

Lillie's Story

My family is so small now. I remember when we celebrated Shabbos and holidays - when my brother and sister were still here, and cousins, and neighbors, would come to share meals. There was so much joy.

Things here in Belarus have been changing – over the past 10 years, the Zionists and Socialists began to organize, and then there was the Russian Revolution, and through it all the Jewish community has been changing and now there is poverty.

My brother went to America in 1906 to avoid the Russian draft – and then last year (1909) my sister went too.... Now, it's just me and my mom and dad - it is so small and so quiet....

"Mom, what? You want me to go to America? I can't – I'm only 14; I'm too young to travel on my own. And, I don't want to leave you."

"Times here have changed Lillie – it is time for you to go. You will be with your brother."

"I don't want to go, Mom. I want to stay here where I we live, where I know everyone."

"No, my dear, you need to go".....

It feels so good to be off the ship! But, my bags are heavy and I am standing in such a long line.

So this is Ellis Island. I am almost in New York City!

But wait, there is a large man up there with a booming voice. He is barking at people, asking them questions. He is scowling – letting some people go on, but to some people, he shakes his head no.

The line is moving slowly. Now I can hear his questions. He is asking different questions to different people. To one woman he demands, "Who is your husband?"

To another person he asks, "Where were you born?"

To others he barks, "How many children do you have?"

I wonder what he will ask me – it's almost my turn....

"When is your birthday?" He looks at me and I stare back, in shock. When IS my birthday? I know I was born on Kol Nidre, the night the full day of Yom Kippur, but I don't know the American date or year. I have no idea – I want to answer, and go by him, but what do I say?

I look around at the other people in line behind me.

"Does anyone know when Yom Kippor is?" I ask fearfully. "Does anyone know?" A

Someone responds, "October 13th." I suppose that means my birthday is the day before October 13th. With a sign of relief, I look at the man and I say, "October 12th – my birthday is October 12th."

The man nods and let's me pass.

“Thank you” I say as I step past him. I step outside - into America.

It's so big – New York is so big, and busy, and noisy!!

How will I ever find anyone? How will I know where to go? How can I possibly find him?

Wait. There he is!! There is my brother. My brother. I run toward him, calling his name.