

Lev Fiedelgolts With His Family



This is my father's family.

Sitting from left to right: father's elder brother Mikhail Fiedelgolts, my father Lev Fiedelgolts, father's sister Maria, my paternal grandfather Gersh Fiedelgolts. Standing: father's elder sister Asya and grandmother (I do not remember her name).

The photograph was taken in Gomel in 1910.

My father's family lived in Gomel [Belarus, 320 km to the west from Minsk]. Before 1917 it was the territory of Poland, being the part of Russian Empire. Now Gomel is a district center of Belarus, being the chief town of the district. Gomel was a part of the Pale of Settlement, so there were a lot of Jews.

There were several synagogues in Gomel and a large Jewish community. Jews were not merely craftsmen; there were also representatives of town intelligentsia. My grandfather Gersh Fiedelgolts was one of them. I do not know where my parental grandparents were born.

They lived in other Belarusian cities when they were single. I know the family story how my parents were wed. They met when my grandmother was married and had two children. I forgot the name of the elder son, the younger one was named Shloime. The last name of grandmother's first husband was Slavin, I do not remember his first name.

My grandfather was a smart and handsome man. Besides, he was a good company. One day he met grandmother. I do not know the details, all I know that they fell in love with each other. Their love was crowned with bereavement of granny. She left her rich husband and two children and eloped with grandfather. It was an improbable story for those times.

They settled in Gomel. Grandmother's first husband must have divorced her, so that they had a chance to get married. So they settled down in Gomel. I do not know what education my grandparents got, but they were educated people. Grandfather was a medical attendant, at that

time the latter were much more educated and qualified than nowadays.

Grandfather treated patients, even made uncomplicated operations. His patients were not always in Gomel. Quite often he was called to other towns. Grandmother was not a housewife after getting married, which was not customary for the married Jewish women back in that time. They lived in the center of the town, by the market square.

Grandmother opened pharmacy right in her house. She was both the owner and a pharmacist. I do not remember my grandparents, as they died when I was a small boy.

What I know about them is from my father's tales. Grandparents were religious in spite of being educated. Jewish traditions were observed at home. Sabbath and Jewish holidays were marked. They went to the synagogue.

There were 4 children in the family. Maria was the eldest. She was followed by the second daughter Asya (Jewish name Asna). Then two more sons were born- the elder Mikhail and the youngest in the family- my father Levi. My father was born in 1899. Later on, he was called Russian [common] name Lev.

My father had a happy childhood. Both father's elder brother Mikhail and my father went to cheder at the age of 5. Father got proper Jewish education, but grandparents were aware that secular education would be important for the career. Boys went to the lyceum named after A.Ratner, which was open in 1907. [The doctor Arkadiy Efimovich Rartner was the founded of the school.

In 1911 private Jewish lyceum accounted for 400 children, whose parents were mostly lower middle class and merchants]. It was the only private Jewish lyceum in Belarus.

My father succeeded in studies. Parents facilitated in that a lot. Not only grandfather, but also grandmother was very educated. Apart from being well up in pharmaceuticals and Latin, she also was fluent in several European languages: French, German, English and Italian.

My father was also fluent in those languages. At a mature age he looked up only for a special terms in the dictionary, terminology was the only stumbling stone.

Grandfather had a great library containing the books in Hebrew and Yiddish as well as secular books in Russian and foreign languages. Grandfather had a large collection of classic music records. All those things were available to the children.