 1963

My grandmother, a widow, had raised two daughters. This was the latter part of the nineteenth century, in the town of Vitebsk, Russia.

Shortly after she had married off her older daughter **[Feiga, who got married about 1888]**, she began thinking about her younger daughter **[Pesha]**, who was a beauty, vivacious and high-spirited, deciding that this daughter would soon reach marriageable age too.

One day she discovered, to her great horror, that this young daughter had been seeing a gentile boy. In desperation she consulted the rabbi, who told her they must arrange a marriage with a good Jewish young man immediately. Which, after a short period, was accomplished.

During the wedding ceremony, when the bride and groom were standing under the canopy, the door of the synagogue opened and the gentile boy appeared. "You cannot marry her. She is my bride," he shouted. Of course he was immediately seized and thrown out, and the ceremony was consummated.

Not long after the marriage took place, the young bride took ill, seemed to have lost of the use of her legs and could not walk. **[Note: I was told by a friend who is a psychologist that this condition, called "hysterical paralysis," was quite common among women in the 19th century, although it is almost unheard of today, when the same underlying problem would manifest itself in a different set of symptoms.]** The young groom had no patience for this state of affairs. He brought her back to my grandmother's house, saying he could not take care of his invalid wife.

Then began a period of great trial and anxiety for my grandmother. She consulted doctor after doctor without much success. She then took her daughter to various spas which were then very highly thought of as curative measures. All this went on for about a year, after which the invalid began slowly to regain the use of her legs with an eventual complete recovery.

One day when my aunt was up and about, and her usual healthy self again, her husband appeared, prepared to take her back. At this point my grandmother said to him, "If your wife was not good enough for you when she was sick, you are not good enough for her when she is well. We will now arrange for a divorce," which was done.

So my beautiful aunt was now a divorcee, and the only sort of marriage that could be arranged for her was with a widower **[Avraham Gosolovsky, or Kassolovsky, born about 1858]** who had two small sons **[Samuel and Nathan]**. She married this man **[who wanted to leave Russia to avoid being drafted]** and took off with him and the two children for America **[using the name Raiken, perhaps because he hadn't served in the Russian army, and living first in Liverpool, England, for a while]**.

They settled in Newark, N.J. **[after first living in New York and starting a second hand furniture business]** where he opened his own business **[Raiken Monuments, still in existence but sold by the Raiken family sometime around 1980]**, selling tombstones and monuments. He did very well financially, adored his wife and was happy to satisfy every wish and whim of hers. She bore him five children and was a wonderful mother all the seven they now had. She drove her own automobile, when automobiles were still a rarity. Belonged to clubs, took her daughters to dancing classes, was always fashionably dressed. It was always an exciting occasion when she visited us (once bringing two adorable summer hats for my younger sister **[Libby]** and me, which we carefully kept on the closet shelf, never having an opportunity to wear them). She was a very colorful character, but not one of her children was as interesting as she was.

Nov. 19, 1963

THE 'GREENHORNS' ARRIVE

On board ship coming here from Russia my older brother Harry, aged 7, was seasick and never left his berth. My younger sister Libbie was ill and kept in the infirmary. My mother wept a lot, fearing she might never see her youngest again. Once a sailor took my mother to the infirmary where he pointed to a crib, telling her my sister was in it, but not being allowed to walk over to the crib to see for herself, she did not believe him.

I felt well and wandered all over the allotted space for steerage passengers. A group of gypsies fascinated me. I stood at a distance to listen to their singing and guitar playing. Once I looked up and saw on the upper deck a group of ladies staring down at me. One of them threw an orange to me **[in the version her granddaughter Michele recorded in 1976, the orange was given to her by a Gypsy woman who was also in steerage]**. I brought it to my mother for permission to eat. She had brought her own food for us to eat on board ship. It consisted of herring, cheese, cholas and lemons, the last considered a cure for seasickness. Of the ship's food, my mother ate only the bread and tea; occasionally milk was served for the children only.

The ocean crossing finally ended. We were huddled together among the other hundreds of immigrants at Ellis Island, waiting for my father from whom we had been separated for two long years. Suddenly our name was called. We stumbled out, the three children clinging to my mother who was holding her meager possessions. Walking towards us came a young, handsome, tall, beardless man. How handsome my father is, I thought proudly, but where is his beard? He wept and kissed us which puzzled me somewhat. I was so happy that we were all together again.

Into his horse-driven wagon we climbed, my father driving with my mother beside him. We three children squatted inside around a small table on which he had placed some yellow bananas and red tomatoes, which we began to eat gingerly. The bananas we peeled as we were told and ate with relish, but the red mushy tomatoes did not please our palates.

Jogging along, we came at last to the first home in America where we were greeted hesitatingly and tenderly by my two older sisters **[Annie and Fannie]**. They had arrived a year ahead of us, in the care of an uncle. **[They arrived in late 1899, as indicated by their passenger arrival records, which said they were traveling with their uncle Abe Cohen. However, the man whose picture is in their passport, identified as Abe Cohen, is actually their father. And Fannie said, in her citizenship application years later, that she was traveling with her uncle Abe Raiken.]** Annie, at 12, was already working as a dressmaker, and Fannie, at 10, was going to school and keeping house for the three of them. **[Annie and Fannie are said to be 10 and 8, respectively, in their passport, issued in 1899, but if Feiga and the younger children came as late as 1901, then Irene would have been about 7, and she said she was already in America when she turned 6, so there is some inconsistency here.]**

[The rest of this story deals with her life growing up in Brownsville, Brooklyn.]