**Kate:** Good morning. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service. Today is the 27th of April, 1994 and I’m in Chicago, Illinois at the home of Sylvia Myers who came from Russia in 1923 when she was 14 years old. Why don’t you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth please?

**Sylvia:** My name is Sylvia Myers. I came here in 1923. I was born March 1st, 1908.

**Kate:** What was your maiden name?

**Sylvia:** Darkova.

**Kate:** How do you spell that?

**Sylvia:** D-A-R-K-O-V-A, but that’s my American name.

**Kate:** What was it originally?

**Sylvia:** Derkovskia.

**Kate:** How do you spell that?

**Sylvia:** D-E-R-K-O-V-S-K-I-A.

**Kate:** Where were you born?

**Sylvia:** I was born in a village, [unclear 00:00:56]

**Kate:** Could you spell that for us?

**Sylvia:** [unclear 00:01:02]? I wish I could get it.

**Kate:** I’ll take it later then from the records. What did the town look like?

**Sylvia:** 13 houses with straw roofs.

**Kate:** What size town was that then you saw people, how many people? 13 families?

**Sylvia:** The peasants had a lot of children. My mother had four.

**Kate:** But 13 families then?

**Sylvia:** Yes, 13 houses so 13 families.

**Kate:** What was the major industry or major thing at the town then?

**Sylvia:** That was farming and my uncle- my father -we had where they slaughter cow- meat.

**Kate:** Your father had that?

**Sylvia:** Yes. He was a butcher but there we used to have… we’re Jewish so we used to have a [unclear 00:02:07], what they called, coming to kill the cows. They used to cut the neck, they didn’t kill them on the head because some of the parts of meat was kosher, Jewish, and some was not. They used to go to different towns to sell it on a wagon and a horse.

**Kate:** This town that you lived in, its name you said was…the village, what was the name of that specific place?

**Sylvia:** [unclear 00:02:38].

**Kate:** And the other name you gave me, what was that? The one we’ll get from the records.

**Sylvia:** [unclear 00:02:44]? That’s the Gubernia, that’s a state.

**Kate:** What was the largest town?

**Sylvia:** After the revolution we went to a city.

**Kate:** But what would you say was the largest city near you?

**Sylvia:** [unclear 00:03:00].

**Kate:** I’ll have to get this, the spelling of that. What was your father’s name?

**Sylvia:** Aron.

**Kate:** Can you spell that please?

**Sylvia:** A-R-O-N.

**Kate:** His occupation was a butcher you said.

**Sylvia:** Yes.

**Kate:** What did he look like?

**Sylvia:** I don’t know. I was a year old when he passed away. I don’t know.

**Kate:** Did they say anything to you about his personality or his temperament?

**Sylvia:** I don’t know anything about him.

**Kate:** How about your mother’s name?

**Sylvia:** My mother’s name was Hana Rochol.

**Kate:** Could you spell that for us for the records?

**Sylvia:** C-H-A-N-A. Rochol is R-O-C-H-O-L. Here she was called Anna.

**Kate:** What was her maiden name?

**Sylvia:** Fonkatz, F-O-N-K-A-T-Z.

**Kate:** What was her occupation?

**Sylvia:** My occupation?

**Kate:** Her, your mother’s.

**Sylvia:** She took over when my father died. She did the same thing.

**Kate:** She was a butcher. What did she look like?

**Sylvia:** A little bit like me.

**Kate:** How tall was she then?

**Sylvia:** That time I think she was tall. I used to be tall. I was 5’3 now I’m not even 5’.

**Kate:** How about 5’3?

**Sylvia:** About 5’4, she was taller.

**Kate:** How about her hair and eyes? Was she fair?

**Sylvia:** She was fair-skinned like me, she had my eyes, but she had dark hair. I have dark hair too.

**Kate:** What about her personality and temperament? Could you tell us?

**Sylvia:** My mother used to like people and talk like me.

**Kate:** She liked to communicate?

**Sylvia:** Yes.

**Kate:** What were her chores around the house? Did she also work at home?

**Sylvia:** I was a year old when my father died. There was a brother who was seven, one sister five, one three, and I’m one, so we had a peasant girl taking care of us. Mother has to deliver the meat all over the towns around us.

**Kate:** So the peasant girl, what were here chores? What did she do besides taking care of you? Did she make food?

**Sylvia:** Yes.

**Kate:** She cleaned the house?

**Sylvia:** Yes.

**Kate:** Your mother basically brought in the money with the butcher?

**Sylvia:** She cooked too when she got home.

**Kate:** Did you help her?

**Sylvia:** Me? I was too little. I had a sister older. She was 10 years old when she start cooking.

**Kate:** Do you have a story that you associate with your mother, a favorite story about your mother that you remember?

**Sylvia:** Favorite story? That I must tell you, when I was a little girl but I remember, they tried to marry her off. She had four children and it was in another town. My mother got dressed up, she had braids, she had a beautiful checked tied velvet checked. She was going to meet the man. She went to that bigger town to meet the man and she came back very disappointed. He had six children but he didn’t want her because she had four. That’s the most important that I remember.

**Kate:** Where was the town that she went to? What town was that? Do you remember the name of it?

**Sylvia:** Gluchov.

**Kate:** How do you spell that?

**Sylvia:** G-L-U-C-H-O-V.

**Kate:** Who was trying to marry her off? Was she trying herself?

**Sylvia:** No, somebody recommended her.

**Kate:** This fella was recommended to her.

**Sylvia:** Yes, and she went there. She had a sister in that town so she went there and came back disappointed.

**Kate:** She never tried it again?

**Sylvia:** No.

**Kate:** Could you name your brothers and sisters please?

**Sylvia:** My brother was Abram, A-B-R-A-M, my sister, the older sister was Sonia, my other sister was Dora.

**Kate:** Dora was younger?

**Sylvia:** I’m the youngest. Dora was older, Sonia just passed away.

**Kate:** How much older was your brother?

**Sylvia:** My brother was seven years older than I, then came my sister, then came my other sister, then I came. Mother was only married eight years when my father died.

**Kate:** Do you remember your house in the small town?

**Sylvia:** Yes, I remember the house.

**Kate:** What kind of house was it? Tell us about it. Could you describe it?

**Sylvia:** There was a big kitchen, that’s the first house that I remember, like a living room but there was another room in the back. When my father took sick he had TB so nobody could come in there. Then there was like a bedroom but everybody had their own little bed. Nobody slept together. That’s all I remember.

**Kate:** The house, you said, had a straw roof. What was the walls made of? Was it brick or wood?

**Sylvia:** Wood.

**Kate:** It was a wooden house with a straw…

**Sylvia:** Yes but we had a brick oven. There was on the oven we used to sleep there in the winter.

**Kate:** On top of the oven?

**Sylvia:** There was like a cubby-hole. You could sleep there because it was warm there.

**Kate:** How was your house lit?

**Sylvia:** Kerosene lamp.

**Kate:** How was it heated?

**Sylvia:** Heated by wood and that stove. There was a brick thing built, big one, and there was an opening on top and it used to warm.

**Kate:** Was there a garden?

**Sylvia:** Yes, we had a garden.

**Kate:** What did you grow on the garden?

**Sylvia:** We had carrots, I don’t remember tomatoes but we had cucumbers. We used to take them up and wipe them up and eat them.

**Kate:** Did you keep animals at all?

**Sylvia:** Cats, of course we had a horse, and we had cattle.

**Kate:** What kind of furniture do you remember in that house?

**Sylvia:** Wood.

**Kate:** Did you have a table in the kitchen?

**Sylvia:** Yes, a big table in the kitchen. That was when I was little.

**Kate:** What about water?

**Sylvia:** Water? We used to go to the well.

**Kate:** To a well and carry water back.

**Sylvia:** Yes.

**Kate:** What about plumbing or going to the bathroom?

**Sylvia:** Outside. At night we had little pots.

**Kate:** What about taking baths, how did you do that?

**Sylvia:** We had like a barrel.

**Kate:** A big barrel?

**Sylvia:** It was sort of like a barrel. I remembered it as little as I was I remember it.

**Kate:** What was your favorite food when you were little? Did you have one?

**Sylvia:** Bread. When I was little we still had food. I used to like meat with potatoes mother used to make.

**Kate:** What was meal time like? You said you had a peasant girl taking care of you.

**Sylvia:** Actually, breakfast was bread and tea but then we had a meal about two o’clock which was a big meal. In the evening was a small meal. There was never dinner in the evening.

**Kate:** Then you kept kosher at home?

**Sylvia:** Yes, mother kept kosher.

**Kate:** Were there other relatives? What about your grandparents?

**Sylvia:** My grandparents lived in a different town. I don’t know much about them.

**Kate:** You never saw them very much?

**Sylvia:** I did see them but my grandmother died when I was very young but my grandfather used to come to visit us. I remember him with a beard.

**Kate:** Whose father was he, your mother’s or your father’s?

**Sylvia:** My mother’s.

**Kate:** Your mother’s father came to visit you. Describe him.

**Sylvia:** He was a tall man with a beard, a grey beard. That’s all I remember about him.

**Kate:** Do you know what he did for occupation?

**Sylvia:** He used to have a store, like a candy store when I was real little but later he went to live with his son in the city and he wasn’t doing anything anymore.

**Kate:** What town did they live in? Do you remember the name?

**Sylvia:** I don’t.

**Kate:** Was it far away?

**Sylvia:** Yes, it was far away, Romnie.

**Kate:** How do you spell that?

**Sylvia:** R-O-M-N-I-E.

**Kate:** When you say it was far, was it a day’s ride on a horse?

**Sylvia:** Yes, only horses. It was more than a day.

**Kate:** Who were you closest to in the family? If you were to pick somebody that was your closest person.

**Sylvia:** My sister.

**Kate:** Which one?

**Sylvia:** Dora.

**Kate:** Dora was your closest?

**Sylvia:** Yes, she raised me. When she was 10 years old she start cooking.

**Kate:** And she took care of you.

**Sylvia:** That was after revolution.

**Kate:** Do you have any stories about Dora? Your favorite ones?

**Sylvia:** Dora? No, but she was always… Oh, I have a story about her. We had one room I remember, later on, we had just one room. We moved from that town in a little bigger town.

**Kate:** What was this little bigger town’s name?

**Sylvia:** Znob, Z-N-O-B. We never slept together, we had small cots like. We all had a bed in one room but she used to clean. What she did, she used to hide everything under the bed but she cleaned in the middle.

**Kate:** What about your brother and your sister, do you have any stories?

**Sylvia:** My sister and my brother when they start getting older my mother send them away to her sister. I don’t remember the town. My sister went to my father’s sister because they had to go to school.

**Kate:** Which sister now?

**Sylvia:** Sonia.

**Kate:** Sonia went to your father’s sister.

**Sylvia:** Yes, she went to my father’s sister because they had better schooling there.

**Kate:** Where was that?

**Sylvia:** I don’t remember that one.

**Kate:** How old were your brother and sister when they were sent away?

**Sylvia:** My sister must have been around 12. The revolution broke out I was nine. She was four years older so she must have been 12 or 11 when she went away.

**Kate:** Where did your brother go then?

**Sylvia:** My brother went to my mother’s sister because they had a store and he helped them out.

**Kate:** That was in the town of?

**Sylvia:** Konotop.

**Kate:** Did we spell that already?

**Sylvia:** I think so, K-O-N-O-T-O-P. I hadn’t.

**Kate:** How did you feel about them going away?

**Sylvia:** I was too young. I was independent.

**Kate:** But your older sister Dora stayed?

**Sylvia:** The one that was two years older, she stayed.

**Kate:** That’s Dora, Sonia was the oldest.

**Sylvia:** My brother was the oldest, then came Sonia, then Dora. So she stayed home.

**Kate:** Tell me a little bit about your religious life at home there when you were little.

**Sylvia:** I didn’t have much religious life because revolution broke out when I was so young, eight or nine years old. They closed all the Jewish schools.

**Kate:** What about before the revolution in the town, do you remember your mother…?

**Sylvia:** In that little town they would go… whoever had a bigger house during the holidays, they would go and pray there.

**Kate:** You said you kept kosher but what about…

**Sylvia:** My mother kept kosher, I did not.

**Kate:** Did you experience then any religious persecution or any prejudice there?

**Sylvia:** Yes, after the revolution especially. Where we lived it wasn’t that bad. They didn’t get to us. After the revolution there were a lot of killings. When the revolution broke out they started killing everybody. First they killed the landowners, they were not Jewish.

**Kate:** We’re talking about the year 1917.

**Sylvia:** ‘I8, they started. We lived in Znob that time but we had to go to sleep at the peasant’s house because they would come at night and kill us, we were Jewish.

**Kate:** Who was coming? Who was that?

**Sylvia:** After the revolution they opened all the jails in Siberia instead of letting out only the political prisoners they let out the killers too. Everybody was let out and some of them came from our town. They were robbing, and killing, and burning but we escaped that because we left there after a couple of weeks.

**Kate:** The small town of 13 houses?

**Sylvia:** No, that we left a long time ago. I told you we went to Znob, was a little bigger town.

**Kate:** You said it was a little bigger, how big was the town?

**Sylvia:** That was pretty big. I don’t know but I remember the streets, you know I was too young.

**Kate:** Did people say that these criminals had come home? Did they mention that in town? You knew that there was something like that?

**Sylvia:** Yes we knew, especially the peasants. We had a nice friend, a peasant, and he’d say, “Come to my house at night, don’t stay in your house at night.”

**Kate:** They knew which houses were which. They knew who was Jewish…

**Sylvia:** We were only a few Jewish people in that town. There weren’t that many Jewish people in Znob. They knew where we lived, yes.

**Kate:** In the original town that you lived it was 13 families. How many were…?

**Sylvia:** That was before. We were only two Jewish families.

**Kate:** In that 13?

**Sylvia:** Yes. They were peasants. They had the farmers.

**Kate:** What happened during the revolution? Did you have enough to eat?

**Sylvia:** During the [inaudible 00:17:38]. We were still pretty good off.

**Kate:** When did it start to get very bad for you?

**Sylvia:** When we went to a city. We had to run away from Znob. We left in the middle of the night this peasant and they were chasing us because they thought we had money but there were two ways to go to [unclear 00:17:59]. That was a bigger city and Germany occupied that part of Ukraine. They were there for nine months. We went there and there were two ways to go. A certain place two roads to get to [unclear 00:18:16]. The peasant knew that they were chasing us.

**Kate:** There was word that these people were after you.

**Sylvia:** Yes. He said to my mother, “Which way do you want to go?” She said, “I’ll leave it up to you” then he told us later. The horse buggy 30 miles took a whole day. We went to that bigger city and the Germans occupy it, which was good, but we had no place to live.

**Kate:** You went by horse and carriage?

**Sylvia:** Yes, took our furniture middle of the night.

**Kate:** You had all your furniture…?

**Sylvia:** Yes, whatever we had. We had the furniture. Yes, mother took.

**Kate:** Do you remember choosing things to take?

**Sylvia:** We didn’t have that much. We had bedding and a little clothes. We didn’t have that much.

**Kate:** You went all night, and you got to the city…

**Sylvia:** We got to [unclear 00:19:16]. It was a city, very nice city, but we had no place to go because there were a lot of running away from the revolution. A lot of Jewish people came there. There was a hotel, a big hotel, and in the basement they had both horse and buggy staying there and those that drawn their buggies they slept there. We got that place; it was horrible, with all kind of bugs. We were there for a while.

**Kate:** How did you get that place? Did the peasant help you?

**Sylvia:** The peasant went back, had nothing to do. But these people that own the hotel were Jewish people so they offered us that place. By that time my sister and my brother they came to [unclear 00:20:12]. They left where they were, so we all were in [unclear 00:20:15] for about two years. We got a house.

**Kate:** How long were you in this place that you’re talking about?

**Sylvia:** Few months.

**Kate:** How big was it?

**Sylvia:** It was a big place but it was just nothing but boards that people slept on. So we took our bedding and put and then we all slept on the boards.

**Kate:** How did you cook food?

**Sylvia:** I don’t remember. There was something, they baked bread there next door so I guess that’s… When Germans left in 1918, they had their own revolution, so they left and the Red Army came in. It got pretty bad. It was hunger.

**Kate:** Those two months that you stayed in those conditions was in the year 1917?

**Sylvia:** No, 1918. We had a little money.

**Kate:** You had saved money.

**Sylvia:** Yes, mother saved money that’s why they were chasing us. We had a little money, not much, but we were able to get by.

**Kate:** After two months where did you move then?

**Sylvia:** Somebody rented us a part of a house.

**Kate:** How big was that?

**Sylvia:** Not too big, I think just two rooms.

**Kate:** It was an apartment? Did it have water?

**Sylvia:** Not an apartment. I don’t remember. Isn’t it funny that I don’t remember, I don’t think so. The toilet was outside but at least they had already built an outhouse for it.

**Kate:** It was a part of a house, that you lived in; a section of a house.

**Sylvia:** Yes. It was a section, it was a big home for the rich people and of course nobody was rich anymore so they rented part of their house to us. It was a little kitchen and a big room.

**Kate:** You had your meals in the kitchen?

**Sylvia:** Yes, we had a table.

**Kate:** What did your mother do for work during that time?

**Sylvia:** Mother travelled from city to city buying this and that and bringing whatever they didn’t… Ukraine had some bread yet but Moscow was hungry but they had shawls that the peasants liked. Mother would take some grain and sugar and go to Moscow and sell it there on the flea market and then she would buy the scarves and shawls and bring it back and sell it to the peasants.

**Kate:** She basically started taking things that were in small…

**Sylvia:** Everybody was doing that, speculating. They call us speculators.

**Kate:** Were you able to live on that? Was it okay?

**Sylvia:** Yes, it was okay. We lived very poor. When I was 12 years old I did that because everybody in the family was sick.

**Kate:** With what?

**Sylvia:** Mother already had typhus fever but she had some kind of infection, so she couldn’t go out. My sister Dora was a housekeeper and my sister Sonia loved to read books. She didn’t care for anything else. My brother just got out the army.

**Kate:** Which army was he in?

**Sylvia:** The Red Army. He was 17 when they took him but then they were discharging him and by that time we already had papers to come here. My uncle found us.

**Kate:** Let’s go back, this is what year?

**Sylvia:** That must have been 1920. We moved to Konotop. My mother had a sister.

**Kate:** After you get out of this part of the house…

**Sylvia:** No, we still lived in [unclear 00:24:02] then but mother was travelling. Later on we moved… she had a sister in Konotop where my brother lived with them and it was better there. They had their own house and they had a part of the house that they gave us.

**Kate:** When you say it was better, what was better?

**Sylvia:** They had more bread.

**Kate:** So more food was available?

**Sylvia:** Yes.

**Kate:** Did you know anyone who was killed or was persecuted in your immediate circle of friends?

**Sylvia:** As a matter of fact some of my family. My mother’s cousins they were pogroms and some of them were killed.

**Kate:** Where did they live?

**Sylvia:** That was in [unclear 00:24:52], before we got there, there was…

**Kate:** Is that before the Germans?

**Sylvia:** Yes, before the Germans. There were bands coming in, the White Army what they called, the Tsarists.

**Kate:** They were called Cossacks?

**Sylvia:** Yes. There was one his name was Petlura. He had a band…

**Kate:** We’ve heard of this band from another person who was frightened we interviewed. It was so bad. I’ve heard of this.

**Sylvia:** Yes, but we were still in the small town. We escaped Petlura.

**Kate:** That band didn’t get to your town?

**Sylvia:** Not to the little town.

**Kate:** How close did they get?

**Sylvia:** Just [unclear 00:25:35] but before we got there. In Konotop they got later and my aunt had a big house. That’s before we went to Konotop. She had one daughter. They got them all in one room, all the Jewish women and men. My uncle hid on the attic, they couldn’t find him.

My cousin, she was a little younger than me, sitting on the bed, they were shooting and they shot her on the foot but she was ok. But one woman, they was not relatives but neighbors, they all came together. They cut their feet off, they cut their arms off, they just killed them right in front of my aunt. My aunt decided she’s going to fall in their blood. She made herself like she’s dead but she came grey overnight. She became grey right away.

**Kate:** Her hair turned color?

**Sylvia:** Turned grey, she was very young woman.

**Kate:** But she survived?

**Sylvia:** She survived and my uncle and their daughter was okay because the foot healed. It was just in the foot alone the bullet went.

**Kate:** When you got to that town…

**Sylvia:** To Konotop?

**Kate:** It was over that?

**Sylvia:** Yes. That was already… the Bolsheviks were there. They weren’t fighting anymore. When we were in [unclear 00:27:14] they were fighting yet.

**Kate:** Some people complain that they didn’t know who were worse even, that the Bolsheviks were not so great either to Jews.

**Sylvia:** Not exactly. I can’t say it because children they helped us. We used to go we used to bring a little dish and they had kitchens for us, they gave us some soup and bread in [unclear 00:27:42].

**Kate:** So they were helpful?

**Sylvia:** Originally. They were trying to make it and I can’t…