

Lev Chernovich With His Fellow Soldier



This is my father Lev Chernovich (to the right), soldier of the compulsory service in Tsarist army with his fellow soldier, whose name I do not know. My father sent this photo to my mother. They were engaged at that time. The picture was taken in 1912.

My father's family lived in an ancient Russian city Smolensk [300 km to the West from Moscow]. I know hardly anything about my father Lev Chernovich and his kin.

There were five children in the family. My father was born in 1891. He was given a Russian name Lev (Jewish name Leib).

I think my father and his siblings got Jewish education. My father never discussed it with me.

It is just my assumption as it could not have been otherwise back in that time. Jews were very religious before revolution, especially those who lived in small towns and boroughs.

Apostates underwent stigmatization, so nobody wanted to be a castaway. Yiddish was spoken in the family. Everybody spoke good Russian, including my father's grandparents.

Father went to land survey school. In 1912 he was engaged to my mother. They must have been acquainted by matchmakers, because mother's family lived very far from Smolensk. She lived in Lithuania.

That year father was drafted for the compulsory military service in the Tsarist army. Soon World War I was unleashed.

Father was not very lucky he was captured by the enemy and sent to the camp for the captives located not far Wroclaw, Lower Silesia.

Father did not tell much about his captivity. I know that prisoners of war were starving. Father corresponded with mother during his captivity. Father was released from the camp in 1918. When

the war was over, father came back to Smolensk.

My mother's family lived in a small town of Girtakol in Lithuanian province. When World War I began and Germans put foot at Lithuanian territory, mother and her younger sister Ida fled to Ukraine to Kherson suburbs [470 km to the South from Kiev], where her distant relatives lived.

The town they lived in was called Oleshki, then it was renamed Tsyurupinsk. When father was released from camp, he came to Oleshki to see my mother.

They left Oleshki and went to mother's parents in Lithuania. They got married there. I think they had a traditional Jewish wedding.

Mother said that father was feeble and exhausted after captivity. He was fed well in Lithuania. He was given a lot of milk to drink.

They lived with mother's parents for a while and then father took mother to Smolensk. They lived in the house of father's parents.

For some reason father's relatives did not like and did not accept my mother. Mother said that the only person who treated her well was father's elder brother Isaac. Others were constantly giving her the cold shoulder. Mother loved father very much and did her best for his relatives to get to like her.

She did not want to be the bone of contention. Unfortunately, all her efforts to get along with father's family were futile. Father went to work as a land surveyor. Mother was a housewife.

She took hard continual disdain and humiliation towards her. Finally, parents decided to move to Moscow. In 1922 they left Smolensk.

I was born in 1923. Father left us shortly before I was born. He had another family. I considered father to be a man who had broken my mother's life. It is an unpleasant recollection for me.

My father was not interested in my life either. I treated him likewise. I practically did not know him. He worked as an economist for the construction ministry. He had duly paid alimony to my mother until I turned 18. Father came to my mother once a month.

He gave her money and left at once. He even did not talk to me. He said couple of words to my mother, and that was it. Then I found out, that father left his second family and got married for the third time.

His third wife was much younger than he was. She left him shortly after they got married. Father died in 1964.