

FAMILY STORIES

When I was a little boy, my mother told me about her life growing up in Vaslui, and her family. I wasn't very interested. She continued telling me her stories, but I still wasn't interested. When I became interested, my mother wasn't there to tell me anything, anymore. I have tried to put her story together based on what I remembered, along with the papers, letters and photographs that she left.

I know that my mother, Celia, (Tsirl), was born on November 3, 1888 to Malke and Jacu Goldstein. I have her birth certificate. She had a sister Suraleah and a brother Meilich. My mother was apprenticed to a tailor at 6, left Vaslui as a "feesgayer" at 16. The "feesgayers" were young Jews, underwritten by the Alliance Israelite who walked in groups across Europe to ports where they boarded ships for "the New World." She arrived in Toronto in 1904 where she stayed with somebody whom I figured out to be the sister of her sister's husband, as a result of newly learned information from that person's grandson, Marshall Egelnick. He is the son of Millie Egelnick, the daughter of Dora Aaron, the sister of Herschleib Goldstein, the husband of Suraleah, my mother's sister. That is not too complicated. What Marshall told me, he learned from an 80 year old cousin in 2005: Schmerl Goldstein was his great grandfather who had four children from a first marriage, and four children from a second marriage. (I assume he lived in Vaslui, and I also assume he must have been related to my grandfather, both being Goldsteins.)

According to Marshall, two of Schmerl's four children from his first marriage, moved to Toronto (Dora and Chanah), and two moved to Paris (Srul Avrum and Herschleib). Dora was already married to Reuben Aronovich (Aaron) when she came to Toronto. The move had to have taken place before 1904.

It was my understanding that my mother was sending money to her sister, Suraleah, to enable her family to come to the United States. It must have been 1913--1914, because, according to my mother, they were on their way to America when World War I broke out and they settled in Paris. However, according to Marshall, his two uncles "moved to Paris." It sounds as if Paris was their intended destination. Not only did the two brothers, Srul Avrum and Herschleib and their families move to Paris, but according to Marshall, three of Schmerl's four daughters by his second marriage, also moved from Romania to Paris.

Marshall's great grandfather Schmerl Goldstein had eight children. I have no idea how many children my great grandfather had. His name was David, but I don't know if he was my grandfather's father or my grandmother's father. I think he lived in the same house with my mother and her family. He must have meant a great deal to my mother to ask me to name my son after him.

Marshall also told me that his grandparents, Reuben and Dora Aaron, had six children. It was Dora and Reuben Aaron with whom my mother stayed when she arrived in Toronto. The story my mother told me was that she found a job as an alteration tailor with Eaton's Department Store. She had been working there for several months and everything was

fine until her foreman asked her to work on Saturday. My mother said that when she started work, she had made it clear that she did not work on Saturdays. When the foreman insisted, she asked for her wages and told him that she is leaving. The foreman then told my mother that she did not have to work, but my mother asked to be paid off, and left.

My mother maintained contact over the years with Dora and with her daughter Millie, even though they were not “blood relatives.” She visited them in Toronto in the early ‘20s, and her big trip was to visit her sister and brother-in-law in Paris in 1926. Millie and her husband visited with my mother soon after they married. My mother corresponded with Herschleib and Suraleah in Paris, Meilich in Vaslui, and Millie in Toronto.

How did my mother correspond? Before she learned how to read and write, she went to neighborhood letter-writers who would write in Yiddish, whatever you dictated, for a fee. In the ‘20s, my mother learned to read and write English, and she would write simple letters, but I assume she continued to use the neighborhood scribes. When I was around eight and had learned to read and write Yiddish script, my mother had me write whatever she dictated. I did this through the ‘30s and ‘40s, adding a few lines in English, and after taking French, a few lines in French. Both my uncles wrote Yiddish beautifully. My uncle in Vaslui also wrote in Romanian, and I would read it to my mother and she would translate. I was impressed that my mother had retained the language.