

Some Words from Elizabeth "Mama" Simon
recorded by Chris Morrow, her son-in-law
tape discovered and transcribed by Glenn Morrow, her grandson

Mama Sings Some Russian Songs

Everything, everything the bottle. The bootle, you go in the saloon and drink that say you've got a son. [sings] That means that when he drinks in the bottle, he gives all the respect, all the love to the bottle, they say that that's his son. They play on the piano that song.

They got a song for the college boys in Russia, so the song is like this. [sings] "He who goes to college goes to Moscow." You know, Moscow? [sings] You know, the electric lights. A lot of students is walking around up and forth, up and forth. The student goes to think, they gave him for a walk, you know. Up and forth [sings]. The priest goes around with a light, and the lights are burning all day and all night; so the students is walking around, they don't sleep. So the priest is walking around with the. And he would be up with them too, only he's too old. He cannot take that That word that's the word I'm going to pronounce [sings] they walk around, that means chaiav. They don't do nothing, only they walk around.

The Student Boarder

You know, near me was a college too, near me a college, and when the boys goes out for a walk they go three by three and they make a big walk all around that section. In my house, a boy from Mr. Duche's estate rented an apartment, he paid the rent, \$27, and he goes to that college. He going to get his education near me in college, like your children get an education. [what is the college called] I don't know, there is a lot of names.

And there's a lot of hospitals too, and there's incurables places, in New York there a plenty of sick people, and those colleges gone up there in Gouvener Hospital. And Gouvener Hospital build up another hospital. In the hospital they need men to work, doctors, and men to work to clean the place, to run around New York in an ambulance. [maybe a medical college?] All kind of things. A student is not all a fantasy, it's a job. They have to get a job and get paid.

Mama on Doctors and Capitalism

You know, a woman goes in a hospital costs a hundred dollars. They don't take her for nothing. So far she has money she has to pay every day. Every time comes a check, comes a shyster. I don't want to do that, that I should go to a doctor I have to pay? I got money I give it to them. They don't give a shit. They just keep the money in the pocket.

They give you a check in the supermarket for a box of things what you used to pay 35 cents now costs 65 cents. What can you do? When they keep the money in packages the mouses eats up the money. Now they keep the money in the register. How much money they need, how much money that give in. Everything is totaled up, is checked up. When the money lays in the packages it's nothing. William Smith invented that check thing. A man by the name of William Smith invented they should give me checks to the old people. I'd only hold the money, I wouldn't eat up the money, you understand what I mean? Look all the saloons is closed. And the car people want you should buy a car. You should buy gasoline, you understand? And when you drive the car you are in danger too. I'm telling

you, the insurance man himself wants to have a job so he wants that I should drive the car and make trouble. Then he would have a case, you understand? A crime.

I want to go up on the bus, I wanted to ride on the bus not the subway, and I wouldn't take a nickle. They make me a case, you understand, so I have to go to the judge they investigate me already, how much money I get, how much money this, how much money I spend and everything. So I have to be careful not to go in the bus, and not to make a case. Thank God, how old I am I didn't have no case. I had a case, I had a case...

Sam my husband, every minute he had a case. And he used to go to the hospital and had a case, and when he was home and I had a trillion girls in the house, and he had to treat all the trillion girls till they don't feel good. They ate too much and had to get Sam call the doctor. Any man can be a doctor, he gives only a look on you and you pay.

Mama on Marriage and the Japanese

You want your daughter should go with a boyfriend, only the boyfriend is no good. She's too young; when she should get married at twenty, thirty, she already have five children. Do you want a head like this, thirty, forty. Tell her not to go. She can depend on you, you know. She has to know it.

Ronnie gets married. He had a hundred girls, he tied up with one girl. You know what happened? He has four children, she went away in Japan, and the children she left. She went to Japan, she tell her history, what a personality she is. Up there they're going to write in the papers that a Japan girl gets married with a Jewish fella, you understand, and it became a beautiful race. Then all the Japan girls will go all over the world, they're gonna to improve Japan. They're going to make Japan not making their noses like this, not their eyes like this, they're going to be a difference. And you know the not-Jewish boy is different than the Jewish. The doctors in the world wants it, you understand. I, I'm that I, I'm an animal, and I cannot go with a Japanese man, you understand, my body wouldn't accept another one, you understand, and then the realization of the schoolchildren, what they learn they go to college, all those books. Germany burned up all the books. They don't make no war, they sold us movies. And if they didn't make a war, children could grow up safe. You understand, they making war. They didn't heed us. They say I wanted to do like that.

Mama's Grandfather

In the Old Country, in my grandfather's home, he was a very tight man, you understand. He could just like this, anything that going to come in the way he's going to...so. They had a business, like the big department stores, a store, a business. So he married up a goy, he rented up a big place, just like this, and he give a business.

The Dowery

So when my grandfather's children grewed up, they brought over a girl from Germany and they married her with father, and they told him they were going to give three thousand dollars. After the party and after the drinking and everything, the girl came in and he said, you got three thousand dollars? No. Take your things and go home. The fella didn't want to sleep with the girl. The girl is so rich. So he divorced her.

Just like we had the rabbi up the next house, the rabbi he lived there the lived in the house next to ours, the rabbi ran away crazy. He made with the family three contracts, and I

didn't know the boy! You take your son, you go away see another party, you say well, I'll give you three thousand dollars I'll give you this son. They drink, they eat, they made a party and he promised him three thousand dollars; he didn't get the three thousand dollars, no deal! They married her, they drink, they eat, they made a big party, the music, terrible. They call up all the section for the party. After the party it was such a history with my father.

My father get married with a girl with a party with everything, he was only 18 years old and the girl with a cow and with pillows and with things and everything. The brother with the girl. My father wanted another girl, he didn't want this girl. So he went away to Behoutin someplace, was not home, he went away. He didn't sleep with the wife and he didn't want to look at her. He said, they wanted to drink a party, they want to enjoy a fresh roast, all right! But I don't want the girl! So they had to take the horses, put the cow to the horses and take back the girl and make a divorce, and then he got married to my mother. And all the life, the father was mad why he took this girl. My father says this girl is an educated girl, this girl can bake bread and mix it and everything, this girl can write and read, this girl was my mother. And she can make art things, and can read, and besides she had a father who was a musician. He had a full house of instruments, and the instruments was played. The man's a musician; he wears a white shirt with [] with ruffles, and a frock coat, such clothes. And all the time he used to be mad on my father why he break that tie. They was teasing on my father; my father had to be careful going to church because they gonna beat him up up there. My father and my mother had the nerve to go away to Odessa, to go to Kiev. And make themselves nice clothes. In such nice clothes, so the old people in town were like this.

The License

When there passed a year my father was in court made ten cases, and my father went to jail too. You hear? You know for what? They took away their licence, and they went into Zhitomir, shopping, so they said where are you going in that big town, there's a brewery where they make beer. So the brewer comes out, hello, yes, buy an order? And he says I cannot buy an order, they took away my license. Ah, license, what license? They took the two wagons with the horses, we had a lot of wagons with horses, and the horses brought over oats. All kind of oats, I dunno, to make kasha, to give the horses eat. Oats. We always had oats. So he loaded out the oats and they loaded in beer.

And they're all drinking beer and my mother sees the agents coming. They're drinking beer and they got no license! And up here she sees already the generals, what they call the investigator, in a uniform with a golden stick. So she says, Oy vey, all that money he shouldn't drink beer! I haven't got no license. They took away the license, they took away. The mayor took away the license, outen the license, no more. He has to get the mayor's time, and he has to pay him \$50 and he has to go and take out a license. Such a lawyer on the case, you understand, otherwise so much beer, the beer has to be dranked up. You know who drank the beer? All the generals drank the beer, all the soldiers -- not the plain people -- they drank the beer. And they made the case. They didn't steal it. The beer was on the wagon, and he comes over and says he has no license and he has beer for \$200. So he says you're not allowed to bring beer. A case in court. They're going to court, they're going to the judge. talked to the judge like I talk to you. When you go to the court, everybody in the courthouse, he's not allowed to make schnapps, he's not allowed to get

schnapps in our house, there's not allowed to be wine. Beer? Yeah, only you have to have license on that. Only they took away the license, you understand. My mother dropped dead and my father went to jail.

When I learned how they called me, I left home, I ran away. I left home, maybe I was eleven, twelve year old. I didn't go to Kiev, I went Zhitomir, that was already rich people, they didn't have no babies, so they took me for a []. They're going to show me moving pictures, they're gonna take me. In that country. She was not a mother, she didn't have no babies, she grewed up big, she wore big dresses, she was like your mother.

And she had to drive with a man what to drive the horses, she goes with four horses. And with four horses there was a man who takes care of them. Only she wouldn't sit all alone in the back and go with the man, she takes me for a ride. I should sit near her. It was such a beautiful game, I was so independent when I went with that rich lady.

She owned the post office. The mail which they used to bring from one town to the other one, the mail. And they had a lot of horses, a big stable with horses. Just like now cars, they had horses. She took me to Zhitomir; in Zhitomir she had her old lady mother, who was sick like your mother, like me. So she left me by the sick mother and she took me up there because she didn't want to go with the goy, with that fellow what which drive the horses. And she was a rich lady. And she get married the same as my father. She didn't have no babies, she was too pure to lay down and have a baby. She never had a little one. Her husband was from the highest people. She had two servants in the house, two girls, they cooked, they cleaned the house, they served down the table. And all the [] men but they lived in the town, they used to come there and play cards all night, and he owned a house, he had nice furniture, he was a rich man.

Maybe he had \$2000, so he lent twenty dollars, and twenty dollars for three months he'd get ten dollars more, he'd get thirty dollars. They was the bankers. There was no bank, it was a house, it was rich. You got money in the house, that party that lives next door ain't got no money goes to you, says lend me twenty dollars, next two months I'll give you thirty dollars. You run like this business, you understand? So he had a lot of time, he goes to church and go play cards all night. And when you come in this house, the house is a rich house.

The Servant Girl and the Singer

If somebody has a daughter and he's a poor man, and he gives his daughter for a servant and then they make the wedding, they married her off. Many girls that I met in New York, they were servant girls in our town. You hear? A shoemaker had four daughters. His house is only big like this. He gives away his girls for a servant girl. He puts her in for a servant girl for my grandfather's house.

Came a -- how you call a man who comes with a lot of boys that have got good voices -- a chazzen, you know what means a chazzen, a churchman. He comes in our town and he gives a concert, and he gives a shabbas, doven in the shule, yiddishe jewish and gentile. At that time he advertise himself like he's a big chazzen, he's a big doven man you understand, so he comes for shabbas, so the Jewish people bring a chazzen from Odessa. Oh, such a singer! They make him a stage and he gives a concert.

We got servant girls, servant girls get influenced with this boychik. He says you going to come to Odessa? I'm going to pay you three times as much. And this girl, a cook in our house, she learns up how to cook, how to dress up and my mother's going to make

her nice clothes. After six months she goes away to Odessa, goes away to Odessa to get the little boy grewed up, and the little girl became big and they got married. In our town that was a shame, up there it wasn't a shame.

From Odessa they came in America. In America, she knows how to run a saloon, she makes herself a saloon. Only her husband who was in shule was ashamed. She had already four sons. The husband who was in shule is an opera singer in New York. He finds out that I am Mendela's zadik, Mendala's granddaughter... in the shule. He says, I want my old grandfather in the house. And I gave a concert and the grandfather took me and gave us milk and eat and everything. Oh I have to take care of her.

He came from Paris. In Paris he was looking for a competition, art people where they can act, where they can play. He was in Carnegie Hall.

So he takes me in and I work by him. He divorced his wife. His wife had four sons she has to support, so how make a home? She makes a saloon! In New York in a cellar. I didn't know. I thought he was a man, maybe fifty, and he was divorced with his wife, and he gave me a job in his house. I had to take up the telephone, I met a lot of art people, like Mr. Hellman, like actors that were working in the Jewish theatre. And I get a call with all the actors and everybody. And they tell me you've got a wonmderful job, you've got a beautiful home, and he pays me thirty dollars a month.

I was sitting on the sixth floor in the window, the grocerman gives me the job. I say you have yourself daughters, why are you telling me? He says, that's a good job, I belong to a church, in the Jewish synagogue. Go there, maybe you're going to get married with him. I said, leave me alone, I don't want to get married.

I didn't know he was divorced from his wife, you hear? He divorced her because she goes with all the actors, and the Jewish yiddishe cantor. Made a lot of money here, and divorced with his wife.

A singer must get in love or he can't sing. And when he's not in love and he didn't see a beautiful girl he couldn't sing. A beautiful girl, I was a beautiful girl, you hear? And he said, my singing is wonderful, I sing good. And I'm happy with you. He didn't touch me. He locked himself in a room. I was by him in the house, did all the work there for a couple of years, summer only he would go away to Paris to look for art people. He give up all his apartments all the good furniture which they bring in, they took it away, and the carpets and everything.

Sam Simon

After some years I married Sam Simon. I'm going get married, have a boy six year old and the father going to be sixty years old? Maybe he wouldn't be able to sing any more and he wouldn't have no job. I left him. And I was a respectable girl and I had a job and that was alright.

That's how I come downtown where I met Sam Simon, giving money in the pocket and everything. I took him and I rented out an apartment and I put all the furniture in there and when Sam's brother came he said, he fooled you. He's not twenty-six years old, he's only eighteen years old. You hear, he took me a marriage license. And Sam Simon. I was nineteen. [end of side]

The Builders

He locked himself in the room. He was a man but he was in my father's house.

When he was in my father's house, my grandfather's house, they had a big room with a lot of arch windows, very high windows long windows, long windows like this, you understand. And that house was called a country house, like a gate house.

They were not much educated people but they knew how to build houses. They built churches, the brothers, the other brothers, and they came in America too, only I don't know where they are.

Alex

Alex was a roofer. He had an office and when you want to make a roof, he makes the roof. Ach, Alex, he was such a nice, beautiful man, my brother Alex.

The Lantzmen

And I had lantzpeople, they call themselves Varoshin, they call and deal with lumberyard on 73rd Street. That's Varoshin, three brothers. They used to put in floors, hardwood floors, and they had a lumberyard. They had such a mazolis underfoot, to work. And they build up all the Bronx. You know Bronx? You know where there's the Grand Concourse?

I lived with them, they took me in America and I came in to them to in the house. And there were four sons. When I was a baby I used to go to the same, to the rabbi, to school with them boys. They was already bigger a little. Fourteen years old. They was in a higher grade. My father paid to the school. In a little town, they right away get something new.

Mama Teaches Russian for a Song

My Ma, I'm going to say this, in one little minute I'll learn you Russian, and you're going to never forget, you hear? One, two, three words. [sings]. I'll explain to you the point, you only have to pronounce with the mouth this word. In one little lesson, one little minute. And that is Russian. We don't want to forget Russian, because Russia beat Japan. You're going to forget that language, and later 30 years, you remind yourself a couple of words. So you'll say Ah Hah!, my grandmother, my mother-in-law learned me Russian words.

You know, those words which I tell you mean that when a person likes to drink so he sings to the bottle that song. That is on the piano and that is by all the students. He says I got a lot of love for you, and when you are with me I don't worry for nothing. And he likes that with the whole soul in his hand. When a person is a drunkard, he's all to the drink, you know, when he's got to drink, he goes out. So that's the words in Russian. Sandy's sister plays at the piano that thing, only she don't know the words. In a different way it says when I got a girlfriend I got the whole world in sympathy, she don't you know, heart and soul. So that is the same words like this too. I respect you, I love you, and when you are with me I forget the whole world. That's in the words.

An Educated Girl

You know, when I was on the job I couldn't leave, I had to stay all alone all day. So every time I remind myself, out of thousands of women I'm a big shot. I know a lot of things, everything how I wear my hair and this and that, they make a big tzimis for me. And I'm an educated girl, I consider myself. My bubbie told me that I'm an educated girl.

And when I get in a school in America, the teacher says that I'm more educated than she. You hear? Then in dancing school the dancing school man says to me, in one hour you learned everything I have to teach! He says I have to make a living, so they have come to me every time and pay me and I should learn them how to dance. Only you dance like Broadway already!

City Life Has Changed

All day long. I'm afraid to walk out because nobody's on the streets. In my section also, nobody's on the streets. So much windows, so much people, and they don't go out, you know? All the old ladies they sit in the house.