

0.04 *Life in the shtetl*

Harry: 'Mother was always in the business, helping out. Before shabbos(the butcher shop) got crowded. People used to come in all at once. They had to cut the amount of meat they wanted. And they wanted liver and they wanted rump, and they wanted something else. And mother used to help. I only helped when father was away. Occasionally he came from the country with the animal, and he had to take it to the slaughter house, and I went with him. Father was off a couple of days a week. Our town had a market every month..and the next town had a market. We used to go to the market. They bought the animals they wanted to sell. He knew animals. We bought the feeders during the summer, and we put them out grazing until the fall. The brewery would only work in the fall. We rented facilities from the land owner who owned a lot of land. He had a brewery and a distillery.

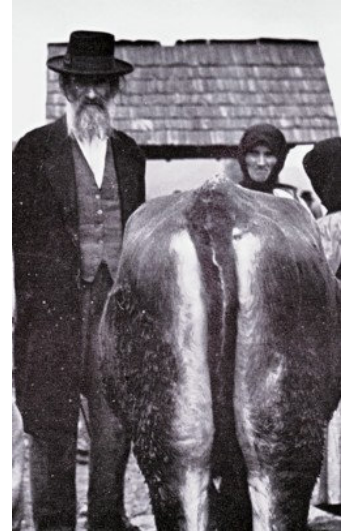
The cattle market Vishniac

Harry: "In the winter we raised cattle behind a whisky distillery. The food came into vats. It came through pipes from the distillery to the area where the cattle were kept. We had goyim (porim) who were supposed to feed (the cattle.) There were 6 (employees.) They worked in teams of 2. If one was missin somebody else had to help out. If one was missin Dave (said he) couldn't handle them (the cows). (He) didn't want to. Some of the cows were still milking. You had to draw milk out of them. Otherwise they would get swollen up. I would get up at 3 0' clock. Occasionally Dave would go along. When it came to carrying the 2 buckets of milk he says 'you carry them, you're shorter.' So he was a kind of draw back.

Harry: When Sara was about to be born and mother had to get the midwife she woke me up. She didn't wake Dave. Sara came later. So I was the house girl...more or less. He (Dave) wasn't too much a home ... (a major contributor to the functioning of the) home. So he wasn't recognized by mother that he was missin or recognized by father that he was missin.."

As Manuel grew, the butcher shop was moved out of the living room and into the shop attached to the house, the one that had been used by a cap maker. The space was 10 ft. by 10 ft. It had no windows and derived its light, heat in summer, and chilling cold in the winter from the front door which was always kept open when the shop was open. On the walls hung sides of meat, roasts, bones, and liver on large nails. In the middle of the shop was a broad tree stump the height of a table. It was here that Shlomo did his slicing, chopping, and cutting. Shlomo was said to have loudly grunted "Hah!!!" as his cleaver forcefully fell on the flesh below. His stump contained the scars of his strong chops and slashes with his knife.

In the winter when Shlomo had slaughtered and had meat for sale he kept moving. The little fire he built in the metal can only provided enough heat to thaw out his frozen hands. Occasionally, during the month of Shvat, Shlomo had to bring the meat inside and work there because it was so cold that meat froze before you could cut it up. At such times the shop acted as its own freezer, and meat could be kept for weeks. In the summer most butchering was done on Wednesday or Thursday in anticipation of Shabbos: Then people would line up outside the shed as they waited to buy a piece of freshly killed, freshly cut meat.





Marc Chagall (Russian, 1887-1985)
BUTCHER (GRANDFATHER), 1910
Gouache and ink on paper

(In the slaughter house each butcher would lay his cattle on their side crossing the legs and tying them. The Shochet had checked his halaf... his knife that was so sharp you could split a hair with it. The butcher would extend the cows neck. And the animal had to be killed with one move. It died instantly. The Shochet waited for blood to run out. Then he cut open the stomach and felt for bumps, evidence of disease. Glot means smoothe. Glot Kosher--no bumps, minor or major. The shochet then took the lungs out, blew them up, and looked for disease.)

Some animals were clearly traif; others obviously kosher. But there were borderline cases. At those times it paid to be on good terms with the Shochet. If he decided against you it could mean a great financial loss. So the shochet was richly rewarded in money and respect for his work.

Misha: The shoctim were a clan. 2 brothers and a cousin, I believe. It's a concession. If you have it you don't give it up. It's an income. The Aaron Shochet across the street lived among the Ukrainians, but he didn't speak a word of Ukrainian. He used to go to bed at 8 and wake up at the stroke of midnight to say Hazot. Then he'd say tillim till

3-4 o'clock, till the first star came up; then he walked to shul and dovined. Of course there was always a feud between the shoctim and the town butchers. The shoctim wanted more money and the butchers didn't want to give that kind of money. But what can you do? Go to a goy to have the shoct?

During the summer, slaughtering was more carefully contemplated. There was always one cow slaughtered on Thursday in anticipation of Shabbos. Then the cow was inspected by the shochet for signs of disease. If the cow had major bumps it was declared tariff, unkosher. The cows that were slaughtered were generally the older ones. "Disease" was common. So it was a rare shabbos when less than one of the town's kosher butchers was unable to sell his meat to his fellow Jews.

But it happened. And on such occasions, Shlomo couldn't sell all his meat before Shabbos. He had to rent space in the town lidorvna. The lidorvna was located in an insulated cellar. During the previous winter it had been stocked with blocks of ice from the river. Hay was placed on the ice to retard melting. Meat could be kept fresh here and sold again on Sunday and perhaps Monday. On bad weeks the family ate a lot of meat. And yes, on summer days, the towns dogs did stand outside the butcher shop waiting for Shlomo to throw out a piece of bone or worthless gristle. A few flies gathered too, flying in and out of the open door. People would line up early on Thursday so they could buy the "right piece of meat." The rich usually got a piece with fat on it. The poor often had to settle for soup bones.



In addition to cattle, Shlomo bought and sold hides: skins of cows, horses; foxes and other wild animals.

Shlomo was a maven at buying cattle. He rarely paid too much. And often got bargains. Some of the cattle were fattened and shipped to Warsaw. In the summer Shlomo grazed them on nearby farms. In the winter he fattened his small herds on brie, the by-product of the whisky distillery. In return for the brie, Shlomo gave the Poretz the droppings from his cows to fertilize the Poretz' fields. When the small herds were fat they were driven along the country roads to the town of Lutsk. Rejish was a day's walk from Torchin. The railroad through Warsaw stopped there. Shlomo sometimes drove his herd to Rejish and turned them over to an agent. The agent accompanied them to Warsaw where he sold them at the best price he could get. Eliyah, his brother was in the same business. But his eye, his judgment was not as keen. He eked out a living but he was truly a poor man. And he was bent like an old man by the time he was middle aged.

His wife, Rifka, came from Ludma, in the province of Volyn.

She was short, attractive, and a good mother. But she was quick to complain, and all too ready to flaunt her virtues on even the distant relatives of Jews that had a convert in her family. When she complained to Shlomo he usually didn't listen.



Misha: There was a feud between the shochet and the rabbi. They didn't want to recognize the rabbi. The rabbi had a hard time making a living. He didn't get a salary. He made a living by selling candles for shabbos and yeast for Thursday for the challas. You can imagine what kind of living he made. It so happens that the shochet who lived across the street was the mohel. And the rabbi's daughter gets married. And the first born is a son; and he has to be circumcised. And the only circumciser is the shochet. And they didn't talk to each other for the last 60 years.

So what are you going to do? Call in a goy? Of course tempers and emotions run high. And the shochet, by some unlikely quirk, made a wrong cut. And he injured the child. So you can imagine what was going on in this little town when something like this happens. The shochet called the rabbizin a snake.

She said that he did it on purpose; he wanted to deform the boy. Entebbe was nothing compared with an event like this in Torchin.



Misha: After a while, Shlomo got tired of being a butcher and he decided to have a taxi, a taxing institution. Once a week there was a market where all the farmers from all the vicinity came together. And they brought their cows and their horses. Horse trading was a great deal. Zeda Yitzak was a horse trader. The Fredmans were cow traders. So in order to enter this market you had to pay a fee. The Fredmans bought the concession from the city. They had it for a short time. I don't know what happened. Somebody was stealing money or something. But the concession for horse trading was the income for a short time. The fiercest horse traders came from Ausditich. Uncle Shia came from Ausditich. They used to come there. There was one trader, and he used to come with a tallis kutin hanging down; a big tallis kutin, from outside his shirt: And he grabbed the horse, and he was running up and down. And the tallis kutin was flying. He used to hold him close to his mouth so his head was high; otherwise the head drooped. This was a picture for Chagall.

Misha: There were Gypsy horse traders. And there's an old joke. A Gypsy tried to buy a horse from a Jew. And they were going back and forth. And they used to spit in their hand and slap the other's hand with each offer and counter offer.

"Five hundred."

He says "No.,,

He spit on his hand and says "550"

"No—525".

Eventually they got to the agreeable price. And the Gypsy takes out the money and pays him.

And then the Jew gave him the rope. Then the Gypsy buys the horse.

The Jew thinks he got a terrific deal.

The Gypsy laughs. "Jew did I fix you up this time. I paid you with counterfeit money."

So the Jew starts laughing. "I gave you a horse with hoof and mouth disease."



The Yitzhak Manuel remembers was 5'7" 5'8" tall, had brown hair, & handsome even features. His beard was full and neatly kempt. He wore a hittel (cap) and a long gray coat. He spoke little, but what he said had meaning. His stories were worth



listening to, being interesting and well told. He rarely repeated himself. He was a good business man, smart, honest, and straight--a man of his word.

His daughter Rifka (Misha's mother) was a dishwater blonde. She was nice, attractive, smiled a lot, was capable and reserved. There's a story that she wore fancy dresses when she lived in Ausditich..dresses purchased in Lutsk.



People saw what she wore and made copies of her dresses for themselves. That's when Rifka gave the fashion setting dress to Gitl, the crazy lady. And everyone else stopped wearing their copies.

Yitzhak" son Usher apparently resembled Misha Klein.

And his oldest son Shia was medium sized, thin and pale. He had a small neat beard and was never well dressed.

Uncle Harry remembers Zeda Yitzhak coming to the market in Torchin one day. He brought along his sons Usher and Shia. He brought several horses that he tried to sell. One prospective buyer examined a horse and talked to Yitzhak. Yitzhak learned many things about the man, where he lived, what he farmed, etc. Towards nightfall the man bought a horse and left.

Yitzhak and his sons came to Kaila's house for dinner. They were going to leave for Lakotch when they finished eating. They had three more horses to sell. While they were

eating Yitzhak checked his wallet. The last farmer, the one who bought the horse at dusk, had underpaid. It probably was an honest mistake, but a lot of money had been lost.

Yitzhak sent his sons on to Lakotch with the horses. He spent the night in Torchin. In the morning he would visit the farmer and talk to him, reason with him. He asked Shlomo to rent a horse and wagon. The farmer lived far away.

Shlomo checked around and the news was bad. The only team available for the following day had a blind horse. Shlomo rented it anyway. He told his father-in-law that his son Usher(Harry) could handle the team. And he was right. Harry drove the team skillfully and rapidly. When, they arrived at the farmhouse Yitzhak talked to his customer. He asked him to check his wallet, to see if he hadn't received too much change. He appealed to the man's sense of honesty or religiosity. The man checked and Yitzhak was right. He did have too much money. He paid Yitzhak the extra money he owed, and Harry drove home with the same skill he had shown on the wild ride to the farm. It was a ride that Yitzhak never forgot. And Harry didn't either.

Harry remembers another incident: Harry was shorter than his older brother Dave but he was strong; deceptively strong. One day a farmer brought a sheep to market and stopped at Shlomo's butcher shop.

"What do you want for it?" Shlomo asked. The farmer stated a price. Shlomo looked the animal over. It was a good sized animal. The price seemed fair. He asked his son, Harry, to lift the beast off the wagon and to bring it closer so he could inspect it a little better.

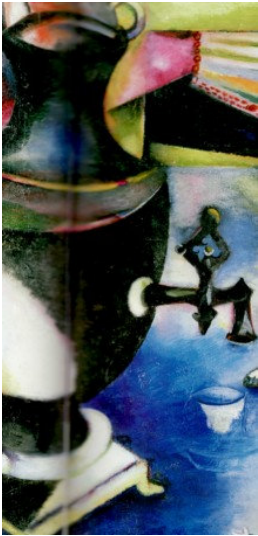
Harry lifted the animal effortlessly. Shlomo watched his son and realized the farmer had overestimated the sheep's weight. Shlomo's eye was not as good as it used to be. He turned down the deal.

The farmer rolled up to another butcher shop. Shlomo watched as the next butcher strained and sweated as he lifted the animal from the wagon. It was a heavy animal, Shlomo realized. I was right the first time. He looked at his son Harry. Why didn't you tell me? he asked. You're stronger than you look.

At age 3 Manuel began heder. Typically a teacher (melamed) would teach 20 children how to read Hebrew and how to say their prayers in Hebrew. When Manuel was 6 the war broke out and there was no school. After the war he went to a school, just for Jews, where he learned how to read and write Polish. After school there was Hebrew school. Then he came home and did his chores. He helped take care of the horse and cow. He chopped wood and carried water from the river to the house.



Jewish Water Carriers

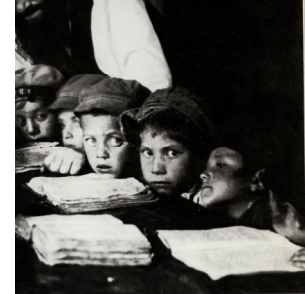


Surca: "Grandpa Sracheel was a big story teller. He used take a samovar of water and drink from the first to the last, 20, maybe 30 cups. He used to drink one after another ...and tell stories. He used to tell such stories from the rabbis you never heard in your life.

Came a man from Warsaw to interview him, he should tell stories to make a book.

Surca: He had a heder. He used to teach Chumash. And I used to listen to the sedras, Friday. It was only for young boys. He had a big, big, room with long tables for the students. Every night came those poor beggars, they were begging for money. They slept over at his house. He put straw, and that's how they slept. He used to like canes and pipes. So they used to come from all over; they used to bring him that present. I was in love with a white porcelain pipe with a picture of a man smoking. For Yom Tov he had a special pipe; for another day another pipe. I remember

Chanukah when all the grandchildren would get together (at Sracheel's.) We didn't have gregors. So the boys used to clap with the canes on the table and yell "oomayne".



Surca: "Baba Bossie was a busy woman. She used to have a business from dishes and pots and pans. She used to take care of all the grandchildren. Dave got into a fight with mother, he came to her. If he froze his feet, he came to her. She was a nice person, good natured. My mother had typhus, the first time. (She had it again during WWI). She had it at the time when Aaron got married to Sheindel. The marriage was (going) on. And my mother was in bed with typhus. So she wanted to eat something. So she reached for the coal oil lamp. Between the wedding Bossie ran in all the time to see how mother was. And it was a good thing. The lamp was on (its side). It almost burned the whole house with mother. Bossie saved her.



Surca: Mother put a wooden floor on her house. And Bossie came with Zade. And she says, while they were digging to put the foundation for the floor, she says (to Sracheel): "Get in and stay there until they give me money to marry off my daughter.' She wanted to marry Aaron with her daughter. My father was the "rich man." They don't need a floor. I need money for the kids. That's more important.'

They had to give her the money. There was nothing to laugh. The poor woman she says "if I can't take it with gitten then with Shlechten."

Surca: Mother and father made a nice living. And she was giving money to this one and changed around. They knew how to spend. My mother was a good (money) manager. Every relative. came to our house from all over. Everyone who had to go someplace stopped at our house. And the next door neighbors they didn't know that uncle was in existence, because the aunt wouldn't let anybody (in.)

Surca: I didn't live there (with my parents) when Zeda Yitzhak died. We used to buy fresh bread and bring it every day to Zeda Yitzhak. He was a good business man, a very smart man. He used to sew his own things. Everything had to be just so. He had a farm rented from a poretz, with a lot of acres of land. He was a farmer. He kept up a lot of people; when they wanted to run away and eat something Kosher they came to him. One rabbi gave permission, a paper, to some boys to dodge the draft; and they wanted to arrest that rabbi. So he ran away and he stayed at grandpa's farm for quite a few weeks; and then he came to America, and he became a rabbi in St. Louis."

Harry: In the Studt, the main section of town, the downtown, there were a lot of little shops; outside and inside they had stores, little stores. And I used to occasionally go and listen to those Zionists. It was more or less secret. They kept their meeting in a little house. I suppose it belonged to a member. You could go in there. I thought that was a little, not in my line. Too idealistic. it was a radical thing. You got to be against... (the old ways.) You got to be a Zionist, you got to be a Socialist; you got to be something different than just a yid. And I didn't like it."

Fay. I knew 2 of the boys. They came and visited us when they needed a few dollars. One boy came once when he was 18. He was gray on the face. He had recently been ill. My mother took him in. She was cooking constantly. He used to sit and eat like he was so empty; he couldn't stop eating. He stayed 1 and a half to 2 weeks. He gained 10 lbs. He went away with pink cheeks. Mordcha was his name. If the family needed help they came to the meema (my mother) and my father.



**I AND THE VILLAGE CHAGALL
1911**



