

## Chapter 6

### The Family

The origins of the Waldman Family are obscure. I was always interested in where our family originated, and even when I was very young, I used to question senior members of the family at every opportunity. Therefore, the following comes from memory of my father, his father, uncles and cousins. Facts about Berdichev were obtained from a highly regarded scholar, Dr. Lucien Dobroszycki, of the YIVO Jewish Institute of Research, New York City.

The earliest ancestor I can identify is Yankele the Zlotnick (Goldsmith), who lived in Berdichev, Russia. Jews had no surnames at that time, and they were identified by their occupation. In this case, Yankele, whom I am named after, was a metal worker, who worked in precious metal. He was considered a very fine craftsman, and it was rumored he even made some jewelry for the Czar. Berdichev was in the "Pale of Settlement" proscribed by the Russian Government, and consequently, had a substantial Jewish population. The city belonged to Poland until the end of the 18th century, when it was taken over by the Russians in 1793 during the reign of Catherine II. The following statistics give an idea of the city's size and population:

In 1778 there were 1,108 inhabitants, of which 741 were Jews

In 1784 there were 1,870 inhabitants, of which 1,319 were Jews

In 1787 there were 2,007 inhabitants, of which 1,504 were Jews

By the end of the 18th century

occupations of Jewish men were:

115	Innkeepers
210	Landlords
65	Merchants
95	Artisans
76	Service men
26	unspecified

In 1797 Jews were given monopoly to manufacture Textiles

In 1800 First Jewish printing House was established

In 1897 Czar Nicholas had the Great Census taken. Total inhabitants of Berdichev were: 53,351 of which 80% were Jews (19,689 men, 21,928 women)

There were 2,412 houses, of which only 306 were big houses

Main occupation of Jews was commerce, and 43% of Jews were literate.

This was the city where Yankele was born and brought up. Did he have any siblings? I do not know. He married a woman named Esther, and they had a son named Izak (my grandfather). Whether Izak had any siblings, again I do not know. Izak was brought up in orthodox tradition, as I can testify; he prayed each day with the tallit and phylacteries, when I was with him in Palestine. As a young man he was subject to the Russian military draft, and for a Jew, that was purgatory. Sixteen years of service, abused, ridiculed,

no promotions, this was no place to be. So, like many of his contemporaries, he decided to leave mother Russia. At that time Galicia was under the wing of Kaiser Franz Joseph, of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This country was a model of tolerance and freedom for its day; so, he managed to get over the border, changed his name to a good Germanic one, Waldman, and became a citizen of Austria. Izak had metal working skills, was literate, and ambitious. He settled in the town of Boryslav, which is in the region with large oil and gas deposits. He gained knowledge of pumps and oil mining equipment, and came to be known as "Izak the Pump Master." He had his own contracting business, and prospered with the growing demand for petroleum products. He met and married a proud and dignified woman named Sara Blanc from Lemberg. They had 5 children: Charna, Moshe, Joseph, Bronia and Harry.

There was an intellectual atmosphere in the household. The girls were literate and avid readers, unlike many of their contemporaries. Traditional religious practices were not rigidly enforced. Although the boys went to "cheder," they preferred secular life. My father was a perpetual truant and a mischief maker. He took 6 years to get through 4 years of schooling. He was known as the "little devil." Fresh breezes of political thought were actively discussed in the house, and Charna and Moshe were the leading intellectuals. There is a story told of a young man who wanted to court Charna. After an evening visit at the Waldman house, Izak asked his daughter, Charna, what she thought of the suitor. She replied, "when he talks of anvils, he is a man. When he talks of men, he is an anvil!"

By the beginning of the 20th century, the Waldman family in Boryslav was well established. Izak was a respected member of the Jewish community.

Moshe was a good student, always excelling in school, especially in electrical engineering. Charna got married. Bronia, who was not fair, remained "an old maid" until much later in life, when she married a nice old gentleman she met when she emigrated to Palestine. Joseph was the problem. He did not like to study, yet he was very bright. So, Izak decided that Joseph would become an artisan. He arranged to send him to Budapest to apprentice as a "brass maker." He was only 14 or 15 years old, very short, and looked like a small boy away from home. He got lost going to Budapest, and was saved by some kindly old Jews, who took up a collection for him in the railway station. He never forgot the kindness of strangers, and practiced charity all his life.

In Budapest, as an apprentice, he had to rise early in the morning from a cot in the workshop, shine the boss's and family shoes, clean out the shop, then run to a bakery for hot coffee, and a day-old roll, which was all he could afford. He apprenticed for three years, gradually mastering his trade. He learned to make brass from melting copper and zinc together, making a mold, casting the molten metal into a form, turning the form on a foot-treadle lathe into a candlestick, polishing the candlestick, and then selling and delivering the end-product to the customer. That was basic training!

When he returned home to Boryslav after his apprenticeship, by chance, there was a visitor at the house named Izzy Singer, who was a distant cousin. Izzy was visiting the family to show off his new-won prosperity which he had achieved by going to America a few years before. He dazzled everyone with stories of "streets paved with gold." My father was completely taken, and then and there decided to go. Izzy's latest caper was to work as a streetcar

conductor in New York City. When a passenger got on the car, he gave Izzy a nickel. Izzy put one nickel in the till and one in his pocket. Thus, he became a "silent partner" to the street car company.

Izzy told my father it was easy to emigrate. All you needed was handful of change, no passport, good health. My father borrowed the necessary funds from his father, purchased a steamship ticket, steerage class, and set out for Hamburg with Izzy Singer to catch the transatlantic ship to New York. He arrived in New York in 1907.