

Bella Knopp



This is my mother, Bella Knopp. Her photo was taken shortly before the wedding in Kiev photo shop Cabinet Portrait, located at Konstantinovskaya street in 1912.

My maternal grandfather's name was Sheftel Knopp. He was born in Zhitomir. I do not remember his birth date. I did not know my grandmother's name. Before 1917 my grandfather owned glass workshop and a store, where glassware, produced in workshop, was on offer and the orders were

taken. Grandmother helped my grandfather with the workshop and the store. Once, either in 1914 or 1915 a customer asked to a glaze the icon [Christian families traditionally had icons in their homes, unless some of their members were convinced communists. Most older people in villages remained religious]. Grandmother fulfilled the order the way the customer asked. And when the customer came to pick up the order, he either had not paid or underpaid my grandmother, I cannot tell for sure. Grandmother was enraged, grabbed the icon and hurled so hard that the glass got broken. She was blamed in sacrilege and insult to the Orthodox sacred thing. The customer filed a charge against my grandmother, and as a consequence she was to be exiled in Siberia. Grandfather spent a lot of money on attorneys, but his efforts were futile. The authorities were willing to make an ostentatious trial so that other Jews would in no way insult Orthodoxy. Revolution saved my grandmother, the soviet regime started a struggle against religion, and my grandmother's culprit was overlooked. But due to constant worries grandmother got afflicted with breast cancer and passed away a rather young woman in 1919.

The my mother's family had six children. My mother Bella Knopp (Jewish name Beila) was the eldest, she was born in 1891 in Zhitomir. Then her sister Khasya was born, brothers Boris, Mikhel, Grigoriy, Hersh and the youngest sister Manya. Everybody in the family spoke Yiddish. In Zhitomir even many non-Jewish people were fluent in Yiddish, and Jews in its turn were fluent in Ukrainian and Polish. All children knew how to read and write Yiddish. I do not know what education my mother and her siblings got. I would say it was rudimentary. Anyway, I remember the fact that my mother corresponded with her kin only in Yiddish. Later in the post-war period my mother started writing in Russian. Of course, the entire family was religious.

In 1912 my father rendered to a matchmaker [shadkhan], who told him about a beautiful eligible maid in Zhitomir [Ukraine]. My father went to Zhitomir [140 km from Kiev] to propose to her. Father's wooing was successful and at the beginning of 1912 my parents got married in Kiev. It was a traditional Jewish wedding. Parents had a marriage certificate issued by rabbi. My elder brother Grigoriy was born on December 28, 1912. In the year of 1917 my second brother Lev was born. He died the year when I was born, 1924. Mother and Lev went to Zhitomir to see her relatives, and Lev died there as a result of either meningitis or heliosis [sunstroke]. He was buried in Zhitomir in Jewish cemetery, next to my grandmother.

I was born in August, 1924. I was named Hertz after eldest brother of my father, who died a year before, 1923. He was buried in Lukianovskoy Jewish cemetery in Kiev.