

Faina Gheller's Father Naum Zelvianski



My father Naum Zelvianski.

This photo was made in S. Klimashevskaya photo shop in Astrakhan in 1918 to be sent to our good friend Esfir Zabar for good and lasting memory.

My father's family lived in Grodno [in Belarus, over 1000 km from Moscow] in a wooden house with three small rooms. Their biggest value in the family was a sewing machine. There was a well in the yard from where they fetched water. Here was a wood stoked stove in the house.

They didn't have a garden, but there was a shed where they kept chickens. They were not wealthy. The family wasn't religious. They observed Jewish traditions, but it was most likely their tribute to traditions and provincial way of life. They went to the synagogue on Friday and on Jewish holidays. They celebrated Sabbath, but didn't follow kashrut. They celebrated all holidays at home.

My grandfather Israel Zelvianski had progressive opinions, he was a Soviet person believing religion to be something obsolete and disappearing, something that was on the way of life and progress, but he never joined any political parties or public or cultural organizations.

My father Naum Zalivianski was born in Grodno in 1900. His mother tongue was Yiddish, but he could also speak Russian, but he could hardly write in it. He studied three years in cheder in his town. He could not continue his studies. He had to go to work to help his parents to support the family.

He accepted the [October] Revolution of 1917 enthusiastically. During the Civil War he and his brother served in the Red Army. He volunteered to the Red Army. He was a private in the 10th infantry regiment. His regiment was deployed near his town.

After another attack of White Guards gangs his neighbors decided to rob his parents' home. Someone informed him about their intentions and he managed to protect his parents.

However, there was another time when he couldn't do anything to prevent attacks and that time only his younger brother and sister survived and were sent to a children's home in Moscow.

The other members of the family were killed by bandits. He found his brother and sister in Moscow and supported them until they grew old enough to take care of themselves.

My father demobilized in 1921 and returned to Tambov where he worked as a tailor: he cut fabrics in shops and also worked at home to earn more.

In 1930 he married a Jewish woman named Rosa (I don't know her maiden name).

In 1931 their daughter Mirah was born. In 1933 they moved to his wife's relatives in Saratov [about 900 km from Moscow]. Shortly afterward his wife died. He lived with his deceased wife's relatives before he met my mother.

My father changed his surname during the Civil War, most likely for more common sounding; he was Zelvianski before.