

Semyon Gun's Mother's Adoptive Parents Lazar And Risia Alpert



These are my mother's adoptive parents Lazar and Risia Alpert. This photo was taken in Borschagovka in the 1910s.

All I know about my mother's father is that his name was Semyon Shtilman. Lazar and Risia Alpert adopted my mother and her sister, but they didn't process any official documentation and the children kept their father's last name. [Editor's note: Semyon called his mother's adoptive parents 'grandmother' and 'grandfather'.] My maternal grandfather Lazar Alpert was born in 1880. Most likely he came from Borshchagovka, Kiev province. I don't know who his parents were. Lazar said

he was a blacksmith from the age of 12. My grandfather was physically very strong. He told me that he could hold an old model gun by the tip of a bayonet with his fingers and his arm stretched. Lazar served in the tsarist army. During WWI my grandfather Lazar was captured by Austrians. Austrians were loyal to them. There was no suppression. Grandfather Lazar told me about Jewish pogroms during the Civil War. I remember one of his stories when an equestrian gang rode into their village and began to torture Jewish families. My grandfather wanted to escape on a horse-driven wagon. One bandit began to follow him. They fought and then the bandit began to shout for help. My grandfather managed to hide in a bush on the bank. He stayed underwater for hours breathing through a rush tube. In the evening he got from under the water and ran to somebody's house where he hid under a bed.

In Odessa my grandfather worked in a forge near a military unit in Politseiskaya Street. He didn't earn much there. Grandfather Lazar went to synagogue on holidays. He had a prayer book: a small thick book that he read through a magnifying glass. He also had a printed Torah. Lazar spoke Russian to me and Yiddish with his wife Risia and my parents. He had a moustache that he liked to wave. I don't know whether he observed kashrut. I know that grandfather Lazar never ate garlic or onions and had gefilte fish and cutlets cooked separately for him.

My maternal grandmother Risia Alpert was born in 1870. I have no information about her parents, her place of birth or her youth. Risia was about 10 years older than my grandfather and had no children of her own. Risia was a religious woman. She went to synagogue with her husband on holidays. She wore dull colored clothes: gray skirts and gray blouses. Grandmother wore a kerchief at home and outside. She spoke Yiddish with grandfather Lazar and my parents. Risia always looked good: she took care of herself. She was healthy and her skin was soft and smooth. My parents used to say 'Oof, she likes herself!' Every morning grandmother Risia had tea with lemon and bread and butter. She didn't drink alcohol at parties: she poured some vodka into a saucer and dipped bread in it. She also had another peculiar feature: she swallowed pills and other medications without washing them down. She had a strong throat and could drink boiling water. Risia had no education, but she counted in her mind in a jiffy. Grandmother Risia liked me dearly. If my parents put pressure on me I complained to her. She always gave me some money on holidays. I addressed her with informal 'you' while I always addressed my grandfather with formal 'you'.