

Malka Deribizova's Family



This is my mother Malka Deribizova, nee Goldberg, her brother Yakov Goldberg and her sisters Shifra, Debora, Rakhil and Liya Goldberg. The photo was taken in Nerchinsk in the 1910s.

Rakhil, the oldest of Mama's sisters, was the only one who knew Yiddish very well. Her grandmother Shosya and mother Sonya somehow spoke Yiddish only to Rakhil, of all the children, from a young age, so the rest of the children didn't know the language.

Rakhil was the last to move to St Petersburg to her brother Yakov. She married Genrikh Yoffe, who was a professor of mathematics at the Shipbuilding Institute.

Originally, he proposed to my mother, but she refused to marry him. He was Jewish, but mother just didn't like him enough and didn't see him in the role of her future husband.

During the blockade of Leningrad Rakhil shared her ration with him [the blockade ration was 150 grams of bread per person per day] and she eventually died, and he spent one year in hospital after the war and died all the same - of dystrophy. They had no children.

Shifra and Liya married two brothers, Gdali and Levi Golumb, who were the sons of a Nerchinsk winery owner and both very unbalanced people.

Liya didn't want to marry Levi, and he would come and make wild scenes. Her parents made her do so, but she didn't change her family name, and remained Goldberg.

Shifra married Gdali and changed her surname to Golumb. Both pairs had kids, but Shifra's girl died at the age of five, and Liya's boy starved to death at sixteen in the blockade of Leningrad, and Liya wore the expression of grief on her face ever after.

Liya was a registrar, and a very well-read and competent person. During World War II she was evacuated to the city of Kiselevsk, Kemerovo region.

The local authorities entrusted her with the distribution of ration cards because they were positive that she would never steal anything. She was a lady of principles.

Both Golumb brothers fled to Charbin, China, in the 1920s to escape the Soviet regime; at the same time the winery had been looted in Nerchinsk, the whole town permeated with the smell of wine spirits.

They fled - and nobody knew anything about them after that, though Liya was left with a son from Levi, named Gdali after Shifra's husband.

In the 1920s Shifra earned some extra money working as a pianist in silent picture cinemas. All the children had received a brilliant home education.

I just recall one story about Shifra. She lived in a communal apartment, and going into the common kitchen was always a shock for her: the neighbors were either fighting or drinking hard.

There was one crazy married couple, and then the wife died and the husband decided to arrange a grand funeral repast. He treated his wife so badly, and he organized a mighty commemoration for the dead, as if it were a celebration of some kind!

He invited Shifra, too. She was around 80 then. She was so disgusted that she left. She couldn't physically stand the feast. She then came to our place without even calling first, and we were very surprised and worried about how she managed to reach us, a very old lady.

Shifra was a book-keeper all her life and died in Leningrad in 1982.

Mother's younger sister Debora was embarrassed to be a Jew her entire life and called herself Vera instead of Debora. She went to Irkutsk and entered economics college. At the end of the first year she was expelled because she dared to dance foxtrot at a college party!

Later she and her cousin, also expelled, had addressed the Minister of Culture Lunacharsky during his visit to Siberia. They were rehabilitated and readmitted to the college on his order.

Debora packed her things and went to Leningrad to study to become a rate-fixer and worked all her life in this trade in various minor associations.

She played piano like a genius and had absolute pitch. During the blockade she met a married Leningradian, Veniamin Heisin. She used to call him Vitamin instead of Veniamin.

His family was in evacuation then. He was Jewish and they lived in a common-law marriage for five years, from 1942 to 1947, and she gave birth to a daughter, Irina.

Even when his wife and children came back from evacuation, he continued visiting her and helped her a lot materially. Irina knew she had a father and didn't suspect he had another family. Debora died in Leningrad in 1993.