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INTERVIEW WITH RABBI SIMON KRINSKY AND MYRON LAZARUS

LAZARUS: Rabbi, where were you born?

KRINSKY: In, Russian Poland.

LAZARUS: Lithuania?

KRINSKY: I was born in Russian Poland.

LAZARUS: And, how long did you live there, in Russian Poland?

KRINSKY: Till the age of 18.

LAZARUS: Oh! You received your education there?

KRINSKY: My traditional religious education I received there, and also general education, because according to the Russian rule, law, we were required to attend every single day, two hours in a Russian school. The instructor was a Jewish man, so after the hours of hebrew, we attend the Russian language, Russian history, and geography of Russia.

LAZARUS: The religious education, did you have a tutor or was it a regular

KRINSKY: I went to a regular hebrew school and then a went to a small parochial school, a Yeshiva, where I received a higher talmudical education. At the same time, when I was 17, I attended the Russian seminary of which I received a diploma from the Russian Department of Education and the diploma is on my living room on the wall.

LAZARUS: This is for?

KRINSKY: Religious seminary.

LAZARUS: To teach hebrew?

KRINSKY: No! To teach the Polish language, to teach all subjects.

LAZARUS: In a public school, would it be like?

KRINSKY: Yes! It was very difficult. I was one of eight Jewish students to receive a diploma from the Polish Seminary of Education. The Polish Teachers Seminary of Warsaw Poland.

LAZARUS: Is this where you were — Where you born in Warsaw, born in Warsaw Poland? What was the name of the city you were born in?

KRINSKY: Oh! Drodnik, Bialistock, Bialistock.

LAZARUS: A suburb of what?

KRINSKY: The city of Bialistock. It was like one of the largest communities.

LAZARUS: Your parents, what did they do in Poland?

KRINSKY: My father was the statispol.

LAZARUS: Meaning?

KRINSKY: A Mayor. He was the Mayor. During the Russian regime and was bidermeister during the first world war when the Japanese occupied the city. We were in Bialistock at that time. And they captured him with dignity and great respect.

LAZARUS: He lived there until he died, in Poland? Did he always stay in Poland, your father?

KRINSKY: Yes!

LAZARUS: How about his family before him? What kind of business were they in?

KRINSKY: Textiles.

LAZARUS: Textiles. Manufacturing textiles?

KRINSKY: Manufacturing textiles. You know . . .

LAZARUS: Clothing. Materials?

KRINSKY: Yes.

LAZARUS: Do you have any memories of Poland? Things you remember about?

KRINSKY: Well, at the beginning during the Kosutski regime, for the Jewish people, in Poland, was a peaceful life. We were not being persecuted. But after the Kosutski regime there were many boycotts, many pogroms in smaller communities on the Jewish people in Poland. Although there were many Jewish representatives in the Stenge. The Stenge is like the Congress. Many Jewish representatives were included.

LAZARUS: Do you have any other memories as a child, as a young man in Poland? Other memories?

KRINSKY: Well the only thing I remember is I almost got drowned in the river. I went fishing and I fell in the water - I was a very good swimmer at that time - so, two Polish, two Russian men picked me up and since then the order was not to go fishing.

LAZARUS: Did you work? You know, you received this education. Did you ever teach in Poland?

KRINSKY: Yes!

LAZARUS: Where?

KRINSKY: In Bokovisk. Bokovisk was a province and a big city. And I was in charge of the first Yiddish/Hebrew Folkshullah, a very liberal, progressive school.

LAZARUS: Now, from Poland you went to Lithuania.

KRINSKY: Yes! The first experience I had in Bokovisk was my father was a well-to-do man. In other words he had a very high position. And at the same time teaching in Bokovisk I also attended a higher talmudical . . . I went to lectures to listen to Rabbi of the city of Bokovisk. We were a group of fifteen students who went there. But later I was expelled from that group because, on the sabbath, instead of being in synagogue and studying torah, I went out with a young lady. I had my first date. And, who met me, the supervisor who subsidized that institution. He came over to me and he said "Gut Shabbas!" That was sufficient. The next day I got a notice that I was expelled from the Yeshiva because instead of being in the synagogue I went to the forest there with a young Jewish girl, of course. The next thing I remember is I played the mandolin. In those days if you were able to sing and to play, you were very prominent among the young ladies. You never had trouble getting a date. I still have the mandolin here. I carried it from Poland to Palestine and from Palestine to the United States. To the present day when I'm a little bit lonely or pessimistic, I close the doors, I take the mandolin and I play. I love to play Russian music.

LAZARUS: Why did you go to Lithuania?

KRINSKY: Because my parents wanted me to become a Rabbi. I went to attend a Yeshiva.

LAZARUS: Called?

KRINSKY: Slabotka, in Lithuania. Crossing a bridge we went to the city of Komersh. It was the highest talmudical institution in Europe. Equivalent to Princeton, Columbia, Yale, and so forth. There were 500 students in that Yeshiva. And I remember something happened and Professor Joseph Klausner came and he spoke in Hebrew on the messiah. We were told not to go. I didn't realize that the dean of the Yeshiva had a group of spies who were following us. And I went with a few more, and the next morning the president of the Yeshiva asked for me, called me into his office. And he said, "Nu?, What did he say?". That was sufficient. He said never again go to those lectures.

LAZARUS: Why?

KRINSKY: Because he considered that he was an atheist. It might have a very bad influence on my talmudical knowledge and on my Jewish convictions - On Judaism.

LAZARUS: Was he an atheist? This lecturer.

KRINSKY: And a very good one. He is the one who has written the book The Nazareth. Joseph Klausner is one of the most prominent professors. He died a few years ago in Israel.

LAZARUS: Do you have any other memories of Lithuania? How long were you in Lithuania?

KRINSKY: Six years. And we studied the Lithuanian language. Economically the people were poor, but they produced the best talents in Jewish life.

LAZARUS: And you studied for six years in Lithuania?

KRINSKY: For six years. During the six years I spent 51 days home.

LAZARUS: Then from Lithuania, where did you go? Back to Poland?

KRINSKY: Then the first world war broke out, and I went home. Then I opened a school, a private school, in my community. And then the Russian revolution. As soon as I listened to Trotsky in Bokovisk I made up my mind that it was not a place for me.

LAZARUS: You heard Trotsky, though?

KRINSKY: Oh, yes! I applied right away for a visa and I went to Palestine. Then from my home to Warsaw, from Warsaw I went to Palestine. When I came to Palestine, that was the pioneering years. a ticket was issued. A doctor was considered the highest profession in Palestine. I came first, but my wife mailed all my documents, all my papers to Palestine. When I came I went to the Jewish education, of which Dr. Schwartz was the secretary, and I submitted my credentials, and on the first day I received a position in Hevelis, the royal Galilee. My family had many relatives in Israel. They were very proud. There were many Israeli's who finished at the teachers seminar there who had trouble in getting positions in Palestine. The reason why I got a position was because of my knowledge in talmud. I was very good in singing. I received right away a position, even right away an advance. You know what that means, some money, and I sent right away money for my wife and wrote her a monument for my fathers grave.

LAZARUS: When did you meet your wife?

KRINSKY: After the Germans, I was teaching in the country.

LAZARUS: In Poland?

KRINSKY: In Poland, of course, and the children from all of the villages came there and I taught the Jewish children Hebrew and there were special subjects for the German language. I received my salary from the government of Bokovisk.

LAZARUS: And you met your wife there?

KRINSKY: I saw a young lady come in there. Then she told me that her mother said to her, she was walking barefoot, to put some shoes on. And she said, if he will like me, he will like me the same way I look right now. Her father was the bidermeister of that province. I met her and we married in Poland where my father was. My father at that time was very ill. So the chuppah was near the yard. We opened the window and my father was able to witness our marriage.

LAZARUS: How long were you married before you went to Palestine?

KRINSKY: Two years.

LAZARUS: And you were teaching?

KRINSKY: Yes.

LAZARUS: Tell us more about Palestine?

KRINSKY: In Palestine I was the principal of the public school, Hebrew public school under the supervision of the Muslem Department of Education.

LAZARUS: What year was that?

KRINSKY: 1923, I believe. In 1924, then I came here to this country. The one interesting thing, they did not have good text books. And we were told to teach the children biology and all those subjects. They didn't have text books. I had to struggle to translate from Russian and German text books into Hebrew. It was a very, very unkind position. Vacation time I spent in Jerusalem. And in the public auditorium I played catch will the well known Hebrew poet Laze Jaffe. I lost. For seven hours. We had lunch, then we had a recess and we continued. It took seven hours to finish the game. I said it gave my arm time, but he won the game.

LAZARUS: How many years did you stay in Palestine?

KRINSKY: Two years. Then I came to this country. I came to Hudson, New York.

LAZARUS: Do you remember any problems in Palestine. Political problems?

KRINSKY: I came to this country and my first position was in Hudson, New York. In Hudson New York I was the Rabbi for the New York State Training School, an institution of many, many girls, I was the Rabbi. And the principal of the Hebrew Institute of Hudson, New York. I stayed in Hudson, New York almost nine years. At the same time I was one of the editors of the bi-weekly called the Trumpet. It was published in Albany, New York. During the years in the country I have contributed to many magazines, newspapers in three languages. I have published four books. One called the "Jewish Tradition" in Hebrew and in Yiddish, one is called "Contemporary Bygone Short Stories", a book of Yiddish poetry, and the latest book was Hebrew poetry. And from Hudson I came to Wilmington.

LAZARUS: Tell us more about Hudson New York.

KRINSKY: Hudson, New York is a very lovely community. I had one of the finest schools there. 120 students who knew Hebrew. I introduced a Jewish doctor, a dentist doctor, Freinberg, who was named on the board of education. When I left Hudson, New York they had a send-off for me in City Hall. They presented me with a golden watch and the Mayor greeted me in the entire community. Just now, a few months ago, a book was published in Israel of modern Hebrew literature that included excerpts from his words, an encyclopedia of modern Hebrew literature edited by G. Kressler. A book of 300 years of modern Hebrew literature, and they included me and they listed all my books. Also, a lexicon on Jewish literature, published in Vilna by Kalman Raisin. He devoted a whole column on my literal works. One poem of mine was set to music by the composer of Mia Bitter, called "On Thy Grave". The poem I published in the Canadian Jewish Eagle, a Jewish paper. The poem was not copywrite. But the man from the music company of Second Avenue in New York set music to it and they copywrite that poem. Of course in the beginning I thought they didn't have any legal right to the poem, but since the poem was not copywrite and the paper was not, it was in order. They published over 30,000 copies and they sold in one year. It's called a eulogy "On Thy Grave". I had the great privilege to serve every congregation in the state of Delaware.

LAZARUS: Why did you come to Delaware?

KRINSKY: In 1931.

LAZARUS: You came in 1931.

KRINSKY: Yes. I served Adas Kodesh. I was the principal of Adas Kodesh Hebrew School for 12 years. I served Temple Beth Emeth 20 years. Then here with Newark, Delaware six years. When Rabbi Kraft went to the army I took over his bar mitzvah class in Beth Shalom. I also conducted high holiday services in Dover, Delaware. So I am the only Rabbi in the community that had the great privilege of serving every religious institution in the state of Delaware.

LAZARUS: They had told me that you had an interesting experience about bringing your wife to this country. What was that all about?

KRINSKY: My wife came over one year after I arrived in this country from Poland. Because of Governor Alf of East Mix who cabled the Ambassador in Poland to issue a visa for Mrs. Krinsky who is the wife of Rabbi Simon R. Krinsky and is the Rabbi of New York State Training School. I have two children. A daughter, Rosalyn and a son Herman. Rosalyn graduated from the University of Delaware and she also won the Historian Prize, the first time that a girl won it. And then she went to Columbia University and she mastered in Library Science. She holds a very responsible position in one of the Westchester public libraries. My son Herman Krinsky graduated from the University of Delaware, had his Masters from Columbia and because he came back from the second world war with frostbite, and then he had a touch of Polio, he could not use his hands and he could not finish by proving to his teachers what he intended to show, but he has been with Pratt Institute 15 years. He is a full professor and he is Chairman of the Chemistry Department.

LAZARUS: What can you tell us about Jewry in Delaware? The Jewish community in Delaware? You've seen a long span of time in Delaware.

KRINSKY: Being in Delaware for 40 years, I have noticed a great change, especially in the Jewish education. We have more educated people today than we had 40 years ago. And the requirements in the schools, the programs, is higher than it ever used to be. We do not stress so much mechanical reading, but they imbue the children with a strong knowledge and love for their history, for their religion and for the country where they are citizens of. I have bar mitzvahed in the state of Delaware, about 500 young men. In Temple Beth Emeth alone, 250. Right now I am bar mitzvahing children of parents that I have bar mitzvahed. And it makes me feel honored more or less, seeing the attitude of my students towards me. That many of them even invite me to officiate at their weddings. The Wilmington Jewish community, as I see it, is a very liberal Jewish community. Judging from the philanthropic point of view, Wilmington is doing a great deal better than other communities of the same size, especially the Jewish Federation of Delaware, and all the organizations, and the B'nai B'rith. And many people who are contributing not only to Jewish Institutions, but to the welfare of the community at large, and I want just to mention one individual, Milton Kutz, who built the Kutz home, and he gave money to the Hebrew Union College and to the Brandeis University. Mr. Harry Cohen, who left money to the University of Delaware. There were many, many individual Jewish people who lived here and they were prosperous and they gave not only to the Jewish organizations, but to all the civic organizations here in the State of Delaware.

LAZARUS: What problems do you see in the Jewish community in Delaware?

KRINSKY: Problems? The problems in the Jewish community in Delaware I think are the same problems in every community. That is rebellion of the youth. Not only are they drifting away from Jewish life, but they have become tyranical in crime, where there should be a turning back to the best.

LAZARUS: What makes you think that?

KRINSKY: Because it takes a good crime for them to realize. The main crime that I have noticed is the lack of understanding of education between parents and children. The parents were not educated enough to be able to educate their children, and the children were air-minded to think that they are getting so very much abated, although their parents struggled when they came in the pioneering days to educate their children. I see a return to the better.

LAZARUS: Why do you think that so many Jewish young people have been radicalized. Why have they become radicals?

KRINSKY: Only when they leave their homes and they went out to a university, for the first time that they feel complete freedom, without supervision from their mother and father, and then they join groups and they follow them blindly because in America today, if you have a few leaders, they call themselves leaders, they are embued with an excellent auditory, they follow them blindly. They don't seem to realize in order to be a success in life they have to devote themselves to study and to knowledge to lead the country.

LAZARUS: Do you think the fact that some of them become radicals, has this something to do with Judaism or their lack of understanding of Judaism? Some of them become Bhudists.

KRINSKY: The problem is that they did not have a great deal of knowledge about Judaism and that it would be better to deal with youngsters. They do not feel Jewish and it is because they do not understand the things about Judaism. They do not understand the moral code of Judaism. As soon as they begin to appreciate the blessing of love of Judaism and the attitudes of our great profits and our philosophers, as soon as they feel and open their eyes, we see a return of the intellectuals who went away from Jewish life entirely, we see a return and they come back to us.

LAZARUS: You talk about getting a better education now than years ago, then why didn't they have this?

KRINSKY: It is always our hope that the next Jewish generation will be a better one.