

ROBBIE: Which is?

AGRIN: Which is, the town was Berdichev and the state was Kiev, Kiva Gubernia.

ROBBIE: And that was Russia in those years.

AGRIN: That was Russia.

ROBBIE: And was it a big town or a little town?

AGRIN: It was a medium town. It wasn't a main city.

ROBBIE: And tell us your father's name.

AGRIN: Harry. Jewish name, Herschel.

ROBBIE: And your mother?

AGRIN: Paya.

ROBBIE: And did you have a large family?

AGRIN: We were, well, I'm the oldest and my mother gave twelve births, but we grew up nine of us.

ROBBIE: Can you remember the names of all the children?

AGRIN: I do, but I've lost all my brothers by now. We're only four sisters. I lost five brothers.

ROBBIE: What were their names?

AGRIN: Nat, Izzy, Harry, now wait a minute. Nat, Izzy, Louie. Louie, Abie, and Wayne.

ROBBIE: And the four girls?

AGRIN: The four girls? I'm the oldest and Bella and Eva and Faye.

ROBBIE: That was a big family.

AGRIN: Did I miss somebody?

ROBBIE: No. I think you mentioned everybody.

AGRIN: Bella, Eva . . .

ROBBIE: When you lived in Europe, can you remember anything about the house you lived in? What it looked like . . .

AGRIN: Not very much, but I know we had, we didn't have a

sink, but we had a faucet coming out of the wall. A faucet and a wooden bucket to collect the water.

ROBBIE: And what did you use for heat?

AGRIN: For heat I think a stove in the middle of the room and it was heated, I think, with wood, if I remember.

ROBBIE: Well, it's hard. You were a little girl. Did any other members of your family live nearby?

AGRIN: On Saturday afternoon I used to go with my mother to my grandmother's house, and it was walking distance. I don't know how far it was. She would walk and carry a child, and I would tag behind her.

ROBBIE: At that time she had one other child beside you?

AGRIN: Well, I, well, she, when my brother was born she had lost three children between after I was born, and they all died. And then my brother Nat was born. I was five at the time.

ROBBIE: Now, in the town you lived, was there a synagogue.

AGRIN: I don't remember.

ROBBIE: Did you ever have any kind of religious persecution?
Did anybody ever try to treat you badly because you
were Jewish?

AGRIN: No. Not then, no. No.

ROBBIE: There were no pogroms?

AGRIN: Once there was a rumor, so we locked ourselves in and
we stayed in the dark, and it was a Friday night, and
we put out the candles. First they were lit, you know.
And then we put out the candles and we stayed in the
dark expecting Cossacks to come, you know. But it
never happened. That was the only bad night I remember
that we stayed in the dark all evening. But nothing
else happened, that I can remember.

ROBBIE: You were a very little girl at the time, but did you go
to school at all?

AGRIN: No. I had one cousin. She was the smart one. And she
used to give private lessons. So I just started to
take, she used to come to the house and teach me
whatever. So then there was talk that we are leaving

for America. So my mother said, "Why do you need it?"
The lessons that she was giving me. We come to
America. So I didn't take any lessons at all.

ROBBIE: Who wanted to come to America?

AGRIN: I don't know who wanted.

ROBBIE: Well, was there anybody here?

AGRIN: My father went first, and after he was here five months
we went, we came. He sent for us.

ROBBIE: Was the trip a hard trip? How did you go? How much do
you remember of the preparation and how you travelled,
and so on?

AGRIN: We travelled a lot, and my brother Nat, at every stop
that we made, we had to buy him a new hat. He used to
throw the hats out of the window of the train. (they
laugh) That's a true story. Every place we stopped
we bought a hat. And at the next stop he didn't have a
hat again, and we had to buy another hat.

ROBBIE: So part of your trip was by train.

AGRIN: By train. By train, overnight. By train. Then we went on a boat. First we went on a small boat for overnight, like a day and a night. That was a very tough, rough, you know, very rough trip. My cousin Sara nearly died. And then we went on the big boat for about two weeks.

ROBBIE: You travelled with other members of your family?

AGRIN: Yeah. My mother, my father was here already. My mother, my aunt and a couple of cousins.

ROBBIE: Her children.

AGRIN: Yeah. My cousins Nat and Sara.

ROBBIE: And your mother had you and your brother Nat and . . .

AGRIN: Nat, and I think she was pregnant with Izzy. Yes.

ROBBIE: How far along? Pretty far along?

AGRIN: We were here five weeks when she gave birth.

ROBBIE: So she was pretty well into her eighth month when you left.

AGRIN: Yeah, sure.

ROBBIE: Now, when you left Russia how did you get across? Did you have papers to cross the border?

AGRIN: I wouldn't know that. How would I know that? I know we went at night in a wagon with a goy, a big goy. We (speaks in Yiddish). How would I say that?

ROBBIE: You stole across the border?

AGRIN: Something like that.

ROBBIE: You had to cross some water?

AGRIN: We had to cross water, and a big goy took me under one arm and my cousin Sara under another arm and he carried us across. We didn't go in the water. The goy went in the water up to here, carrying two of us.

ROBBIE: A child under each arm.

AGRIN: (she laughs) Under, yes. That's, I remember it like yesterday.

ROBBIE: And how did your mother cross?

AGRIN: My mother walked it. She wore a velvet dress with a train. (they laugh)

ROBBIE: Her best.

AGRIN: The best dress, a black velvet dress with a train. And in front of the dress she sewed in a five hundred dollar bill to get the money across.

ROBBIE: To hide her money.

AGRIN: To hide her money. So she sewed it into this, and then when she had to cross the water she picked up her dress like that, and she walked. (they laugh) And the rest of the train was floating. (they laugh) That's the truth.

ROBBIE: And you can remember.

AGRIN: That I remember. And a big goy took Sara under one arm, my cousin Sara and me under the other arm, and in two minutes we were across over there.

ROBBIE: And what about all your, what were you carrying? All the things that you were taking with you?

AGRIN: I really don't remember much, but my Uncle Schmelik
(she laughs) bought a new pair of rubbers to come to
America. So when he had to cross the annex, he took
off the rubbers and left them there and went across,
and the rubbers never came to America. (they laugh)
The funny thing, those things I remember.

ROBBIE: And were there other things?

AGRIN: Other things I don't remember, but the rubbers were
very important to him.

ROBBIE: I thought there were a pair of candlesticks.

AGRIN: Oh, candlesticks, yes. The candlesticks, and a pillow.
Everything was left on the other side.

ROBBIE: And you were glad to get across.

AGRIN: Yes. I didn't know. Me, I was carried across. My
cousin Sara and I were carried across.

ROBBIE: Right. You were little tiny children. And did you
take food with you to eat on the way?

AGRIN: All I remember, my cousin Joe used to go to, and Nat,

too, my cousins Nat and Joe, they were two brothers. And Sara was very sick the whole trip. So we had to get oranges.

ROBBIE: Oh, this is when you were on the big boat.

AGRIN: On the big boat.

ROBBIE: Now, where did you, where was your passage?

AGRIN: I don't know.

ROBBIE: You were down below?

AGRIN: Yeah. We had to be somewhere down below.

ROBBIE: In steerage.

AGRIN: Yeah. But what's his name, Joe and Nat used to take us up on the deck.

ROBBIE: You were sick.

AGRIN: We were seasick. And Nat was wonderful. He used to, I don't know where he got, from the passengers, he got oranges for Sara.

ROBBIE: So that . . .

AGRIN: Sara was dying, she was so seasick.

ROBBIE: And how long did the trip take?

AGRIN: Well, on the big boat we were, I shouldn't touch this.
(referring to her microphone) On the big boat we
were two weeks, and before that we were on a small
boat, like, overnight. And then we were on a train a
lot. On trains.

ROBBIE: So it took you maybe a month?

AGRIN: Maybe, maybe more. Maybe more than a month. And at
every station, every stop that we made, we had to buy
my brother a new hat. As soon as we got on the train
he threw out the hat out of the window.

ROBBIE: Do you remember when the trip was over when you first
saw the Statue of Liberty?

AGRIN: It was a great thrill, when I saw it from a distance.
And my father came to take us home, and I don't know
the reason that he didn't take us home. They didn't

leave us to go home.

ROBBIE: You were on Ellis Island?

AGRIN: We went to Ellis Island.

ROBBIE: How did you get to Ellis Island from the big boat?

AGRIN: I think the boat took us, I think. I don't remember another boat. I remember another boat first, one night, before we got on the big boat. Now, what do you need the story of my life here?

ROBBIE: Mama, because it's a fascinating story and it's something that none of us can ever experience. It was unique to you, and it was so long ago, and that you can remember as much as you can remember is wonderful. Now, when your father came to get you at Ellis Island, you said he couldn't take you off. Why not? You don't know?

AGRIN: He spoke with us from a gate, I think. We were on one side, and he was on the other side, and my mother spoke with him. Whatever they were saying, I don't know. And he had to go home, and he couldn't take us.

ROBBIE: Did anybody get off at that time? Did anybody leave?

AGRIN: Other people, I don't know. But we didn't. My aunt didn't, my aunt and the two children. My, how many children did she have? Yeah, she had Sara and Nat. And Mama had Nat and me, and with a big belly.

ROBBIE: Hmm. You think maybe it was a holiday?

AGRIN: Maybe. I think later we figured out it must have been Memorial Day. Because we came here, it was kind of warmish. So we, we think, I don't know who thought that maybe we came here Memorial Day and they wouldn't leave us off. We can't prove it now.

ROBBIE: So where did you stay?

AGRIN: In Ellis Island? I remember we were in a room, many people in one room, huge room, like a big barn. Bare floors, and little cots. And on the floor we slept. And that's where we slept.

ROBBIE: And that was just one night.

AGRIN: That was one night.

ROBBIE: Were you frightened? Were you excited? Do you remember anything?

AGRIN: No, I don't remember being excited or being frightened, or being anything. I don't remember.

ROBBIE: And when your father came, did he bring anything?

AGRIN: He brought bananas, but we didn't know what it was, but it was very good. But then he went away, and he didn't take us off. We didn't go. But I told him when he comes back, whenever, he should bring more of the yellow things that shaped like a half moon. I said it in Jewish. I didn't say half moon. The (Yiddish).

ROBBIE: That's all you know about a banana?

AGRIN: It was yellow, the (Yiddish). That means it was curved, like a half moon, and it was yellow. That was a banana.

ROBBIE: Do you have any memories at all of what it was like on Ellis Island? You slept, you said, on a cot, or on the floor. Were there many people in that room?

AGRIN: Yeah, there were many people. And I saw one woman that was, I don't know what she was. But she made milk for us. She took a pot, a pitcher, and put in water, and put in a white powder. That's what it looked like to me. And she stirred it, and she made milk, and we drank it.

ROBBIE: Well, we do that today.

AGRIN: Yeah, but at that time it was very novel.

ROBBIE: At that time, yes. Oh, you had never seen that before.

AGRIN: I never saw it before.

ROBBIE: And they gave you milk.

AGRIN: They gave us that to drink.

ROBBIE: And did they give you food?

AGRIN: This made an impression, to take a pitcher of water and give me milk, you know. But other food didn't make an impression. I suppose they gave us something.

ROBBIE: You remember there being doctors there who looked at

you.

AGRIN: Yeah, they looked for lice. I guess they looked for lice. Why should they take the hair apart and look?

ROBBIE: Right. And they didn't check your heart, give you an examination?

AGRIN: No. Mostly in my head they looked. But they didn't find anything. (they laugh)

ROBBIE: And how long did you have to wait before you could leave?

AGRIN: Leave Ellis Island? Well, he came one day and couldn't take us, so he went back home. And the next day he came and we went. The reason, I still don't know, whether it was a holiday or whatever.

ROBBIE: And when you left Ellis Island did you go on a ferry boat?

AGRIN: Wait a minute. I think we went on an elevator, which was a very terrible, not terrible, exciting thing to do.

ROBBIE: You mean, on an elevated train.

AGRIN: Yeah.

ROBBIE: After you left Ellis Island and got to the mainland,
then your father took you on an elevated train.

AGRIN: And we went to Essex Street where he was a boarder at
that time, before we came. He had to be somewhere.
So he took us to a house on Essex Street and that night
we slept on the floor because he was a boarder there.

ROBBIE: With a family that you didn't know? Relatives?

AGRIN: I didn't know. No, not relatives, no. A strange
family. And after that I think we stayed there a
couple of nights, we slept there. And finally we ended
up in an empty apartment on Essex Street. I think it
was number twenty-one and a half.

ROBBIE: I don't believe it. You remember?

AGRIN: I don't believe it either. But the house is still
there. At that time it was a new house.

ROBBIE: No, I don't think the house is there any more. It was

a new building?

AGRIN: At that time.

ROBBIE: And what was in there?

AGRIN: Nothing. We had no furniture at all. Nothing,
nothing. We slept on the floor.

ROBBIE: A blanket?

AGRIN: Maybe they borrowed from somebody, yeah. And then we
got an apartment. Maybe in that house (?).

ROBBIE: And you stayed there for?

AGRIN: I don't remember how long we stayed there.

ROBBIE: Do you remember anything about how you got some
furniture, or . . .

AGRIN: That I don't, but I do remember that my brother Izzy,
wait a minute, was it Izzy?

ROBBIE: Izzy wasn't born. That must have been later.

AGRIN: That story must be from later. That Izzy locked

himself up in an empty apartment and we were going crazy.

ROBBIE: That was later. Or was it Nat?

AGRIN: No, it was Izzy.

ROBBIE: That must have happened later, because Izzy wasn't born. You said . . .

AGRIN: So who was it that was locked up, and we were going crazy. We couldn't find the child. We missed the child. And finally we found him sleeping in an empty apartment in that same building where we were looking, yeah.

ROBBIE: In the same building where you lived. Uh, how much do you remember about, um, the way you lived at that time? Who had money? Did your father work?

AGRIN: I don't remember my father working.

ROBBIE: When you first came over? You can't remember. And how long you lived on Essex Street, you don't remember.

AGRIN: No.

ROBBIE: Now, when was the baby born? Your mother was pregnant when you came.

ROBBIE: Well, I know the Fourth of July was so noisy, my mother couldn't take the noise of Fourth of July, in Manhattan, in those years.

ROBBIE: Fireworks, things like that.

AGRIN: Fireworks. It were dreadful. So she was sick in bed. And I think she gave birth a day or two later. I think Bella was born the fifth of July. I think she gave birth that day or the next day. And she was born in the house. There was, my mother, I don't know how she got to know those doctors, but there was a place where they . . .

ROBBIE: A clinic?

AGRIN: . . . the doctor came and delivered her at home. And she didn't have to pay. We had no money at all. So I remember in that house she gave birth the day after that noisy day with the Fourth of July. And I, at that age, had to wash those bloody sheets. It wasn't like

today people take care of themselves. Bloody sheets, I had to wash those sheets and hang them on the roof.

ROBBIE: When did you start going to school in this country?

AGRIN: All I remember that one day, I didn't understand English, hardly nothing. So we went to school and I remember the teacher saying, like, she's right in front of me now, she wore a thin blouse, and underneath, it was sheer, she wore, it was winter, she wore an undershirt with short sleeves. I thought teachers were not human at that time, but here is a woman, I see her underwear with short sleeves, and the blouse had long sleeves. It was amazing. I never saw it. And I remember her announcing that it's now 1904. That I remember like you're standing here now and telling me, it's 1904. And I understood. I kept studying that all those years. I couldn't speak English at all. 1904.

ROBBIE: How did you learn to speak English?

AGRIN: I don't know. I don't know. And I speak well, considering I wasn't born here. And I didn't start anything until I was eight or better. And you wouldn't

think that, people don't believe that I wasn't born here.

ROBBIE: Did your parents ever speak English at home.

AGRIN: No!

ROBBIE: What did they speak?

AGRIN: Jewish, Yiddish. No. Who's going to speak English? Who?

ROBBIE: So you had to have learned in school.

AGRIN: I might have. I went to a school, and I know it was, once it was Christmas time, and then we lived in Bridgeport, and there wasn't a Jewish person in Bridgeport that we knew, nobody. And here I am, and I can't speak a word of nothing. All goysha children, you know. And they gave us Christmas presents.

ROBBIE: This was at school.

AGRIN: At school, the Christmas presents. So Nat, who went to school, Nat and I. I got writing paper and envelopes. I didn't know how to write nothing. (they laugh)

And what did Nat get? Some kind of a toy, a metal thing. A toy, I think, Nat got, from the school.

ROBBIE: Now, when did you move to Bridgeport, do you remember? Shortly after you came?

AGRIN: It must be shortly after. And the school was like, if I looked out of the window it was like, oh, it was like I would go to the corner, like I would go to the center.

ROBBIE: A block, or two blocks.

AGRIN: So when I used to, my mother timed it, when she heard the bell ring that I had to go in, she let me go to school. Till then I had to scrub the floors, I had to do work in the house. And when she heard the bell, so I had to run quick to get into school. It was a terrible life.

ROBBIE: Why did you move to Bridgeport?

AGRIN: I wouldn't know. I still don't know.

ROBBIE: Didn't your father want a farm?

AGRIN: In Bridgeport, yeah, we lived out of town. It was not far out of town, but it was quite far. And the school had two rooms. Naturally I was in the stupid room.

ROBBIE: Not stupid. Young. The youngest children.

AGRIN: The youngest, yes. Nat and I were in the same class, the same room.

ROBBIE: In the house where you lived, can you remember anything about it?

AGRIN: No. It was a nice room with windows, and a bare floor. And on my lunchtime I had to scrub the floor, and then went to school. When I heard the bell start ringing I went to school. We heard the bell in the house.

ROBBIE: Did your father have any animals?

AGRIN: A dog, always.

ROBBIE: But no farm animals there?

AGRIN: Not there. At one time, when we lived, like, out of town a little bit, we had a cow. A horse, a cow. He loved animals, my father.

ROBBIE: I thought he was a farmer.

AGRIN: Yeah. A Jewish farmer. And I had to dig the potatoes.
Potatoes grow under ground.

ROBBIE: Under the ground.

AGRIN: Under the ground, yeah. I did everything. Oh, boy.
I've got some kind of a . . . (tape pauses)

ROBBIE: How did your parents feel about America? Were they
glad they came? Were they sorry?

AGRIN: They never discussed that with me. I don't know
anything. No.

ROBBIE: You don't have any idea about that.

AGRIN: If they spoke about it, they spoke with relatives,
friends.

ROBBIE: When you lived in Bridgeport, you had no other family
there?

AGRIN: We had a distant, we came to Bridgeport because we had
a distant relative. My Aunt Shangles in-laws

something, were in Bridgeport. And they talked us into moving from Manhattan, that we just came to Bridgeport.

ROBBIE: And about how long did you stay? Do you have any idea?

AGRIN: We stayed a while. I went to school there for a while. Of course, I never went to school. I had to watch kids.

ROBBIE: How much school did you have?

AGRIN: I left school. I may have been twelve years old, and I was in the third grade. I never went to school. And the truant officer used to come after me day after day after day. And finally they discharged me from the school because I had to stay home and watch the babies.
(tape ends)

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

ROBBIE: And in Brooklyn did you stay in the same apartment all the time?

AGRIN: No. No, we moved several times in Brooklyn.

ROBBIE: Why?

AGRIN: Oh, Cindy. Why, because we moved in and we got a month free. And then we stayed, like three months, for one month's rent.

ROBBIE: You got a month free, you paid a month . . .

AGRIN: And we lived in a month. And they made us move.

ROBBIE: And then you moved.

AGRIN: So we moved.

ROBBIE: You were very poor then.

AGRIN: Very poor. And . . .

ROBBIE: How did the family earn a living?

AGRIN: I have no idea. At one time my father had a horse and wagon and he went with a horse and wagon and he had bells on the wagon that made noise. And it was like a junk wagon.

ROBBIE: He would pick up.

AGRIN: And he'd buy junk. If you had junk, you heard the bells ring on the wagon, you'd call in the man to sell whatever you had.

ROBBIE: And did your mother work?

AGRIN: Not at that time. She was having children. She had Bella, she had Izzy, and she had, all the children were born.

ROBBIE: It was a hard life.

AGRIN: Sure.

ROBBIE: What happened when you were thirteen years old?

AGRIN: Ooh.

ROBBIE: You had a bad experience, I remember.

AGRIN: I don't know what.

ROBBIE: You said you went to a gypsy.

AGRIN: Oh! And the gyp, that was at school.

ROBBIE: Oh, I don't remember. Tell me.

AGRIN: I went to school, and a gypsy told my fortune, that I'll die before I'm thirteen. And I took it so to heart that I actually got sick. So my mother, so then my mother used to say, "Why do you lay in bed and cry all the time?" So I told her about the gypsy. The gypsy went to school with me, and for maybe a penny or two she told me my fortune.

ROBBIE: This was before you left school.

AGRIN: Yeah. So my aunt says (Yiddish). You know, my aunt had three daughters and two sons. You know, my cousin Sara, you know. By the way, where is my cousin Sara?

ROBBIE: Gone.

AGRIN: So my aunt says (Yiddish). I finished thinking about whatever the gypsy said. So she had, she lived in four little rooms, my aunt.

ROBBIE: Where did she live?

AGRIN: On Allen Street, number twenty-one and a half, Allen Street. And the elevator, I could reach it. I slept on the window sill. I slept on the window sill. The

window sill was about that wide. It was enough for me to sleep.

ROBBIE: You were a small girl.

AGRIN: I was small, I was young, and I was small. Because the bedroom was too tiny, and Olga was there and Lizzy was there and Sara was there, there was no room. So I slept on the window sill. And it was fine. I loved being there.

ROBBIE: How many people lived in those four rooms?

AGRIN: Oh, boy. Ruchel had five children, and Schmelik lived there, my Uncle Schmelik was a boarder. And Lizzy's boyfriend, the Hussim, lived there. I don't know how many people lived there.

ROBBIE: That was five children, a mother, a father, an uncle, a boyfriend. That's nine so far. No boarders?

AGRIN: Yeah, the boarder was the Hussim. Lizzy's husband was the boarder.

ROBBIE: So there were nine people, and you were on the window

sill.

AGRIN: And I was on the window sill, and two of my cousins, where are they? I don't even remember where my cousins are. Nat and Joe slept up (Yiddish), in the kitchen. (Yiddish), you know. And the girls, Sara, Lizzy and Olga and I, slept in a bedroom. I was on the window sill. And the Hussim and Joe, my cousin Joe, where is my cousin Joe? Terrible. Slept, they had a piece of furniture. It looked like a big dresser.

ROBBIE: A Murphy bed. A bed pull-down.

AGRIN: At night it was a bed. So I don't know how many people slept there.

ROBBIE: Well, it was a lot of people.

AGRIN: It was a lot of people.

ROBBIE: And they all made out fine, didn't they?

AGRIN: Well, it seems that way.

ROBBIE: They grew up.

AGRIN: But to go to the bathroom in the morning, there was one bathroom with seven families on the floor. And what we had in our room with so many people. To go in the bathroom in the morning, don't ask.

ROBBIE: Now, you were very young. What were you doing then? You were out of school. Did you start to work?

AGRIN: Yeah, because the gypsy said I was going to die, so my Ruchel said (Yiddish). She'll be with the kinder, and she's (Yiddish), the whole business. So my cousin Nat, he was a foreman in a factory. What did they make? I think they made blouses there. So he took me into the factory to work. So I slept by Ruchel. And he also lived there, my cousin. Then he married my cousin. He was engaged at that time. They were engaged. Then he gave me a job for three dollars a week, six days a week. And the . . .

ROBBIE: How many hours a day?

AGRIN: Who the hell knows. And the seventh day, I went home Friday night to Brooklyn.

ROBBIE: To the Sabbath.

AGRIN: And my mother, (Yiddish) a washtub full of clothes.

ROBBIE: She soaked them for you?

AGRIN: Soaked it. Yeah, got it ready for me. And that was my Saturday recreation, to do the wash.

ROBBIE: For the whole family.

AGRIN: Naturally. With two big washtubs, you know. That was built into the house. Yeah, sure.

ROBBIE: On a scrub board.

AGRIN: Yeah. That was my Saturday off. And Ruchel, out of my three dollars pay, took fifty cents a week for the sandwiches that she gave me for lunch every day. It was a tomato, herring and two big slices of bread. And believe me, it tasted very good when I was hungry. And an apple, and an apple, for fifty cents a week.

ROBBIE: As you grew older, you went back and lived with your family again?

AGRIN: Yeah, sure.

ROBBIE: And you continued to work in the factory.

AGRIN: Yeah, but not in New York any more. I got bolder and I got a job.

ROBBIE: And then how did you meet Papa?

AGRIN: Ida's, they were having, the barbers were having a dance. And Ida was a friend of mine, and she was engaged to a barber. Also I lived in one house and he was a boweder, or whatever. So the sister says, (Yiddish).

ROBBIE: "Take Hattie with you."

AGRIN: "Take Hattie with you and introduce her. He's a nice man, (Yiddish). A nice young man." So she asked me to come, and I went. I borrowed a dress from somebody else. I didn't have a dress to wear. So I went, I went to the affair, and Ida introduced me. She was engaged to a barber, and she knew Papa, you know. They happened to work in the same barber shop or something. So that's how I met your father. So after I met him he takes out a picture from his pocket, and that's the picture. Where's my picture? That picture. I said,

"Where did you get that picture?" He says, "Newman was the photographer," and Newman was a friend of your father's. They were friends. So he went up to see him in his gallery, you know, where he was taking pictures. At that time you don't have pictures like today. You have a camera, and you make pictures. You want a picture, you have to go to a photographer and pay him and he takes pictures. So I went one year, and I had made that picture. It's a New Year's card. And I made it up like a New Year's card. And I had many pictures. The man liked the picture and he put it in his showcase.

ROBBIE: For display.

AGRIN: For display. And I didn't have pictures. I'm telling it to you wrong. I went with a friend of mine. She went to have pictures taken for New Year's. I went with her. And she paid. She had her picture taken, several pictures, and then she picks out what she wanted. And so the man says, "Let me take your picture." I says, "I have no money to take pictures." He says, "I'm not asking you for money. If you'll see

it in the showcase, come up and I'll give you a picture. You don't pay me, and I don't ask you for money." So he took pictures and sure enough whenever I passed the street I see my picture in the showcase. So I went up, and he gave me a picture. Fine. That's it. Then I had this dance. The barbers had a dance on a Friday night. Ida says, "Come with me. What have you got to lose? If it's too late to go home, you'll sleep at my house." So I went, and not so easy. My mother don't let me go out at night. But I manage and I went with her. And before we went the sister says to Ida, "Introduce her to Agronovich, (Yiddish). He's a nice young man, introduce her to him." So that's how I met your father.

ROBBIE: And how did he get the picture.

AGRIN: This photographer with a friend of his, and your father went up to see him and he saw the picture. He says, "May I have this picture?" He says, "What are you going to do with the picture?" He says, "I'm going to find that girl, and I'll marry her."

ROBBIE: And that's really what happened.

AGRIN: That's the truth. That's what happened.

ROBBIE: That's a lovely story.

AGRIN: That's exactly what happened. So he says, "Take the picture." So when I met him, whenever it was that I met him, when Ida's sister said, "Take her to this dance, maybe Agronovich will be there." So I went with her to the dance, and there was Agronovich, and he takes out my picture from his pocket. Now you know the whole story.

ROBBIE: That's a lovely story. Now there was a tragedy in your life with the loss of a brother.

AGRIN: Oh. Oh, my brother Izzy. Oh, that was terrible.

ROBBIE: What happened?

AGRIN: Why did you bring that up?

ROBBIE: Because that's part of your life.

AGRIN: Oh. My mother lived in a, how do they call those apartments? Railroad apartments. Do you know what a

railroad apartment is?

ROBBIE: Yes.

AGRIN: And it had to heat, the stove was in the kitchen only,
the stove.

ROBBIE: Yes.

AGRIN: So naturally this was winter. For a fact, it was the
second of January, because it was the day after the
first of January that Izzy slept late. He didn't work
that day. My brother Izzy. What a wonderful boy. Of
course, it's so many years, I hardly remember. I was
married already, then. And I had already you
(Yiddish). That was later. And he got up early in
the morning and he put on, he had a little gas stove in
his room at the end of the railroad, you know, far away
from the kitchen. So he lit that little stove to warm
up the room to get up. It was the second of January,
very cold. The winters used to be colder, I think,
many years ago. Well, anyway, somebody, whoever got up
early, I cannot remember any more, maybe it was I who
got up early . . .

ROBBIE: You didn't live there.

AGRIN: Oh, I was married already. I didn't live there. Well, whoever it was was in a terrible accident. Put up the coffee with a . . .

ROBBIE: On the stove.

AGRIN: No. First Izzy got up. So he wanted to warm up the room. So he had a little stove in his room. So he put on the little stove and went back to bed, warming up the room for him to get up. Somebody in the kitchen, I think it was Bella, put on the light in the kitchen to make coffee, and then she turned off, she took off the light, and at the same time when she . . .

ROBBIE: Turned off the gas.

AGRIN: . . . turned off the gas, it turned off in the other room, too, you know. There wasn't enough gas, you know what I mean. So if you put on that light . . .

ROBBIE: When she put on the gas in the kitchen, it turned it off.

AGRIN: It stopped in there, but the gas was still open, and that's how the tragedy happened. Bella put on the gas in the kitchen, and that's what happened. And here Izzy doesn't get up. And we go into his -- I wasn't there. I didn't live there any more. They go into the room, Izzy's dead. He's asleep, and the gas is full of room, the room was full of gas, that the jet was left open. And that's how he died.

ROBBIE: A terrible tragedy. How old was he?

AGRIN: I think he was nineteen. A handsome young man. (they sigh) You've got that over here?

ROBBIE: One of your other brothers died young, too.

AGRIN: Abie died young. Abie was the sick boy all his life. He got spinal meningitis when nobody knew what it was.

ROBBIE: And they didn't have any cure.

AGRIN: He suffered a long time. A couple of years. For a fact, he got married to Helen. My mother didn't want them to get married. She knew, she told Helen that he's dying, but she wouldn't listen, and she married

him. You know Helen.

ROBBIE: And the rest of the family, all your sisters and brothers grew up.

AGRIN: Yeah.

ROBBIE: And became successful, some more than others.

AGRIN: Not successful.

ROBBIE: Who was the most successful?

AGRIN: I think Nat was.

ROBBIE: And how did he make his money?

AGRIN: He made his money in Wall Street, I believe. It was a miracle that he turned out so well and so rich.

ROBBIE: And the children of your sisters and brothers. How did they turn out?

AGRIN: Not bad, not bad.

ROBBIE: How did your children turn out?

AGRIN: Thank God, my children are fine.

ROBBIE: You have a son.

AGRIN: Wonderful. A daughter a teacher and a son a doctor, couldn't be better. (she laughs) Couldn't be better.

ROBBIE: Are you happy that you came to this country?

AGRIN: Well, I didn't know much about the other country. I was young. What did I know?

ROBBIE: But as you look back now, do you think you were better off being here?

AGRIN: Oh, well, no doubt. Of course. Of course, I don't know anything about there. This is my home, you know. I was here.

ROBBIE: And you made a wonderful life with a third grade education.

AGRIN: Well, look who I married. He had less education than I.

ROBBIE: And together you were able to raise your children, send

the son through medical school, and the daughter through college. You did all right, Mom.

AGRIN: Yeah, I'm not complaining.

ROBBIE: And how are you feeling today?

AGRIN: Like an old lady. I'd like to feel like ten years ago, at least.

ROBBIE: And you've got a lot of years left.

AGRIN: Yeah, but look how many years, how old I am. How could it be a lot of years left. It couldn't be a lot of years left.

ROBBIE: Whatever is left you'll make the best of.

AGRIN: Of course. (end of tape)