1. Family Origins

***Audio note*[1]**

MA: My father came to England in the early 1880s[2]. It was the time of the great wave of pogroms in Russia and, you know, it was time to get out. What stimulated him a little further was that he was approaching the age when he had been conscripted for the Russian Army..

DA. Which was, how old?

MA: which was around 18[3]. So, he thought well it is time to go. He lived in a sizeable town by Russian peasant standards called Grodna[4].

Abram Abramovicz

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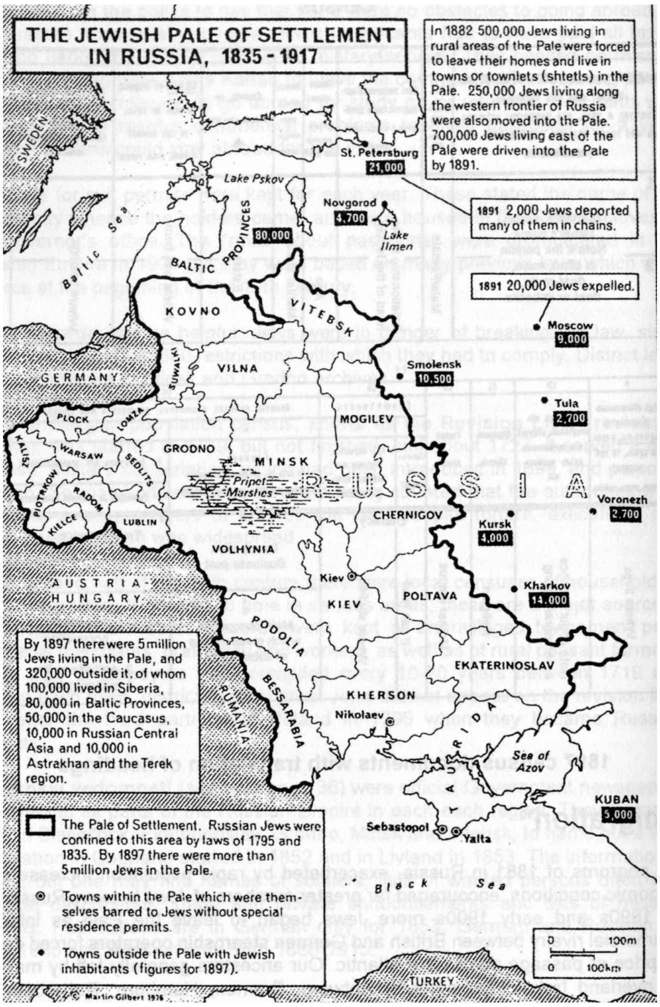
[1] Tape 1, Side A; Audio data file: Marktape1. There is poor tape quality for the first 20 minutes, after which it improves

[2] Paul Walman notes: Both parents came from the Pale of Settlement. From Abram Abrams Naturalisation papers they came to England – 1891. Originally lived in Friedrichstadt (now Jaunielgava) Latvia (Latitude: 56° 37' 0 N, Longitude: 25° 4' 60 E). Stated he joined the Russian army in 1888.

[3] Rebecca Abrams adds: Shortly before he died Frank Adams (Mark's younger brother, who changed his name to Adams in order to be able to serve in the British army) told me that Abram was forcibly conscripted into the Tsar's army. This was normal practice in the Pale of Settlement, although Mark was wrong about the age. In fact, Jewish boys as young as 12 or 14 were routinely conscripted at that time. (See Walter Lacqueur History of Zionism, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972, p 57.) According to Frank Adams, every year on his birthday, the Tsar pulled lots for the names of Jewish soldiers who would be released from service. By a miracle Abram's name came up and he and his friend David Isaakovitz decided to leave at once for Britain.

[4] Grodno/Hrodna, a town in which Jews were permitted to live and had a sizeable Jewish population in the late 19th century. Grodna was in Belarus, just across the border from Lithuanian, but it was all part of the Russian empire at that point. In an interview by Rebecca Abrams in 1986 Mark states: "My father had had a little more travel experience in that he had moved for a job to Riga which was probably the biggest port in the Baltic at the time and knocked around there for a bit and then on to another big town Kovna." "My mother came from a village in Lithuania called Pusushva and he came from an even smaller village and I can't remember its name".


SWEDEN
Baltic Sea
Lake Pskov
St. Petersburg
21,000
Novgorod
4,700
Lake Ilmen
BALTIC PROVINCES
80,000
Moscow
9,000
KOVNO
VITEBSK
GERMANY
SUWALKI
VILNA
Smolensk
10,500
Tula
2,700
PLOCK
LOMZA
MOGILEV
WARSAW
GRODNO
KALISZ
SEDLITS
MINSK
PIOTRKOW
RADOM
Pripet Marshes
RUSSIA
Voronezh
2,700
KIELCE
LUBLIN
CHERNIGOV
Kursk
4,000
VOLHYNIA
AUSTRIA-HUNGARY
Kiev
KIEV
POLTAVA
Kharkov
14,000
PODOLIA
EKATERINOSLAV
RUMANIA
BESSARABIA
KHERSON
Nikolaev
TAURIDA
Sea of Azov
KUBAN
5,000
Sebastopol
Yalta
Black Sea
0 100m
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TURKEY

THE JEWISH PALE OF SETTLEMENT IN RUSSIA, 1835 - 1917

In 1882 500,000 Jews living in rural areas of the Pale were forced to leave their homes and live in towns or townlets (shtetls) in the Pale. 250,000 Jews living along the western frontier of Russia were also moved into the Pale. 700,000 Jews living east of the Pale were driven into the Pale by 1891.

1891 2,000 Jews deported many of them in chains.

1891 20,000 Jews expelled.

By 1897 there were 5million Jews living in the Pale, and 320,000 outside it, of whom 100,000 lived in Siberia, 80,000 in Baltic Provinces, 50,000 in the Caucasus, 10,000 in Russian Central Asia and 10,000 in Astrakhan and the Terek region.

▭ The Pale of Settlement. Russian Jews were confined to this area by laws of 1795 and 1835. By 1897 there were more than 5million Jews in the Pale.

⊙ Towns within the Pale which were themselves barred to Jews without special residence permits.

● Towns outside the Pale with Jewish inhabitants (figures for 1897).

Martin Gilbert 1976

He came to this country. He had no particular trade, being 18 years of age. All he had done was some fishing, in Riga, in the Baltic, but that is no trade in the East End of London.

DA: What would he have done if he had stayed in the Baltic and Russia?

MA: He would probably have settled permanently in Riga, which is a big town and had the great advantage, as far as he was concerned, of what is called intellectual stimulus. There were newspapers, there were books, there were people who incessantly argued about insoluble problems, and that's what he loved.

They came to London, went straight to the East End. As a great many immigrants from Lithuania and Poland and Latvia did. And there, I don't know how, in what way, he met my mother.

DA: Did he have any other relatives in the East End? Did he go to anyone?

MA: No, he went to a brother who had immigrated just slightly earlier, about a year earlier, who had settled in the West End. What is often overlooked I think is that the Jewish immigration was almost considered as being immigration to the East End of London. Well, in a very large extent, it was. But there was an equally important settlement in Soho, particularly the garment trade, for peddlers, for people who sold things from stalls and barrows and so on. And his brother settled there.

DA: So we already had some family here?

MA: Yes, but I don't think they had seen much of each other and I don't think they continued to see much of each other - they knew each other and saw each other. He just went to the East End of London for one very good reason. He had already heard that the real radical movement in this country was among the Jews of the East End[5]. That was true and one of the great German anarchists, Rudolf Rocker, who didn't know a word of Yiddish when he came to England, in fact, went to special efforts to learn Yiddish because he was told the only audience for the anarchist, would be among the East End Jews, who were crazy (!). So that was one reason for going to the East End, also there was a Jewish theatre there which rather interested him[6].

And he took various jobs — making cigarettes, making walking sticks, anything that turned up. The one thing that he didn't do was tailoring. He never knew anything about that. It was always – little jobs that you could take on for a few days and then drop, or do on your own time, and do as a self-employed person, which was terribly important to him.

DA: Would he have had that opportunity had he not come to England?

MA: I don't imagine so. He would have been an employee of some kind, or he would have got stuck, if he had stayed in his birthplace, he would have been stuck in a Jewish community, which was absolutely ringed round. It was a ghetto. But he regarded himself, for what it is worth, a philosophical anarchist. The essence of philosophical anarchism is that you consider it degrading to be in a relationship where you are the servant of someone else, but it is, if anything, even more degrading to be an employer of anyone else. So, you have to work for yourself, that's all. And jobs like making walking sticks for special customers, or making a few hundred cigarettes – you were your own master, your own workman. So, that is what attracted him to the East End and there are lots of little jobs like that.

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[5] Paul Walman adds: The German gentile wrote *The London Years* by Rudolf Rocker published in 1956. This book was an insight to life in London during his time in London between 1895 and 1914 and reflects the plight of the Jewish Russian immigrant workers. In the book Annie's brother David Isakovitch is mentioned a number of times. David later went on to write "A History of The Haymarket Affair" (Under his new name of Henry David) which was about a demonstration and unrest that took place on May 4 1886 at the Haymarket Square in Chicago.

[6] Most likely the East End Yiddish Theatre, see also http://www.jewishmuseum.org.uk/

DA: Why do you think he became an anarchist? What …..

MA: I think, partly, this was his urban contacts in Russia. Grodno[7], which by our standards is a small town, but by the standards of Jews who lived in tiny villages in the settlement, it was a metropolitan town. And to go Riga[8] was like going to New York today. It was a great Baltic centre, with a very… long history in the Baltic, as a centre. And that's where I think he picked up his interest there and was greatly fed by the activity of the radical Jews of the East End[9]. He used to, later on, drag me, walking miles and miles because he could never afford fare money, to meetings of the Workers Circle in Cable Street[10], to listen to them. And I had a great victory when later on I made him compromise and let me go and hear some of the Clydeside Rebels, who were orthodox members of the Independent Labour Party (laughs). That's right, he thought he was really getting on that. He would stand behind and say , "Hmm, that fella's soff, that fell's soff!"[sic], and the contempt in his voice must have reached even the man on the soapbox. Anyway that's where he settled.

And then the problem, once he got married[11] was, how do you make a living of some kind, without disgracing yourself, and making enough not only to buy herrings and potatoes for yourself, but also for a wife, and for a growing number of children?

DA: Where did your mother come from?

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[7] Grodno, spelled Hrodna on the map, 100km south west of Vilnius, on the Belarus/Poland border http://www.viamichelin.com/viamichelin/gbr/dyn/controller/mapPerformPage?expressMap=false&act=&pim=true&strAddress=&strCP=&strLocation=Grodno&strCountry=1794&productId=&x=27&y=10

[8] Capital of Latvia

[9] Rebecca Abrams notes: See East End Jewish Radicals by William J Fishman for historical corroboration. Peter Kropotkin and Rudolf Rocker spoke at meetings during this period.

[10] Rebecca Abrams notes: The Workers Circle was an organization formed by Jewish immigrants from Russia to promote self education, literary work and support for those of the community sick or unemployed. The initial group, the Arbeiter Ring Verein, with a membership of twelve was formed in June 1908 in what is now Tower Hamlets; a second was formed independently by five members and called the Freie Arbeiter Ring, holding its first meeting in July 1909. The two groups came into contact a year later and merged in July 1911. From 1912 the Circle had used rooms at 136 Brick Lane for its activities. In 1924 Circle House, Alie Street, E1 was purchased as the headquarters. May have held meetings in Cable Street as Mark says

[11] Mark and Frank told Rebecca that Abram and Annie met through her brother David David (nee Isaakovitz), and that Annie was already living and working in the East End of London when they arrived. According to Mark, it was Annie who decided they would get married and Annie who officially gave him the name Abramovitz on the marriage certificate.

Annie Isaacoff

MA: She came from Lithuania[12]. It was a small village outside Vilna[13], which was then Russian, not Polish, as it is today[14]. So he began looking around for things to do that would be more stable, and what he picked up was being a peddler. He was able to hire a pony and a trap and get credit to buy various bits of haberdashery. And then he would load up and go off to the little villages of Hertfordshire, particularly Hertfordshire was his favourite place.

DA: When was this?

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[12] Paul Walman adds: Pašušvys- pronounced Pusushva, geographical location: Kedainiu, Kaunas, Lithuania, Europe, geographical coordinates: 55° 24' 0" North, 23° 38' 0" East – Information from both her brother's (David & Jacob) Naturalisation papers

[13] Yiddish name for Vilnius, capital of Lithuania

Paul Walman provided the following information on Annie and Abram:

Annie Isaacoff (also known as Issacorwitz):

Father: Nathan Isaacoff Issacorwitz: *Mother:* Pauline (Frumma Pescha) Saffer, *Birth*: Abt. 1872 in Pasusvys Kovno; Latitude / Longitude 56 00 24 00 E; *Married* Abram Abramovicz, 02 Oct 1892 in East London Synagogue.

Residence: 02 Oct 1892 Lane Place; 08 Nov 1893 28 Steward Street, Old Artillery Ground, London; 1896 1 Chance Street - Bethnal Green; 02 Jul 1900 5 Lebanon Terrace Hyde Lane; 02 Apr 1901 31 Cedar Terrace Edmonton; 20 Sep 1902 33 Cedar Terrace Rosebury Road, Edmonton; 27 Apr 1906 57 Balfour Road Edmonton; 28 Feb 1909 57 Balfour Road Edmonton; 02 Apr 1911 4 Moscow Street, Leeds; 11 May 1914 73 Town Road Edmonton; 03 Jul 1941 46 Park Avenue, Bush Hill Park, London.

Death: 01 Mar 1959 in 46 Park Ave Bush Hill Park; *Burial:* 01 Mar 1959 in Western Edmonton

Abram Abramovicz

Father: Lazarus (Lewis) Abramovicz; *Mother*: Sarah Katz

Birth: Abt. 1867 in Friedrichstadt (now Jaunielgava) Latvia; *Military Service*: Abt. 1888; Russia

Immigration: 1891 in London, aged 24. .

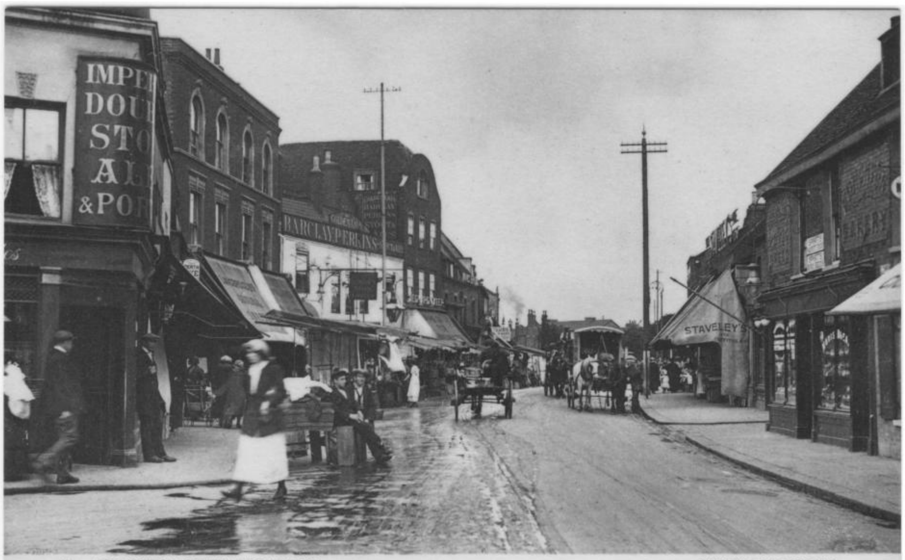
Residence: 02 Oct 1892 66 Brick Lane London; 08 Nov 1893 28 Steward Street and then as Annie (Chance Street onwards), though he did not move to Leeds for the period that Annie was there.

Adopted the name Abram Abrams in appox 1894 and had a certificate No 191102 issued by the board of trade to use the name for business purposes. Initially traded in Boots and Shoes for the fist 8 years and had a boot stall in Edmonton Green. Also started a drapery business and rented stall No 33 & 38.

Children: Nancy Abrams; Lizzie (Bessie) Abrams; Lily Abrams; Ida Abrams; Joe Abrams; Max Alexander (Mark) Abrams; Hilda Abrams;Frank Percy Adams

[14] In the interview with Rebecca Abrams 2 years later he says it was part of the Russian empire at the time.

MA: Well I can tell you[15], because he was already established in that kind of work when I was about 6 or 7. It was before World War 1, and I was always taken on his outings. It was wonderful! We would go off in the pony and trap and we would just meander on and on, and we'd come to a pub and say, "This is the place!", and get down, go in. And I remember on one occasion he left me in the trap, forgetting that the pony wanted to eat as well. The pony began eating the grass that rose steeply up the bank. And as the pony got higher and higher up the bank I got lower and lower, until I thought I was going to be well below the pony. And I began screaming, and he came out and pulled the pony back and took me into the pub with him. Which he did regularly after that. When that seemed reasonably adequate, he felt he ought to lead a more stable life, so we moved to Edmonton. At Edmonton we used the front room, which had ordinary windows like any other little house, as a place of display for his goods and wares.[16] We occasionally got a customer, but not very often! [laughs] So from there he branched out and took a stall in the Edmonton Green Market, where things began to look up.



29. EDMONTON GREEN ABOUT 1914 ENFIELD LIBRARIES

The Market, Edmonton Green, London N9 c 1915[17]

And, from that…

DA: What was your mother doing this time?

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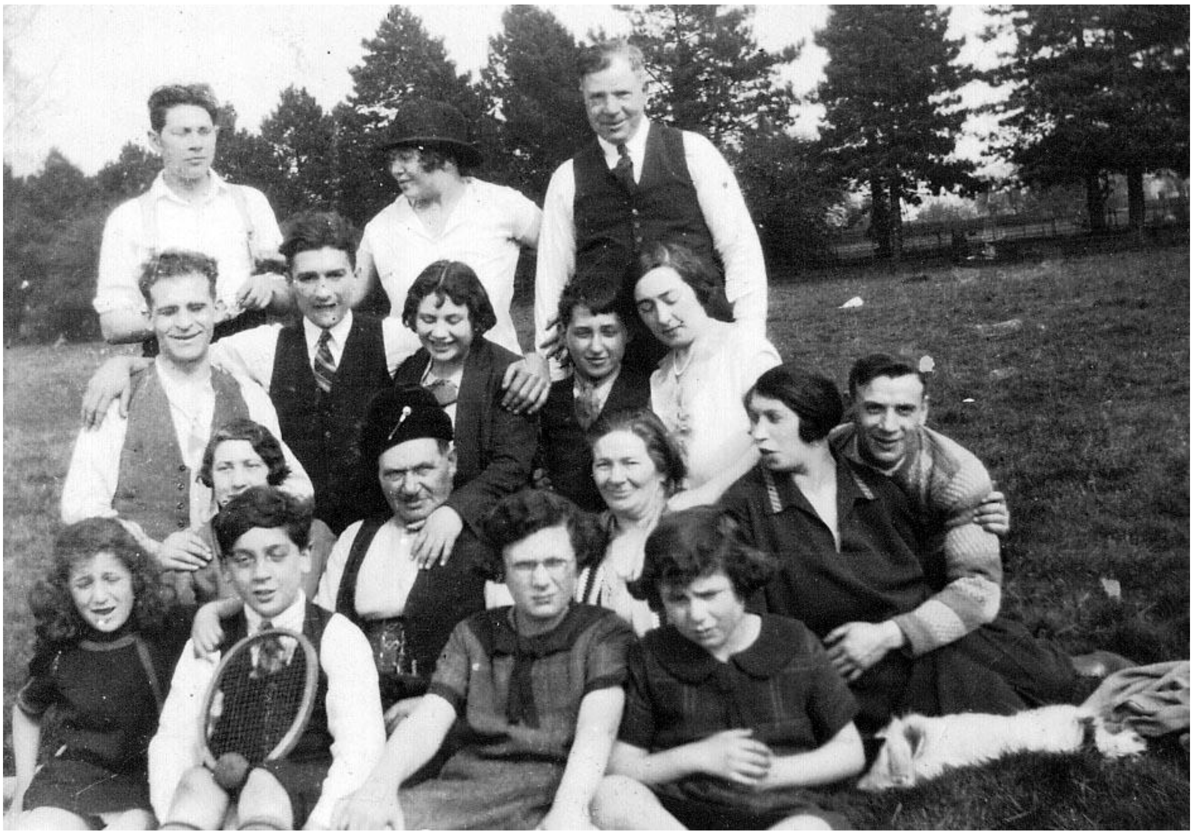
[15] In the interview with Rebecca, Mark states that he was born at 73 Town Road, Elm Road, Edmonton, London N9 early in April 1906 but that his mother delayed registering his birth until the 27th of April because she was afraid he could be repatriated to fight for the Tsar's (Russian) army.

[16] According to Abram's naturalisation papers, he first worked as an itinerant pedlar, then ran a boot stall in Edmonton market, and then set up shop in the front room of the family house in Edmonton. Eventually he seems to have bought the house next door and was running a haberdashery shop from the knocked together front rooms of both these houses.

[17] A postcard from Enfield Library's collection. Paul Walman notes: Abram ladies outfitters occupied numbers 33 and 35, between Geary's bakery (37,closest, without the canopy on the right) and Staveley Provisions (31, next to the telegraph pole on the right) on the west side of The Green. Later Joe opened a hairdressers at number 19. See also http://lower-edmonton.anidea.co.uk/local/thegreen/thegreen.html

MA: She was looking after six children, plus another two who came later. And she was doing odd jobs like cutting down clothes and making them fit the younger children. And she also did the writing for my father, because she could write in Yiddish. And she could read Yiddish. And he never bothered[18].



Abrams Family Picnic in Wormley, Essex, 1926[19]

Back Row (Left to Right): Mark Abrams, Lily Tropp (nee Abrams), Meyer Tropp
2nd *From back*: Sam Marcovich, [unknown] Hilda Abrams, Joe Abrams, Sadie Abrams (nee Miller)
3rd *From back*: Bessie Markovich (nee Abrams), Abraham Abrams, Annie Abrams (nee Issacrowitz), Ida Walman (nee Abrams), Lew Walman
Front Row: Pauline Marcovich, Frank Abrams, [unknown, unknown]

DA: He just spoke?

MA: He spoke it and he read printed Yiddish, which was fine – there were always two or three Yiddish papers around the place, but written Yiddish, he never thought it was worth his while.

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[18] In descending order of age: Nancy, Lizzie (Bessie), Lily, Ida, Joe, Max Alexander (Mark), Hilda, Frank.

[19] Supplied by Paul Walman. According to his father, Ida was apparently pregnant at the time.

DA: I remember you telling me about his political activities. When did they really take off?

MA: They took off while he was still in the East End and his first years in Edmonton in North London. Incidentally, this is related to his political activities: in the house in Edmonton we had four pictures on the wall – one was a portrait of Émile Zola[20]. Of course, because of the Dreyfus affair; one was a portrait which I have never seen anywhere else – I've never seen the Zola one anywhere else – it was a portrait of Kropotkin[21]

DA: Why was that?

MA: Why that? – because he was the father of philosophical anarchism. And then there were two pictures – reproductions – one of the Worker's Daughter, and one of the Squire's Daughter – the Squire's Daughter was haughty, aloof, arrogant looking, dressed in fine clothes, but looking as sour as sour milk. The Worker's Daughter was chubby, rosy cheeked, eating away, and hugging a loaf to her chest. The contrast, and the lesson, and the moral, was obvious: If you want to be happy, don't have anything to do with these rich so and so's – stay away from them [laughing].

DA: That was the message on the wall all the time?

MA: All the time. And he never parted from them.

DA: Where are they now? Have you still got them?

MA: I think what happened was that they went not to my eldest sister, who left home at the age of 14[22]. She found life was a little too intensive. She emigrated to America with my uncle[23]. But the next daughter, Bessie, I think she got them when she got married, when she came out of the synagogue. She was told it was a present. It was hoped this would poison her husband's mind and stop him being a paid labourer. He was tailor with regular job [laughs].

Well, he then went and got another stall in Hertford and ran the two together. But always, no paid help.

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[20] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89mile_Zola
[21] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kropotkin
[22] Paul Walman adds: Nancy was 17 when she arrived in New York
[23] Paul Walman adds: She was alone – Uncle David had gone 3 years earlier.

DA: Because you were helping?

MA: I would help on the Edmonton one mainly, but occasionally he would take me out to Hertford and I would help out as well. For some reason or another the other children didn't. They were busy – at the age of 13 left school and you had to go to work and bring in some money. So as long as I wasn't 13, and then when I was 13 I was trapped into this educational ladder so I was always available. You could always fit in education sometime.

And then from that point he decided, okay, that he could now, with the assistance from my mother and me and my younger sister Hilda, he could operate a proper shop. So he opened a shop in Edmonton, in The Green. The Green was the marketplace, the central marketplace for Edmonton, and it sold clothes and stockings, you know the usual sort of glorified haberdashery clothesware sort of shop. Which did reasonably well, until the war broke out. And then there was a great outburst, understandable I suppose, of anti-Germanism. Everyone who couldn't speak cockney was considered a German in Edmonton, and of course Jews couldn't speak like cockneys. So, it began to get very, very hot for Jewish people who couldn't speak English properly. They were accused of being German.

DA: Can I just ask what was the house you lived in like? Can you remember that?

MA: Yea, very clearly. Front parlour, front window, it was full of things he wanted to sell, not the full range but two or three things. Then there was one room, the parlour, which had aspidistra in. My mother always insisted that there should be a large aspidistra, a couple of arm chairs, and a sofa, and a little table. No one ever went in there. Then there was an intermediary room which was meant to be a dining room, but in fact it housed a table[24]. My mother was determined that we should all be great musicians. She didn't know what she was up against! It was dreadful [laughs]. And where we ate was in the next room, the kitchen. That was really the centre of the house, which had an open grate and was always food going on it, because with eight children you can't sit them down all together. And also you can't count on them all turning up at the same time. So, there was a permanent supply of fried things like fried fish, or latkes, or candied orange peel. Anything that would make room for itself on the open fire.

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[24] He says table, but in his interview with Rebecca he talks about the piano which was positioned in a middle room of the house that everyone passed through. His piano teacher was the son of the caretaker of Edmonton Jewish Cemetery.

And then there was the scullery. The scullery had a copper – a large open copper, where you did boiling of your clothes when you wanted to clean them. That had a little fire underneath it and the fire was going, the water was getting warm, you pushed in all the clothes with a stick, added some soap and let it boil, for a bit – stirred it from time-to-time and took it out, and then came the tough job of putting it through the mangle. God! Have you ever tried working a mangle? You could tear your guts out when turning the handle on some of those clothes. It was all right, it was fine after a while. You would see who'd win – would you win or would the mangle win? [laughs]. Usually I won.

DA: Sounds like a really big house.

MA: No, they were all very small rooms. It was part of a terrace. And then there was a reasonably long garden. And we had a civilised neighbour, the Mattocks. And they suggested that we'd both benefit if the fence between their house and our house was pulled down. We'd then have the illusion that we each had a large garden. And strangely enough, it worked. This stuff by the American poet[25], you know that 'good fences make good neighbours', turned out to be absolutely wrong. Pulling down the fences really helped in that case. Then, in our part of the garden, we kept chickens. So we had eggs regularly and, once or twice a year, we would have our own chicken to eat as well. You know, we would all go out and feed the chickens with maize and oats.

To cope with the conviction that all Jews were Germans, my father took into partnership a man who had a son in the army. So he stuck in the window of this shop a photograph of this son in his army uniform, showing that at least, you know, we were on the right side. And then by a sheer fluke, this cousin of mine he would be, the son of my father's relation in the West End, joined the army, became an expert on how to operate a machine gun, and had his photograph taken operating his machine gun, or ready to operate his machine gun [laughing]. This also was put in the window – this was Lew, our cousin, the machine gunner, from Soho.

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[25] This probably refers to Robert Frost, who didn't write the words, which came from an old proverb, but wrote a poem around them "Mending Wall". See: http://www.writing.upenn.edu/~afilreis/88/frost-mending.html

Lew [Walman] 'The Machine Gunner', approx 1919

DA: Did this placate the neighbourhood?

MA: Well, yea. Oh, yes we were regarded as okay. Then after the war, you see this was by 1918, when I was already 12 – up til then in Edmonton I had gone to Montague Road Elementary School, which was about, I suppose, two and half miles away. We walked at 8:00 in the morning and then walked back again at 12, and then walked back again at half past one, and then walked back again at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. It was absolute hell. Because among other things, it passed what I thought was the biggest Jewish cemetery in England. The Montague Road Cemetery – and I thought, my God, how quickly can I get past the cemetery?

But, it was a very tough school. I remember my first week there. There was always, among the regular students, there were always 20 or 30 gypsies. Because there was lots of open space there and they used to park near the school. And the biggest of the gypsies picked on me in the first couple of days, to fight me. Well, my fighting tactics were very simple. As soon as I saw him approaching, I backed. And I kept on backing – round and round the field, until he got tired [laughing]. My brother was watching this, my older brother, and he said, "Ah, that is not the way you fight. When you see him approaching to you, and is within a couple of feet of you, push out your right arm as hard as you can and hit him somewhere. And then while he is still bewildered that you are actually hitting him, hit him again doing the same thing with the other arm – straight out". I thought, fine. "Should we practice it?" He said, “No, no, no we don’t need practice. No one to practice on here, except me. You remember and do it, cause he’ll pick on you again tomorrow. He has already been telling his pals what he is going to do to you tomorrow”.

DA: You must have been terrified.

MA: Yea, I was. But the tactic worked! He tried three or four times, coming straight at me – I pushed out my arm [laughs]. He gave up and after three or four. He went away. And he left me alone after that.

DA: A school toughie were you!?

MA: I wasn’t the school toughie, but at least I wasn’t kicked around or anything.

DA: And what did they teach you? Did you speak Yiddish at home or did you speak …

MA: No, we spoke at home – we spoke a mixture of Yiddish and English. In that my parents spoke Yiddish, but the children spoke English. And, although we could speak, the children could speak a little Yiddish, and my parents could speak a little English, neither of us would give way – we stuck to our languages, but it was all right[26]. We understood perfectly. And on the great holy days – like the New Year and the Day of Atonement and things like that, my mother would insist that I walked to Tottenham, which was the next borough, and go to the synagogue there. And my father would ostentatiously (when he should have been fasting), would ostentatiously eat his way through a rilo, [laughs] to show what he thought. But he never did anything positive, but it was just a sort of negative, to show that this was not really what he approved of. In fact there was one rule in the Abrams family that was never broken by either of them. That you must never, under any circumstances, hit one of the children. If the worst came to the worst the only way you could get relief from frustration or anger was to bang your head against the wall. They would do it. I’d seen both of them do it, rather than strike one of the children.

DA: Was that unusual at the time?

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[26] Rebecca Abrams adds: It states in Abram’s naturalisation documents that while he spoke good English as well as fluent Yiddish, he was barely literate in English. From his written test, you can see that he was simply copying the English letters from the given script, but did not know how to write. He was 50 years old at this point and had lived in England for 30 years. I remember Sonia saying that right up to the end of her life Annie never really learned English and mainly spoke in Yiddish. I also remember Mark saying his parents spoke Yiddish to one another.

MA: Oh it was very unusual. You could hear the yells coming from every house in the street, every minute of the day practically. When the husbands weren't beating their children, they were beating their wives. No, no, that was … I've never known … what I do remember of my mother, is something very striking that has stayed with me all my life … I don't see why I should be embarrassed. I'll tell you: The child after me was my sister, Hilda. And when she was still quite young, my mother was breast-feeding her, and I came into the room and I saw this strange animal being breast-fed (I knew it was my sister alright), and my mother looked up and saw me looking sort of half puzzled, half you know. And what she did was to pull her breast down out of Hilda's mouth and, squirt my face with it with the milk .. warm milk all over my face! Then we looked at each other and then burst out laughing. And that, I will always remember. You know, this warm milk and then the minute, no, quarter of a minute, of absolute silence, and then we both burst out laughing. And that was typical of her. And if she wanted to show me what an awful swine I was, she would go and beat her head on the wall rather than mine.

DA: Sounds quite a strong woman.

MA: Yes, she was small, she was pretty, but she knew what one should do and what one shouldn't do. One of her favourite sayings, and of my father's as well, but more hers, was, and I think it is the same in German, -- "*es passt nicht*", -- it is not becoming for a Jewish person to do a thing like that …*es passt nicht*. And we knew that when she said that it meant, 'Please, don't do that'. And that was as far as she ever went in a rebuke. What was much more common with her, she would say, "Where are you going now?" And I say, "I am going to walk down the street to see what is on at the movies, not the movies, the picture palace." And she would say, "Are you going to walk all that way. Put an apple in your pocket. And here I've got some warm latkes I've just fried … put one of those in your pocket, you'll be hungry." Now I had to wrestle with her almost to prevent her putting food in my pockets! That was her contribution to my upbringing. My father's contribution was to inculcate me with his idea of sound, political society.

DA: So, we've got to just after the war. Were you very conscious of the war, or was it just kind of …

MA: Yea, I was conscious of the war because the Zeppelins were dropping bombs near us. In Wormley, Hertfordshire, we could see them going over. There was a terrible blackout. There was no food. The reason we had chickens and then began to grow potatoes was that there was no sort of rationing. You waited for someone to say, “Do you know they’ve got potatoes at so and so?”, and then the whole street would make a rush! If you were very lucky you could get some things called artichokes … we never knew how to cook artichokes. But we always took what we could. And that was one reason for our attempt at self-sufficiency.

Well, then from Edmonton, there was a scholarship examination held, when you were 11, to go to Latymer School Edmonton, Latymer Grammar School. And for the whole of Edmonton, I suppose in a normal year, there would be about 10 places. It was primarily a fee paying school. Maybe a dozen, I don’t know. But anyway when my year came I said, yes, I would take it, and I came top. I was given an enormous bound volume of Boy’s Own Paper to celebrate this [laughs]. And I went to Edmonton Latymer School, where I played football, I never got to the top of my form. But usually I was second or third or fourth and the form teacher would say….

Audio note[27]

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