

Upon returning home SHLOMO-ZALMEN resumed his studies under the supervision of his grandfather to whom he was particularly attached. Rabbi PINKHAS, in his capacity as Av Din, was consulted from time to time to solve disputes or settle matters of religious law. On one such occasion he was asked for his opinion of a marriage match which had been proposed for a daughter of a family living in Graftskoy (55). The prospective bridegroom was a scholar from Lithuania. Rabbi PINKHAS interviewed the youth to ascertain his suitability. Something about him seemed out of place. Withholding his decision Rabbi PINKHAS wrote to the rabbi of the youth's town with whom he was acquainted. He enquired whether the scholar was known to the rabbi and if so, whether he would give him a character reference. The rabbi replied that he knew the scholar only too well since he had just deserted his wife and child!

Not satisfied with simply revealing the man as a fraud, Rabbi PINKHAS was determined to see justice done to the deserted wife. Once again he wrote to the rabbi in Lithuania and asked him to arrange for the wife and child to travel to Graftskoy. In due course the woman arrived and Rabbi PINKHAS staged a confrontation with the errant husband. In this way the girl from Graftskoy was saved from a bigamous marriage and the deserted wife was assured of compensation.

In 1897 tragedy struck the Komisaruk family. Rabbi PINKHAS's life was suddenly cut short as a result of a freak accident. One day, in the depths of the severe Russian winter, Rabbi PINKHAS went out to draw water from the well which stood in the yard of his house. As he was hoisting the bucket up, he slipped on the icy ground, lost his balance and fell forwards into the well. He struggled to free himself in order to climb out but to no avail. He began to shout for help but no-one heard him. Hours passed until a passerby heard his weakening plaintive cry. Quickly his sons were alerted and they lowered ropes to haul him out. This was no easy task; his great height meant that he was wedged tightly into the narrow well. Eventually he was freed and they wasted no time to rush him inside to be dried and warmed. But his constitution was not strong enough for him to overcome the ordeal. He became ill and over a few short days developed pneumonia.

It was apparent to Rabbi PINKHAS's family that he did not have long to live. Wasting no time, all of the family who were living elsewhere returned to Graftskoy to be with the patriarch of the Komisaruk family during his last hours. On the 26th of Adar Rishon the end was approaching. All of his family were gathered around his bedside and the street outside was full of people anxiously awaiting news of his condition. After farewelling his wife, children and brothers, Rabbi PINKHAS looked around to the large group of his grandchildren. His eyes came to rest on MENAKHEM-MENDEL's son YAAKOV-LEIB. He called him over, blessed him, then passed away (56).

The news soon spread throughout the Kolonyas that the life of Rabbi PINKHAS Komisaruk had come to an end. Thousands of people came to Graftskoy to attend his funeral including sixteen rabbis from the surrounding district. They had come to pay their last respects to the man who had done so much good and helped so many people in those terrible days of the pogroms. Rabbi PINKHAS wrote no philosophical books. Yet he was a great man in other ways. Almost his entire life he had given up to the service of others. From the battlefields of the Crimea to the pogrom-devastated Kolonyas, he constantly strove to help those in need and to bring spiritual guidance and strength to help relieve the suffering of his people. He was beloved by his family and his grandchildren passed the memory of him on to their grandchildren with the stories they told of their recollections of him. Wherever his descendants and relatives live, the memory of him will remain sacred.

(55) Incident related by RAKHEL Luban.

(56) Rabbi PINKHAS's death and the events surrounding it were related by his grandchildren RAKHEL Luban of Israel and SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komisaroff of Melbourne. A former resident of Graftskoy, living in Melbourne, recalled the funeral (Meerkin).

Rabbi PINKHAS's death was reported in the Hebrew newspaper HaMelitz (57):

" HAMELITZ No. 59

20 Adar Two, 5657
12 (24) March, 1897

Grafskoy - (Jewish settlement in the Government of Yekaterinoslav)

The 27th day of Adar I was for us a day of mourning and grief because during it passed from life in the sixty-seventh year of his life, the Rabbi, the Gaon, Av-Din of here, our Rabbi PINKHAS Komisarov, who officiated to the glory of our settlement as Rabbi and 'Shokhet and Examiner' more than thirty years. Great honour was shown to him in his death, all the rabbis of the surrounding settlements gathered, came to pay him the last honour and eulogised him according to the Law. He was great in Torah and the Fear of Heaven, and in peace and righteousness he walked with his brethren the farmers.

Peace be unto his dust and may his soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life.

Kalman Bruser

"

A day or so after Rabbi PINKHAS's death, MENAKHEM-MENDEL and BEILA-REEVA gave birth to another son. He was named PINKHAS after his late grandfather. Although in mourning for his father, MENAKHEM-MENDEL adhered to the tradition which held that the welfare of the living had preference over respect for the dead. So he arranged for the 'Briss' and the customary celebrations which accompanied the birth of a child. In fact, the same people who had come for the funeral attended the Briss. However the rejoicing was not for long. A few weeks after its birth the baby died.

Not long after the death of Rabbi PINKHAS, his wife BASSIE also passed away. The exact year is not known, the date was Rosh Chodesh Iyar. Soon after her death the house she and Rabbi PINKHAS had lived in was demolished, as it was no longer safe to live in due to its age. This may indicate that it was the original house erected by Rabbi PINKHAS's father, Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN soon after his arrival in Grafskoy (58).

To relieve her sorrow and loneliness after the death of her children, ESTER Luban asked her brother MENAKHEM-MENDEL if he would send his son ZALMEN, whom she was very fond of, to live with her. MENAKHEM-MENDEL gave his consent because he was finding it hard to support his large family. He also realised that ZALMEN would have more opportunities to make a living in a town than on the farm. In 1897 ZALMEN went to live with the Lubans who had moved from Mikhailovka and settled in Melitopol, a small town situated on an inlet of the Sea of Azov. At the age of eleven ZALMEN started to earn his own living. His uncle KHAIM-MOSHE found him a job in a factory. During the winter it was his job to set up a stall in the market. This was situated on the frozen lake and early each morning ZALMEN would set out in the freezing cold to assemble the stall before the market opened. Some mornings the cold was so intense that his hands froze to the crowbar he was using. ZALMEN led a difficult life in those days but there were also happy times. He was very attached to his aunt and uncle and was the greatest of friends with his cousin ALTER. Whenever ZALMEN was free from work, he and ALTER would run off and enjoy themselves, getting into all sorts of trouble through their escapades. Those years which ZALMEN spent in Melitopol provided him with some of his happiest childhood memories.

(57) The original of this newspaper was kept by Rabbi PINKHAS's daughter ESTER Luban and is now in the possession of her grandson MOSHE Luban in Israel. The author, Kalman Bruser was a grandson of David-Moshe Bruser, the Chasan of Grafskoy. The date should have been 26 Adar I.

(58) The foundations were still visible when KHAIM-VELVEL Komesaroff was a child.

One particular incident took place while ZALMEN was at work on the stall in the market. The news suddenly spread that the Starista of the town was going to visit the market. A Starista was usually a retired army officer who had been made mayor of the town as a reward for his military service. The market was in an uproar. Quickly everyone tidied up in preparation for the arrival of this illustrious personage. The owner of the stall where ZALMEN worked ordered him to go inside a shed and stay there until the Starista had departed. An insignificant boy like ZALMEN was not to be allowed to get in the way of the Starista. Disappointed but resigned to his fate ZALMEN went into the shed. Soon he could hear cheering and the sound of horses riding into the marketplace. He was longing to see what was happening. As time passed he became less and less able to restrain himself and when he could bear the suspense no longer he peeped through a crack in the wall of the shed. Outside he could see the crowd gathering around a man on horseback: the Starista. He was indeed an awesome sight, a tall man dressed in an elaborate scarlet uniform with a plumed hat. ZALMEN was overjoyed. Now he could boast that he had seen the Starista. He became so worked up with his excitement that he could hardly keep still. He longed to get out of the shed and run to tell ALTER. He began to jump up and down, and when he could contain his emotions no longer he flung open the door and ran through the marketplace shouting: "I've seen the Starista. I've seen the Starista." We can imagine what happened to ZALMEN when he got back to work and his employer caught him.

Although ZALMEN had very little secular education, having only learnt to write in Russian as he gained experience later in his own business, he had the usual Jewish education. Aside from learning at home with his father and grandfather, and for a period with his uncle Rabbi ZALMEN, he went to Cheder together with his cousin ALTER, who being somewhat younger was in a lower class. ZALMEN learnt not only what he had to but because he had a love of his studies. As a teenager he set himself the painstaking task of writing his own Megillah for Purim. This entailed long hours of care and concentration as he copied the Megillah word for word onto a parchment scroll and then decorated it. ZALMEN also acquired a different type of knowledge from his uncle KHAIM-MOSHE Luban. This saintly and pious man introduced his nephew to the ways of the Chassidim with their devotion at prayer and their love of song and dance. Much of ZALMEN's later traditional practices, particularly at the Seder table, may have been influenced by these Chassidic customs. Thus he was fortunate in gaining a good background in study in the Misnagid background of his home, tempered by the Chassidic environment of the Luban home.

ZALMEN was an outstanding student, well ahead of the rest of his class. Eventually the teacher told him that he could teach him no more of the normal course of studies and suggested that he teach him to translate the Bible into Russian. When ZALMEN next saw his father and told him of this, MENAKHEM-MENDEL was furious. He forbade ZALMEN to contemplate studying the Bible in Russian saying: "There will be time enough when you grow up to learn to be a Goy!" (59)

(59) ZALMEN was a great storyteller and delighted telling these anecdotes of his childhood to his children and grandchildren.

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

CHAPTER SIX: THE NEW CENTURY

The beginning of the Twentieth Century was marked by tragedy for the family of MENAKHEM-MENDEL. In 1901 the eldest son KHAIM-VELVEL became ill and did not respond to any of the usual home remedies. As Jews could rarely obtain the services of a doctor, they had to resort to an infamous character called the Feldsher. Such men usually received their scant medical knowledge whilst serving as orderlies in the medical corps of the army. On demobilization they continued to use their incomplete knowledge to treat the Jews in their home towns. In desperation, MENAKHEM-MENDEL called the local Feldsher to attend to KHAIM-VELVEL. The Feldsher entered the room alone to attend to the sick boy. At this time ZALMEN, his brother, was resting in the adjoining room. Suddenly he heard the Feldsher cry out: "What have I done? I've given him the wrong medicine!" The parents, upon re-entering the room, found their son dead. Although ZALMEN told his parents what he had overheard, the Feldsher denied that he had caused the child's death.

In 1908 MENAKHEM-MENDEL and BEILA-REEVA had their youngest son whom they named KHAIM-VELVEL in memory of his brother. An amusing incident occurred on the day that the baby was born. Towards evening MENAKHEM-MENDEL was riding home after the day's work, anxious to find out if his wife had given birth yet. As he rode up to the house, he saw some of his children waving to him excitedly at one of the windows. Thinking that this meant that the baby had been born, he rode quickly towards the Saray (barn), waving back happily. However this was not what the children had been trying to tell him. They were frantically trying to warn him that the top half of the Saray door was closed. Completely oblivious to any danger, MENAKHEM-MENDEL rode on without looking where he was going, but looking back towards the house. The horse headed straight for the doorway as it was accustomed to duck under the upper part of the door, and commenced munching its food without a care for its rider who lay sprawled out on the ground having been knocked off the horse by the top half of the door.

Despite the tensions and trials of the period, life on the kolonyas followed its unchanging course. In between occasional outbursts of violence there was little to alter the routine of life. For the children particularly, life was just one big game. True they had to attend Cheder which was always a trial for them, but they managed to brighten even this dark spot in their day with all sorts of pranks. The teacher led a hazardous existence trying to avoid the many pranks played on him. He had a fruit tree in his back yard which was the object of temptation of his pupils. One day, MENAKHEM-MENDEL's youngest son KHAIM-VELVEL and a friend could not resist the temptation to acquire some of this fruit. In the midst of a lesson they asked to be excused from the room. Thinking that the teacher was occupied with the rest of the class, they crept around the back of the house and commenced to fill their pockets with fruit. Unbeknown to them, their exploit was being observed by the teacher through the window. They returned to class confident that they had got away with it. But at the end of the lesson the teacher ordered them to remain behind. He took the boys to the back of the house. They were terrified that he was going to beat them. But instead he made the boys drop the fruit, piece by piece into the toilet, thus ignobly relieving them of their illgotten gains (60).

Even the older children were no exception when it came to mischief. One day BEILA-REEVA had to leave the house for a while to visit a friend. In her absence, her children YOKHVED and BENYOMIN decided to do her a favour. They would make Latkas for the evening meal. Confident that they were capable of doing what seemed to them an easy task, they set to work. They had seen their mother make Latkas many times so they did exactly as she had done. Unfortunately they made one slight mistake. BENYOMIN had gone out to the Saray to get a tin of oil, but he had mistaken the tin for one containing kerosene. Completely oblivious to any danger they proceeded with their cooking.

(60) Anecdotes of Grafskoy at this period were, in the main, related by KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) Komesaroff of Melbourne.

It is not hard to picture their horror when the Latkas exploded in their faces, and the look on BELLA-REEVA's face when she returned home to find a ruined kitchen.

A character in Graftskoy who was feared to some extent by the children was SIMKHA's wife KHAHA-ROKHA. It was to her that the children had to go whenever they needed haircuts. Her sharp tongue and brisk manner resulted in the children doing all they could to postpone a visit to her. Once, after he could delay no longer, KHAIM-VELVEL set off to his aunt's house for the dreaded haircut. He sat in the chair motionless. KHAHA-ROKHA clipped away furiously, with little or no regard for KHAIM-VELVEL's comfort. Suddenly she accidentally cut a small piece off his ear. Terrified of being rebuked for interrupting her, he bore his pain in silence for a while. Then he began to whimper. At this KHAHA-ROKHA snapped at him: "What are you crying about?" Then she caught sight of the blood and hurried to patch up his ear. "Why didn't you tell me?" she asked. "I thought that you'd be annoyed with me," KHAIM-VELVEL abashedly replied.

One of the favourite characters of the children was BEREL Komisaruk. This kindhearted man always had a soft spot for children. They knew that if they came to his grocery store they could expect to receive some treat. Whenever his wife SONIA, who disapproved of his generosity, was not looking, BEREL would sneak outside the shop and distribute handfuls of sweets or lump sugar to the eagerly awaiting children.

BEREL and SONIA (nee Golosoff) lived firstly with his father VELVEL (the third son of Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komisaruk). Then they built a large house with an adjoining shop at the main crossroads of Graftskoy. They had six children between 1892 and 1906: ZALMEN, LEIBL, SHEINDEL, SHMILIK, VELVEL and NEKHAMA.

After the death of their father VELVEL in c.1900, the two brothers BEREL and MEIR shared his land. MEIR married RIVA (nee Lev) who came from Kolonya Novozlatopol. Their children were LUBA, VELVEL, ZALMEN, AVROM and PERETZ.

Of VELVEL's daughters, three lived in Graftskoy: HENIE married to GERSHON Ushkatz (their children were VELVEL, MOSHE, REEVA and DAVID); KHANA married to AVRAHAM Amiton (their children were VELVEL, ROSE, JIM and MAURICE); and ESTER married to VELVEL Pogorelsky (their children were BASSIE and YOKHVED). VELVEL's other daughter LEAH married her cousin BEREL Winnikofsky and they lived on Kolonya Kobilnye (their children were YOKHVED, SARAH, ZALMEN, MOSHE-KALMEN, YODEL, ZLATR and ROKHEL).

A further branch of the Komisaruk family which lived in Graftskoy was that of Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN's second son LEIBL. His only son SHABBESAI (SHEPE) married MALKA (nee Eseritz) and their children were SHLOMO-REUVEN, BASSIE-GITTEL, ESTER, HERSHEL, DAVID-MOSHE, ROKHEL and LEIBL. SHEPE's four sons lived in Graftskoy initially. The head of this branch of the family SHEPE had a reputation as a saintly man. In his later years when he was able to leave the care of his farm to his sons, he devoted himself to study. He had an air of dignity about him and when he walked in the streets people said that he walked as if the 'Shekhina' (presence of G-d) rested on him. He died in 1917.

The extensive families of the descendants of LEIBL and VELVEL Komisaruk are further elucidated in the genealogical charts and their subsequent activities in the United States, Canada and the U.S.S.R are covered in later chapters. ~~Likewise the families of the youngest brother YOSEF and sister KHANA Kroll are covered separately.~~

One of the highlights of the family's social life in Graftskoy came when ESTER Luban and her family came for a visit. Since she was much more prosperous than her relatives on the kolonyas and lived in a town, they felt it necessary to have everything in perfect order for her visit in order to impress her. For days beforehand everyone would set to work to clean up their houses and yards. Then ESTER would arrive. She always dressed in the best of clothes, usually a long black lace dress (61) and, especially to the children was an impressive sight. On such occasions the children had strict instructions to be on their best behaviour. After a number of years however,

(61) Recalled by KHAIM-VELVEL Komisaroff of Melbourne.

KHAJM-MOSHE's leather business suffered a setback and the Lubans lost most of their money, yet another trial to add to their sorrow after the loss of three children.

The happiest time of the year was Yom-Tov. On the day before Rosh Hashanah all the elder children returned home to the Kolonyas from the cities where they had been working during the year. All work stopped and preparations were made for the coming festive season. For some three weeks, from before Rosh HaShanah until after Sukkot, little or no work was done on the farms. The intermediate days of the festive season were a time for the family to get together after long periods of separation. In Grafskoy, MENAKHEM-MENDEL and SIMKHA with their families loaded themselves into their wagons and set off for Kolonya Engels. There they would spend the day visiting their sister DINA Namakshtansky and her family. This was a particularly joyous occasion as dozens of people crowded into the small house. The festivities were presided over by the lively DINA. She was always concerned that everyone enjoy themselves and anxious to discuss the events and gossip of the past year with her relatives. Although the Namakshtansky family struggled to support itself, DINA was renowned as a generous hostess.

With the Komisaruk family spread far and wide throughout the southeastern Ukraine, this was one of the few opportunities they had to get together. At some stage during the holidays, Rabbi ZALMEN from Vasilkovka, MEIR from Andreyevka and ESTER Luban from Melitopol would come to visit their brothers and sisters on the kolonyas.

One fear marred the celebrations each year on Pesach. This was due to the presence of the Christians living in the surrounding villages. Since Pesach usually coincided with Easter the Christians' natural distaste for the Jews was transformed into violent hatred by the fiery sermons of the priests denouncing the Jews as the 'murderers of Jesus' and urging that they be made to pay for their 'crime'. In their zealous hatred the priests spread the age-old misconception which held that Jews used the blood of Christian children as an ingredient for Matzot. After being conditioned by a series of such sermons throughout the period of Lent, the Christians were ready to give vent to their fury and hatred. On the first two nights of Pesach particularly, the Christians would set out for the nearest Jewish settlement to claim their vengeance.

In Grafskoy, MENAKHEM-MENDEL's older children and their families would return home from the cities on the eve of Pesach to be with their parents. As the time to commence the Seder drew near, MENAKHEM-MENDEL would close all the windows, lock the outside shutters securely, and then bolt the door once all the family were safely inside. Not until he had ensured that all means of entry had been barred would he commence the Seder.

The family were usually in high spirits. Happily they joined MENAKHEM-MENDEL as he conducted the Seder, the volume of their singing getting higher and higher. Then suddenly someone would stop and say: "What was that noise?" Instantly the Seder was interrupted. Everyone would sit still, scarcely breathing, listening for any sound from the outside. If none could be heard the Seder continued. Once again the fervour increased until suddenly there was a loud bang. The Seder stopped. There was another bang, and another, and soon a torrent of them. Fearfully the family sat still as they listened to their Christian neighbours throwing stones at their houses and shouting abuse at them. Occasionally screams could be heard as the Christians broke into other houses, smashed windows and furniture, and beat up the occupants.

When the commotion died down and the Christians departed, the Seder would resume as if nothing had happened. Determined not to let anything interfere with their celebration, MENAKHEM-MENDEL's family sat far into the night recalling that great day when their ancestors were delivered from their oppressors of bygone days, undeterred by the present-day oppressors clamouring for their blood.

After the conclusion of Yom-Tov life returned to routine on the Kolonyas. The elder children returned to their jobs in the towns, visitors went home, and farmwork commenced once again.

Crime was relatively unknown on the Kolonyas and for this reason there was no 'Nachornik' (policeman) in Graftskoy. If one was required he had to be called from Myadla. There was however a courthouse, housed in the 'Prikaz' (municipal building). This building was very rarely used. In fact KHAIM-VELVEL (MENAKHEM-MENDEL's son) could only remember it being used once during the time he lived in Graftskoy. That was in connection with a petty squabble involving his brother BENYOMIN. One summer's day BENYOMIN and a friend were walking in the orchard near the Prikaz. They had a difference of opinion over a matter they were discussing. Tempers flared leading to BENYOMIN striking his friend. Later the friend's father accused BENYOMIN of thereby insulting his son and insisted on calling the Nachornik from Myadla to settle the dispute, since BENYOMIN refused to apologise. The Nachornik arrived and opened the disused courthouse. There he heard the case, found BENYOMIN guilty and passed sentence: BENYOMIN was to walk through the prison cell; not to be confined to it, but merely to walk through it! Despite the seemingly light punishment, MENAKHEM-MENDEL was appalled and would not speak to his son for some time as even to walk through the cell he considered as a slur on BENYOMIN's character and the family's good name.

The Prikaz also incorporated a post office, but this too was kept locked as mail was brought in a few times a week by a Jew who had the government contract to deliver mail.

During the slack season, throughout the long winter months, MENAKHEM-MENDEL did not have enough work to keep him occupied. To fill in time and to earn some extra money he bought a Tatchanka. This was a four wheeled cart (also referred to as a Britchka) which had upholstered seats. MENAKHEM-MENDEL used it to pursue his part-time occupation as a Balegolah (carrier). He used to travel to Rozovka where he would meet the trains at the station and collect parcels and passengers wanting to reach the Kolonya region from the train.

In 1904, the Russo-Japanese War broke out. At this time ZALMEN, the son of MENAKHEM-MENDEL, was working for a leather manufacturer Rosenshein in Melitopol. He had acquired this position with the help of his uncle KHAIM-MOSHE Luban who was engaged in that trade and with whom he was still living. When the war broke out this company was given a contract to supply the Russian army with boots, blankets and other equipment. The company sent shipments to Manchuria but they never reached the army. In order to investigate the fate of the shipments, Rosensheins sent ZALMEN as their representative to Harbin in Manchuria.

The country was in a state of upheaval as ZALMEN set off on his long journey across Asia. Bribery and corruption flourished and ZALMEN had to bribe his way onto the Trans-Siberian Railway as tickets were unobtainable through normal means. When he arrived in Harbin a shocking sight awaited him. Outside the city were long lines of open railway trucks. At first ZALMEN thought that they were animal transports, but on closer scrutiny he found that they carried thousands of wounded Russian soldiers. They were lying exposed to the weather, on filthy straw, in torn clothing, with little or no medical care.

ZALMEN could not understand how this situation could have occurred. What had happened to all the clothing which Rosensheins had sent? When the train finally reached the station, ZALMEN set out to try and find an answer to this mystery. He walked through the town until he arrived at the market place. It was crowded with hundreds of Manchurian peasants who seemed to be clamouring towards one particular section of the market. Interested in finding out what was the cause of the commotion, ZALMEN made his way through the crowd. There, in the centre of the crowd he found the answer to the puzzle of the missing clothing. All the clothing which Rosensheins had sent for the troops was piled high in the market place and the Russian officers were selling it to the peasants while their own soldiers were dying of exposure.

All over the vast Russian Empire similar instances of corruption occurred. The atmosphere was ripe for revolution. For many years the Communists had been preparing for an opportunity to come out into the open. By 1905 public opinion was aroused against the government of Tsar Nicholas II. Numerous uprisings broke out throughout Russia in which many people were killed and much property was looted. On resuming work at Rosensheins after returning from Manchuria, ZALMEN was involved in one of these uprisings. While going about his usual work in the store ZALMEN heard sounds of a disturbance in the streets of Melitopol. A group of Communist students who had come from the Moscow university were demonstrating and raiding the shops. Some of them burst into Rosensheins brandishing revolvers and shouting "Rooki Vyerk" (hands up!) All the staff were lined up against the wall with their hands in the air. Then the leader of the students told them that he was collecting money to finance the coming Communist Revolution. ZALMEN was terrified; his hands were shaking and as one of the students passed him and noticed his terror, the student whispered that he could put his hands down. Suddenly ZALMEN realised with astonishment that this student was in fact one of Rosensheins' sons who had been away at university for some time and had now come back to raid his own father's shop.

Even after the students had departed, taking with them the contents of the safe, Rosensheins was afraid that this would not be the last he would hear from them. So he issued pistols to some of his staff. On his way home ZALMEN decided to test his pistol because he had very little idea how it worked. Standing up in his droshky, and lifting the pistol high in the air, he pulled the trigger. There was a loud explosion, then everything went black. The next thing ZALMEN knew was that he awoke and found himself lying on the road in the middle of the forest. There was no sign of the droshky. Evidently the horse had bolted when it heard the shot, throwing ZALMEN onto the road and knocking him unconscious as a result of the fall. ZALMEN picked himself up and walked the several miles home to the Lubans. (68)

Despite the efforts of the Communists, the revolution was doomed to fail. The Tsar's loyal troops were able to put down the revolt and restore law and order. But public discontent had not abated. In order to divert this rebellious spirit which could break out again at any moment, the Tsar needed a scapegoat. Who better than the Jews? Everyone hated them anyway so it would be easy to blame them for all the country's troubles. The Tsar and his advisers activated a program of government inspired pogroms on numerous Jewish settlements. Thousands were massacred and many others fled the country.

Besides the horrors that the Jews were subjected to by pogroms there was another evil: Priziv, compulsory military service. Every male on turning twenty-one, commenced a period of four years in the army. Under normal circumstances, and in a country which had not devised a program of persecution of the Jews, this situation would have been of little consequence. But this was not so in Russia. One of the most terrible things that could happen to a Jew was to be conscripted into the Tsar's army. Conditions for Christian soldiers were bad enough, but for the Jew, Priziv was almost a sentence of

(68) Retold by ZALMEN to his son PETER Kays.

death. Usually the conscript was sent many miles away from his home to the remote regions of Siberia. There he was subjected to the most shocking conditions. For a Jew living with conscripted peasants life was a continual hell. The peasants blamed the Jews for all their grievances and the authorities did nothing to stop the persecution of the helpless Jewish soldier. Because of this they did everything they could to evade Priziv. When their efforts to avoid it failed the only course open to them was to leave the country. This situation initially did not affect the Komisaruks or their relatives who lived on the Kolonyas because farmers were considered to be essential to the economy and thus were supposedly exempt from Priziv. For this reason ZALMEN, although no longer living on the Kolonya, registered his home as Grafskoy and his occupation as a farmer. But his ruse was shortlived as it was likewise for various others of his cousins who were living in the cities.

In the village of Andreyevka, on November 13, 1906 (69) TYBEL and MEIR Komisaruk gave birth to their youngest daughter KHAYA-SARAH. Following the birth TYBEL was very ill. Her condition worsened and ten days later (November 23rd) she passed away. The cause of her death has never clearly been established; it was said to have been due to a 'twisted intestine'. Her untimely death at the age of thirty-nine not only plunged the family into grief, but left her six children in difficult circumstances. Her husband MEIR was heartbroken at the loss of his wife. He was unreconcilable to such an extent that he lost all interest in living. He rarely ate and as a result was seen to be steadily wasting away. The burden of caring for the family fell on his eldest daughter KHANA-REIZEL. Aged only nineteen, with little experience in coping with a household, she was forced to rally her natural skill to care for the needs of the younger children, particularly the baby KHAYALAH.

KHANA-REIZEL was engaged to be married to her cousin ZALMEN, the son of MENAKHEM-MENDEL. The unexpected death of her mother however delayed the marriage plans. Despite the fact that the bride was in mourning for her mother, tradition held that a marriage could not be postponed (70). The date was set for the 13th of Nisan 5667 (1907). But the young couple's impending celebration was to be marred by the death of the bride's father MEIR. His gradual decline over a period of a few short months following his wife's death had culminated with his own death. No medical cause could be attributed; rather it was held that he had died of grief. The date of his death is not known exactly save that it was a few days prior to his daughter's wedding (her marriage certificate refers to him as 'of blessed memory').

On this occasion the marriage was not postponed. It took place on Kolonya Grafskoy since ZALMEN's parents lived there. The couple made their home in the town of Berdyansk, a port and resort on the shore of the Sea of Azov. The early days of their marriage were difficult ones for KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN since they had to care for all of KHANA-REIZEL's brothers and sisters. KHANA-REIZEL found caring for the baby KHAYALAH particularly difficult due to her inexperience. She was however determined that the family should not be split up. Time and time again her uncles MOSHE, FULIK and MANYIK Zhmood tried to persuade her to seek adoptive parents for the baby. But she persevered for some time. However after several months she found she simply could not manage and gave in to her uncles' pressure. They advised her to give the baby to a cousin who was unable to bear children and was anxious to adopt KHAYALAH. The cousin was KHASA, a daughter of LEIZER Zhmood of Andreyevka. LEIZER was a brother of KHANA-REIZEL's grandfather KOPPEL Zhmood (who it appears was still alive at the time) (71). KHASA and her husband ARON Abramovitch who was a tradesman, took the child into their home on Kolonya Prishib near the village of Mikhailovka.

(69) November 13 = November 26 current calendar.

(70) The date on the marriage certificate seems to have been altered, probably due to the death of TYBEL.

(71) None of his grandsons born around this time were named after him, thus indicating that he was still alive. The first to be named after him was the present author, born in 1947.

ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL had settled in Berdyansk because ZALMEN had opened a business there (72). Having gained sufficient experience in the leather trade during his employment at Rosensheins in Melitopol, and having gained considerable knowledge from his uncle KHAIM-MOSHE Luban, he was ready to take the step of starting his own enterprise. At this time the leather trade was predominantly a Jewish trade and was particularly widespread in the southeastern Ukraine. ZALMEN took a partner into his business, his friend Avraham Lamdansky. From time to time it was necessary for ZALMEN to travel for business purposes. Conditions for long distance travel in Russia were far from comfortable and for Jews certain antisemitic regulations added to the difficulties. On one occasion ZALMEN travelled to Moscow by train. When he arrived he found that his business was going to take more than one day and so he would have to stay overnight. ZALMEN went to a hotel but was informed that because Jews needed a residence permit he could not sleep in the hotel or any place in Moscow. Angered by this but knowing there was no authority to whom he could complain, ZALMEN went to the railway station and spent the night sleeping on the platform.

Shortly after his return to Berdyansk, ZALMEN received notification from the army that because he was twenty-one he was being called up for military service. ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL were horrified to receive what could have been his death sentence. ZALMEN went to the military authorities and explained that he was newly married and had the responsibility of providing for his wife's family. But all his pleading was to no avail. The army was adamant; there were no exemptions from Priziv. ZALMEN was called to present himself for medical examination prior to being enlisted. At his wits end he resorted to drinking vinegar in order to make himself too sick to pass the medical requirements.

In 1909, March 19th (Erev Pesach), ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL's first child TYBEL (TANYA or TESSIE) was born. ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL had a difficult early married life. Besides the problems connected with raising their own family and the responsibility of looking after KHANA-REIZEL's four brothers and sisters, they lived in constant fear that any day ZALMEN would be called up for Priziv again. Periodically he was ordered to appear for a medical examination and each time he managed to fail the examination by drinking vinegar.

In 1911 their son MEIR was born.

When ALTER and PINKHAS, KHANA-REIZEL's brothers reached their early teens they worked for a cabinet maker in Berdyansk, Leib Palyekov, who with his wife Rivka were friends of ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL. Thus the brothers were able to help contribute to the family income.

In 1912 KHANA-REIZEL received a letter from Australia from her cousin DAVID, a son of her uncle MOSHE Zhmood. The purpose of his letter was to ask KHANA-REIZEL's permission for her sister TSIPORA to come out to Australia to marry him. DAVID had been very fond of KHANA-REIZEL and he said that seeing he could not marry her he would do the next best thing and marry her sister. Although KHANA-REIZEL did not want to be separated from her sister she decided to let her go to Australia, accompanied by her brother ALTER who was to look after her. Once in Australia she would decide for herself whether to marry DAVID or not. TSIPORA and ALTER set off on their journey, first travelling north to the Baltic Sea, there to board the German ship 'Kaiser Wilhelm Der Groser' bound for Australia.

Shortly after arriving in Melbourne TSIPORA wrote to her sister telling her that she intended marrying DAVID and asking KHANA-REIZEL and the rest of the family to come to Australia. KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN did not know what to do for the best. It would be very difficult for them to give up the life they had been used to, their family, friends, business and go to live in a strange country. Yet KHANA-REIZEL wanted to be with her sister and brother. Since her parents' death KHANA-REIZEL had always gone to her uncle and aunt MANYIK and ESTER Zhmood in Mariupol to ask their advice whenever she had a problem. So she went to them to seek their opinion now. MANYIK and ESTER were very much against the idea of their favourite niece leaving Russia and going so far away.

(72) Details of these years related by TESSIE Freedman.

Then KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN had their minds made up for them; ZALMEN was called up for Priziv again. Over the past few years ZALMEN had made himself so sick by drinking vinegar that a doctor warned him that unless he ceased he would eventually kill himself. As it was he was in such a state that the doctor advised him to seek a warmer climate since the Russian winter was too severe for him.

ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL no longer had any choice; they had to leave Russia. ZALMEN set about making the necessary arrangements. Firstly he sold his share in the business to his partner Lamdansky. Then he divided his money in half; one half was to pay for the journey and subsequently to set himself up in business in Australia, and the other half (3000 Roubles) he put in the bank in case they found life in Australia too unbearable and returned to Russia. Finally there was the matter of a passport. In order to acquire one ZALMEN had to go to Simferopol, the capital of the government of Tavrich in which Berdyansk was located. On his return ZALMEN passed through Melitopol where he farewelled his aunt and uncle whom he had been so attached to, ESTER and KHAIM-MOSHE Luban and his cousin ALTER. He returned to Berdyansk and set about making preparations for the journey.

Before leaving Berdyansk KHANA-REIZEL tried to contact her sister KHAYALA. Over the years since she had been adopted, they had heard from her adoptive parents only rarely. Unfortunately, just before KHANA-REIZEL wrote to Kolonya Prishib, the Abramovitchs moved elsewhere without leaving a forwarding address. In any case, KHASA and ARON had written previously in reply to a request from KHANA-REIZEL to let KHAYALA come with her to Australia, that they would not dream of parting with her because they regarded her as their own child. So KHAYALA was never to see her brothers and sisters again.

ZALMEN, KHANA-REIZEL, their children TYBEL and MEIR, together with KHANA-REIZEL's brothers PINKHAS and YEHUDA-LEIB (LOUIS) farewelled their relatives in Berdyansk and set off on the first leg of their journey in August 1913 from Berdyansk to Mariupol. There they farewelled MANYIK and ESTER Zhmood who had been like parents to KHANA-REIZEL. From Mariupol they went to Graftskoy where they spent their last days with ZALMEN's family. During their stay in Graftskoy they visited their many relatives in the district, their aunt DINA in Engels, uncle SIMKHA in Graftskoy as well as their many cousins. Finally they arranged for a photographer to come from Pologi to take a group photograph with ZALMEN's parents and his brothers and sisters.

When the departure could be put off no longer, ZALMEN farewelled his mother BEILA-REEVA and his brothers and sisters. Then MENAKHEM-MENDEL drove the family to the railway station in his Britchka. In later years this was the only incident that TYBEL, ZALMEN's daughter could remember of her early life in Russia: riding along the country road, sitting on her grandfather's knee as he drove the cart. After a tearfull farewell the train pulled out of Rozovka station, and as ZALMEN looked back at the tall bearded figure of his father on the platform gradually fading into the distance, little did he know that he would never see his father again.

From Rozovka the family went to Yuzovka. Then a journey of over a thousand miles north to Libava in Latvia lay ahead of them. The train passed through Kharkov, Gomel, Minsk, Shavli, Vilna; along much the same route that their greatgrandfather Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komisaruk had taken in the opposite direction some seventy years before. After many weeks of travelling they arrived at the port of Libava on the Baltic Sea. Here they had to wait until October before they could book passage on a ship. On October 3rd they departed the shores of Russia.

From Libava the ship went to London where they had to wait for a short while until they could arrange passage on a small boat which took them across the English Channel to Antwerp. In Antwerp they boarded the German ship 'Koenigen Louisa' which was to take them to Australia. This was only a small ship but was crowded with hundreds of Jews who were leaving Europe. Jewish activities aboard ship were organised and religious services were held regularly. YEHUDA-LEIB had his Barmitzvah on board ship at the age of twelve as was the

custom for boys who were orphans. Life on board ship was not very pleasant for the Jews because of the strong anti-semitic feeling which existed amongst the crew. They openly insulted the Jews, walking up and down the decks shouting 'Verfluchte Juden' (dirty Jews) and singing 'Deutschland Uber Alles'.

From Antwerp the ship sailed to Gibraltar, then across the Mediterranean to Port Said in Egypt. Here a large number of Jews who had come from Palestine boarded the ship (including the Feiglin family of Melbourne). The journey was very slow, and because it was a small ship, very rough. Consequently most of the passengers were continually seasick. From Port Said the ship went to Colombo in Ceylon, then to Australia calling in at Fremantle and Adelaide before finally arriving at Melbourne, on December 8th 1913. At last, after a journey of over four months, KHANA-REIZEL and her brothers were reunited with their brother and sister.

On first arriving in Australia the family lived for a short period with cousins of KHANA-REIZEL's mother, SHILLEM and KHANA Joel, in Drummond Street, Carlton, a northern suburb of Melbourne predominantly inhabited by immigrants. Not long after her sister arrived, TSIPORA married DAVID Zmood and all the family went to live with them. DAVID hated the Russians so much because of the suffering he had undergone at their hands, that he forbade everyone to speak Russian in his house. He referred to the language as 'Dos Chazisher Sprach' (that piggish language). Everyone had to speak Yiddish. This made things particularly difficult for ZALMEN's children because in Russia they had spoken only Russian and knew very little Yiddish. Added to their struggles to learn English, they had to learn Yiddish.

After a while, ZALMEN and his family moved into a house by themselves and TESSIE and MYER soon commenced attending school. There also they led a difficult existence because of their total lack of comprehension of English. MYER became embroiled in a number of fights with other children because he thought they were stupid when they could not understand his Russian. Despite all these difficulties TESSIE and MYER gradually began to pick up the language.

Early in 1914, YAAKOV-LEIB, ZALMEN's brother, came out to Australia. He had left Russia because of a disagreement with his parents-in-law over his dowry. He left his wife BESSIE and son NEYKA (NORMAN) in Russia with the intention of sending for them when he had made enough money to pay for their passage. (BESSIE was the daughter of a miller Svidla from Myadla). Finding it difficult to make a living in Melbourne, YAAKOV-LEIB went to Sydney. But there also he had little luck in finding a suitable job. After a long period of unemployment he was prepared to take any job offered him. In desperation he went to work washing bottles in Woolloomooloo, the slum area of Sydney. He led a very hard life during this period, separated from his family, and struggling to make ends meet. It was probably due to these hardships that he began to be attracted by Communism.

The first few months after arriving in Australia were very difficult ones for ZALMEN. With the money he had brought with him from Russia he went into business travelling around the country towns selling drapery. Unable to speak a word of English he found it very hard to make himself understood. His business kept him away from his family for long periods. Because of these hardships, KHANA-REIZEL was very unhappy in Australia. She was homesick and longed for the life she had led in Russia. At this period Australia was isolated from the rest of the world and had few of the cultural facilities of European society. KHANA-REIZEL had been used to the gay life of Tsarist Russia with its operas and concerts. She found Sunday in Melbourne particularly dull. In Berdyansk every Sunday afternoon, the entire town, dressed in their best clothes, would promenade along the boulevade which ran along the sea-shore to listen to the Naval band playing and to watch all the fashions and activities. In sharp contrast, the people of Melbourne spent Sunday at home and the streets were deserted.

In 1914 the First World War broke out, bringing with it another reason for KHANA-REIZEL to return to Russia. This was the resentment which was shown publicly by many Australians towards foreigners during the war. One day while travelling on a tram, KHANA-REIZEL and

her sister TSIPORA were insulted by an Australian woman who called them : "Filthy Krauts" because they had been conversing in Yiddish and the woman thought that they were Germans. How ironic it was that they should be abused in Australia because they were thought to be Germans after they had been abused by the Germans as 'Dirty Jews'.

KHANA-REIZEL could put up with the boredom no longer; she was determined to return to Russia. Despite all efforts by her relatives to dissuade her, passage was booked on a ship bound for Europe. All the preparations were made whilst her sister and cousins tried desperately to persuade her to change her mind. In the end she gave in and decided to try for a while longer. The ship sailed without them and a few weeks later news reported that it had been sunk in European waters, one of the first casualties of the war. Realising that they all might have been killed, KHANA-REIZEL felt that fate meant them to be in Australia and never again talked of returning.

In 1915 KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN had their first child to be born in Australia, a son PINKHAS (PETER).

KHANA-REIZEL's brother PINKHAS enlisted in the Australian army almost as soon as war broke out. He was under age, only fifteen, and had to falsify his age to be accepted into the army. In 1915 he was sent overseas with the Anzac Corps and participated in the landing at Gallipoli in the campaign to capture the Dardanelles. After the evacuation of Gallipoli he was sent to France where he was wounded in the leg by a piece of shrapnel. He was sent to London to convalesce. There to his surprise he found his cousin VELVEL (WILLIE) Zmood who had also been wounded whilst serving in the Australian army. They had been in contact spasmodically but for some time had not heard from each other and had been concerned for each others welfare. After a period in London, PINKHAS was sent back to France where he spent the rest of the war as an interpreter attached to army headquarters.

Meanwhile in Russia ALTER Luban left Melitopol shortly before the war broke out and travelled across Asia via the Trans-Siberian railway to Harbin in Manchuria. Harbin was an international trading centre at the junction of the railway to Vladivostok, controlled predominantly by Russia. It also had a large population of Jews who had fled from persecution in Europe. ALTER worked there for some time in his aunt's business (his father's sister whose married name was Baranov). He had been fortunate in getting out of Russia when he did because once war broke out it was difficult to travel freely. Europe was in chaos, families were split up, one member in Europe, others in America or Australia, now prevented by war from joining their loved ones.

In 1917, ALTER Luban left Harbin and settled in Seattle, USA. He intended setting himself up in business and when he had saved enough money, he would bring his parents out from Russia to join him. However his plans were interrupted by an event which had been gradually brewing for many years, the Russian Revolution.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REVOLUTION

In March 1917, years of planning by the Communists culminated in the outbreak of open revolution against the corrupt and hated government of Tsar Nicholas the Second. The Tsar was overthrown and subsequently killed, and a Provisional Government set up with Kerensky at its head. The Jews of Russia and their expatriots throughout the world rejoiced; at last centuries of oppression under the Tsarist yoke had ended. The Pale was abolished and Jews were granted equal rights with all other peoples of Russia. Many Jews joined the various factions of the Communist movement, eager to take advantage of the first opportunity they had ever had to shape the destiny of their country. SHMILIK (ANDREI), the son of MANYIK Zhmood, had joined the Bolshevik Party in 1915 and by the time of the Revolution had become influential as a planner of party policy and propagandist. He was later to rise to the uppermost heights of the government hierarchy under the assumed name of ANDREI ALEXANDROVITCH Zhdanov. Many Jews who had fled from Russia to escape persecution returned now, confident that a new life and freedom for the Jews would be firmly established and eager to lend a hand to shape their country.

The reaction of the Jews living on the Kolonyas was somewhat more restrained. Isolated as they were from the mainstream of political activity, their feelings were less extreme than those of their relations living in the cities. Certainly they were overjoyed to learn of the overthrow of Tsarism, but it took a while for the effects of the Revolution to be fully felt (73).

In Graftskoy the news of the Tsar's abdication arrived one Friday evening. MENAKHEM-MENDEL's family were sitting around the table awaiting his return from Shule. The door opened and he walked in with a solemn expression on his face. Standing in the doorway he stared at his wife and said: "Arop Nikolka fun prestolka".

BEILA-REEVA looked at her husband quizzically. What on earth was he talking about? His language had been a strange mixture of Yiddish and Russian. She thought that he was complaining that she was sitting on his chair so she started to say: "What are you so fussy about .." But he interrupted her and repeated with greater emphasis: "Arop Nikolka fun prestolka !"

Suddenly BEILA-REEVA understood what he was trying to convey. He had said: "Nicholas has been removed from his throne." He had heard the rumour whilst at Shule. The reason for his obscure way of relating the news was that the event was still unconfirmed and he was frightened that someone might overhear his conversation or that the children would understand if he spoke clearly in Yiddish and would spread the story. Thus if it were found to be untrue he could be accused of treason.

It is obvious that the fall of Tsarism was a momentous occasion. For three hundred years it had stood as a symbol of 'Mother Russia', seemingly immovable and eternal. No wonder MENAKHEM-MENDEL found it hard to believe that the Tsar had really fallen.

In contrast, the reactions of the peasants showed no restraint. They wasted no time in taking advantage of their new found freedom. On an estate near Graftskoy the moujiki rose up en-masse and murdered their landlord and his family. Such outrages were common throughout Russia as the moujiki took their vengeance for all past abuses by the landlord.

Then came the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 and Kerensky was removed from power. Numerous factions strove to control the country: the anti-revolutionary White Guard and the Cossacks who were loyal to the old regime of the Tsar; the Bolsheviks led by Lenin; the Mensheviks and many others. The country was in turmoil, allegiances changed from day to day. This chaos eventually developed into outright Civil War.

The Jews soon realised that their lot was not going to be any easier under the Communists. In fact it became far worse. The Jews were in the middle of all the opposing factions, preyed upon and exploited by them all. As always the Jews were an everpresent scapegoat to blame whenever anything went wrong.

(73) Recollections of the period related by WILLIAM Komesaroff of Melbourne.