

Sarra Nikiforenko With Her Family



Our family of Zelyonyie. Upper row: my sister Sonia's husband Grisha, my sister Bronia's husband Shymon, my sister Bronia, my sister Basia, her husband Grigory , my sister Polia, her husband Boris (I don't remember my sister husbands' last name. I am 93 and I am surprised I remember anything at all), my younger brother Boris Zelyony, my brother Solomon Zelyony; lower row: I, Sarra Nikiforenko (nee Zelyonaya); sitting: my sister Sonia, our mother Enta Zelyonaya, Bronia's little son Grisha, Sonia's daughter Sarra, Solomon's daughter Rachel Zelyonaya, Basia's sons - older Syoma and younger Zyunia Zelyony, our father Shaya Zelyony and Solomon's wife Basia Zelyonaya. The photo was taken in Tuchinskiy Photo shop in Smela in 1926. We had been planning to make a family photograph for a long time before we got together.

My father's family came from Smela town. This town is located in Cherkassy region. It's a small picturesque Ukrainian town in 200 km from Kiev. The town is located on the bank of the Tiasmin River. I don't know the origin of our family name - Zelyonyie, but most Jews in our town had Russian or Ukrainian sounding names. There was Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish population in the town. Poorer people lived in the outskirts and Jews resided in Jewish neighborhoods. My grandfather Zalman gave his children a decent education: both Jewish religious and secular. They had fluent Russian and could read and write very well.

My father, Shaya Zelyony was born in 1861. He prayed in his room every evening with his face to the East. He was not to be disturbed at this moment. He went to synagogue every morning, on Saturday and Jewish holidays and undeviatingly observed all Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays. My father got a profession of cabinetmaker when he was very young. He was a very skilled master and became popular.

My mother Enta Platkova was born in Kamenka town near Smela [30 km] in 1865. When my mother turned 16 and it was necessary to find a match for her my grandfather made the rounds of surrounding towns looking for a suitable match. My future father, a young man from a well-to-do family, having a profession, happened to be the most appropriate suitor. My grandfather came to an agreement with my father's parents and returned home to make all wedding arrangements. It was also quite customary for Jewish families that young people never saw each other before wedding. When the bridegroom arrived the bride was covered with a white veil. Four boys were

holding posts with a chuppah stretched on them. The rabbi took them around the chuppah, said a prayer and gave them some wine and then the veil was taken off the bride and the husband and wife saw one another for the first time then. They liked each other and made a beautiful couple for the rest of their life. My mother and father settled down in Smela. They rented a room from a Jewish family until my father bought a house.

I remember my brothers and sisters very young. They went to Baku [the capital of Azerbaidjan] in 1930-1932. I saw each of them two or three times afterward. We mainly communicated through letters. I don't remember my sister husbands' last name. I am 93 and I am surprised I remember anything at all.

My parents named their oldest son Anisim. He was born in the Jewish month of Nissan in 1883. He studied at cheder like all other boys in Smela but he was fond of technical things since childhood. There was a sugar factory in Smela and a technical school for boys at it. Anisim finished this school and became a mechanic. He went to work in Donbass. In early 1920s he moved to Dnepropetrovsk, an industrial town with better job opportunities, where he got married. My brothers and sisters had Jewish spouses and observed Jewish traditions and customs, but they weren't orthodox Jews. They gave a tribute to traditions celebrating holidays and eating no pork. They spoke Yiddish at home.

Solomon, the second son, was born in 1885. He studied at cheder and was as fond of equipment as his brother. At the beginning of 20th century industry was accelerating in the south of Ukraine [that belonged to Russia at that time]. There were many vacancies and the origin didn't matter for employment - industrious work was important. Solomon went to work at an iron ore mine.

My older sister Basia, born in 1888, was educated at home. My sisters had Jewish teachers. I remember that they were old men wearing yarmulkes and poorly dressed. Our mother always gave them a meal and some food to go. I don't know whether they received money for their work. They taught my sisters to read and write in Yiddish and Russian, and basics of Mathematic. They had 2-3 classes per week where they taught them to write and read in Russian and Yiddish, mathematics, literature and Jewish traditions. Basia married Grisha, a Jewish young man living in our street. I remember their wedding and my other sisters' weddings with a rabbi. The wedding took place in a blooming orchard in spring. The chuppah was a beautiful shawl tied to blooming cherry tree branches. A nice and hardworking Jewish man, he worked at the mill in Smela. They had a good life - they loved each other - together and had two boys: Syoma and Zyunia. They moved to Baku in 1930.

My other sister Bronia, born in 1892, was married to Shymon that was a bookbinder. They had a son. His name was Grisha. I don't remember whether they had other children. They moved to Baku during famine in 1932. I can't remember when they passed away.

Sister Sonia, born in 1895, was a great housewife. She and her husband Grigory, a Jew, lived near us in Smela. Their daughter Sarra, my grandmother's favorite, was a beautiful girl. Sonia helped mother about the house and Grigory learned profession with my father. He was a good specialist, but not as good as my father. They moved to Baku in 1931.

Sister Polia, born in 1905, had the same teachers and had learned the same languages at home before the revolution, but afterward she attended a secondary school for several years. Polia

married Boris, a Jewish man, cinema operator and a very nice man. All Jewish young people knew each other and got married based on their affections and preferences. Their daughter Rachel was born in 1928.

My youngest and favorite brother Berele (he was called Boris at home) was born in 1907. He studied at a Soviet Jewish school.

He worked at sugar factories. Shortly before the Great Patriotic War he moved to our parents in Baku. He married a nice Jewish girl (I've never seen her since they lived in Baku, and can't remember her name). They had a son - Vitalik. Boris perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War. His son died of some disease during the war.

I was the fifth daughter in the family. I was born in 1909 in Krivoy Rog where my parents moved following Solomon. My father was hoping to have a lot more clients in a growing town. But it was a dirty and dusty town. They were not happy about living in a rented apartment and were completely discouraged by an accident in the mine. In 1912 we returned to Smela: to the familiar life and environment.

We celebrated Pesach, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and other holidays. The family fasted at Yom Kippur - only younger children were allowed to have a bite of something in the kitchen.

We sang many Jewish songs. I had a wonderful voice and my father enjoyed singing with me. There were special songs for each holiday. Those were joyful holidays when many people came to the house: all children and their friends. They sang and danced. It was a lot of joy to have a big family at that time. All children were treated with love.

We spoke only Yiddish in the family, although my father spoke fluent Russian. There were many books at home in a bookcase: they were both religious books in Yiddish and Hebrew since my parents prayed at home.

My mother was very proud of her children: we were big and healthy and so were our friends. When a bunch of us was going out she always asked us to stay at a distance from one another so that nobody put an evil eye on us.