

Pushkin-Solomon Family

By Ken Solomon

Conversations with

Sarah (Pushkin) Solomon

Also named: Sora or Fruma

b. 1903, Sveksna, Lithuania

d. 1908, Southfield, MI, USA

2 January 1993

The town: She was born in Sveksna (pronounced: Švėkšna), Lithuania. It was surrounded by mostly farmland. Her dad (Mordechai or Motel Pushkin, b. approx. 1866) died in hospital in Memel, Germany, and was buried there. Not enough money to return him home for burial. He was under 40 when he died and had been a shoemaker. "Never made any money at it."

Germans and Russians both wanted Sveksna. Germans marched in with horses. They were angry that everyone had left. Bubby and her mother Yetta (Solomon) Pushkin, b. 1860, Sveksna, were the only ones left behind. Everyone else, her five brothers and sisters, had already migrated to the U.S. She had an uncle (probably also from Sveksna), her mother's only brother, who brought everyone over. She emigrated to the U.S. in 1922.

She described her home as being as big as a one-room apartment. Bubby and her mother were alone. When Bubby was five to six years old, she remembers the Germans put horses in the ground floors of homes. She remembers horses' heads sticking out of windows.

Transportation consisted of horse and buggy.

16 January 1993

The town was surrounded by farms. Few Jews in town sold at the market. Gentile farmers sold oranges, tomatoes. She said there were two saloons in town, where the farmers spent their earnings. "Rich people didn't like it - the drunks." Jews drank homemade wine.

22 May 1994

She mentioned something about Purim, and the holiday celebration in memory of "Homan" or "Chomam" (sp?). He was a "Nazi-kind-of-guy", who wanted to remove all of the Jews from the town. He marched in on a horse. People threw a plate of ___ at him. People made cookies and cakes in shapes/images of him?

More stories about this Chomam: She remembered when she was five to six stories about him. "He took over Sveksna?" His name meant a very mean. He ordered all the Jews out to the main street (market) to kill them. A gentile man on a horse had a pail of ____ and dumped it on him. He was killed the day he was to order all the Jews killed on the street by a gentile.

Other towns nearby: Taverig (sp?) or Tverai (sp?). This was a bigger city where people did business. Two or three hours by horse, to buy things their town didn't have. Another town, Kovna or Chovna (sp?). A bigger city in Russia.

I asked where were her parents born. She said her mother was definitely born in Sveksna. Possibly her father too. She didn't remember where her grandparents came from.

1 January 1995

In "the old country", "I remember it like today." She was dancing at a party; lots of music and dancing, and we ate. "When I was young, you wouldn't recognize me..." "I made it a point to be there at the party. The dance was in a synagogue. She had to buy a ticket? She remembers being about 15 to 16 years old. She said there was a dance every Saturday, in front of the City, where the stores are closed?

I asked her if there really was someone called a matchmaker, and she said yes. I asked if she would have to marry somebody she wasn't interested in. Answer: yes – she would have to. I reminded her of something...

She lived in a house next door or possibly down the street from a rabbi. He didn't have a lot of business. She later said he wasn't a rabbi, but an educated man – like a rabbi. He lived in front of a large house with two bedrooms. A woman lived with him. This man, she said, had bothered her to get married. She said "He knew someone I would like." But she wasn't interested and used to hide herself from him. Her mother needed to pick the best man for her.

She said the man (or rabbi?) said she should remain (not emigrate to U.S.). It would not be good for her mother. "It is not religious (U.S.). She said "A girl (bride) had to be clean in the U.S." She said "He says my mother was an elderly woman who would not like it. The U.S. wasn't good for them. America would not be good for them."

She described her house : "European porches that attach to the front of the house." She sat on the porch at night. Her mother didn't allow her to leave the porch. "She was so strict." He (the man) couldn't take her for a walk. Her mother was very strict.

"Terrible thing in a small town... when you get married and meet a boy (man) you had perfect." "You couldn't be touched by anybody." She said it was "like Hebrew- the old religion... it was written – if she 's not clean the man (if religious) should not marry her, because she was already touched."

Describing a scene at the train station in "the old country" on her way to America (1922): I almost lost my mother. She went to the bathroom (apparently leaving Bubby on the train by herself). She came back after signing a paper... the train was leaving.

"My mother...rest in peace...had a habit of leaving me. I turned around and saw (through the window) my mother outside the train. She ran down and jumped from the train, leaving her clothes behind. I lost all my clothes, you know what I had? Two suitcases... I watched them go away (with train)..."

but I had my mother." Those were all the clothes she had, except for the clothes she had on at the time. She said a dressmaker made her two dresses; one was "beige," and the other was "blue." The shoes she had on were high heels, very high heels... She said "I was told these were not the clothes they were wearing in America. My mother...rest in peace...said I should take low heeled shoes... the shoes I was wearing weren't the styles they were wearing in the U.S."

Three years later, at the age of 95, after battling with Alzheimer's, Sarah passed away.

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The Pushkin's mostly ended up in Detroit, MI, except for one sibling who raised a family in Brooklyn, New York, and the Solomons were in, I believe, Brooklyn.

K. Solomon