

## Reminiscences of Dora Kraftchek Waltman

(b. 25 September 1898, Zhabokrich, Ukraine –  
d. 23 December 1991, Toronto, Canada)

**Father:** *Pinchas Kraftchek (b. 1864, Zhabokrich, Ukraine - d. 2 June 1951, Toronto, Canada)*

**Mother:** *Fumasia (Mashe) Veltman (b. 18 February 1870, Zhabokrich, Ukraine - d. 26 December 1950, Toronto, Canada)*

**Husband:** *Leib Waltman [née Spektor] (b. 27 November 1896, Zhabokrich, Ukraine - d. 8 July 1968, Toronto, Canada)*

Reminiscences taped and transcribed by: Marla Waltman, 26 March 1978, Toronto, Canada.

Transcript not edited except for a editorial notes or corrections shown in [*italics in square brackets*]

Dora: I'll tell you my life story. I was born in Kryzhopol (I don't have to tell my age?). We were ten children. We lived in a nice place, in a quiet little town. In 1912 [*more likely that it was 1913 due to birth of youngest child in May 1914*]. my father left for Canada.

Marla: Why did he leave?

Dora: He lost his job. He was working for a big concern and then they went broke. They had a hardware store - wholesale - and a grocery store - wholesale - in Kryzhopol. And then they had, well I don't know how to tell you, they used to sell things, kerosene, well this isn't interesting.

Marla: Yes it is!

Dora: So my father used to manage it so when they would bring a carload of gasoline or oil they used to put it in a big tank and people from the small towns used to come and buy by the barrel. That was my father's job. Then he lost his job and he couldn't get another job. So we had some family in Canada, my father's cousin, and they sent him a ticket and he went to Canada in 1912.

Marla: When had they come to Canada?

Dora: They came in, maybe, 1908. My father came in 1912. Two years later the war started, in 1914. I think, the First World War started and we couldn't take a ship to Canada. So we remained in Kryzhopol. Then the war started and the Bolsheviks with the.... the socialists were fighting with the government. They threw down the King, the Czar Nicholai, and the war started. The war started with Germans first. The Germans started the war and then the Bolsheviks took over and there was Lenin and Trotsky fought with Donykin and Kerensky, that was the government. Then little by little the Bolsheviks took over most of Russia.

Marla: Was it noticeable where you were living?

Dora: Yeah....sure they were there. Well, we were used to it. You know. At that time planes were very seldom, they didn't have so many planes. But they used to come with trains and shoot at the city. A lot of people got killed.

Marla: In Kryzhopol?

Dora: Yeah, in Kryzhopol too. And then they made in the smaller towns. So we went to Odessa. They said whoever who wants to go to the big cities went to Odessa. They were fighting in Odessa too. England was there, England and France had an army on the Black Sea. They had boats and there was shooting into the city of Odessa.

Marla: Were you living in Odessa at that time?

Dora: Yeah.

Marla: Why did you move to Odessa?

Dora: Because in the small towns were pogroms so we went in the bigger towns where it was a little better. But then there was a hunger and we didn't have no food. We used to go to the small towns then the Bolsheviks took over Odessa and the French and the English left so we could go to the small towns. We used to buy sugar, bring it to Odessa and sell the sugar and buy salt. Then we'd come to the small towns and exchange it for flour, for vegetables and for fruit. And that's how we lived there for about two years, two or three years, we lived like that. We were in Odessa and then we went back to the small towns.

Marla: Your whole family was going back and forth?

Dora: For a while, yeah, because there was no food in Odessa. So we had to come back. In 1920, I decided to go to Romania.

Marla: The war was over.

Dora: Yeah, it had quieted down. There was fighting in Siberia and different places farther away. So I decided to go to Romania because we knew that from Romania you could go to Canada, you can go to the United States. The boys [*Dora's brothers*] were afraid to go because we had to cross the border. And if they caught one of the young men they used to arrest them and sometimes shoot them. I had a friend whose sister lived close to the border on the Russian side. His brother was on the other side, on the Romanian side. I knew them very well. One day I was talking to him and he said do you want to go? I'll take you across. I'll send you across. So I came with him and I stayed at his sister's place over night. And during the night he arranged somebody with a little boat, a little canoe, his brother was waiting on the other side for me. So I went across and then my mother had a cousin in that city, it was a big city, on the other side.

Marla: What was the name of it?

Dora: Siroka [*now called Siroki*]. It used to belong to Russia and then Romania took it over [*it is now located in Moldava*]. So, when I came there I wrote a letter to my father in Toronto. I had the address. It took about two months until I got an answer. He sent me \$500 and said he would send some tickets for the family. But my family went back to Kryzhopol from Odessa because life was easier there. You could buy more. Like food. That's all we needed was food. For clothing... nobody thought of anything. But I couldn't get anybody to go and get the family because they wanted a lot of money to bring them over. They wanted about 10,000 rubles to go to Kryzhopol and bring the family to the border, that was the Dneister. That

lake was the Dneister, maybe the Dneister was only as wide as from here to Bathurst Street [*less than 1/8 mile*]. That's all. Because you could see across and see people walking on that side and the other side. You couldn't walk to them though because it was very deep. Years ago a boat used to go there. There was a bridge. But during the war they took the bridge apart because it was two different countries now.

It was in the fall, in October, and the weather got colder. I was afraid that the Dneister would freeze up and then you can't get across and you can't go by boat. Anyway, I got somebody to recommend me, they gave me the name of a man that when I go across he can take me to Kryzhopol to my family. In the meantime, we arranged with a soldier to take me across the border around 3:00 o'clock in the morning, a Romanian soldier. I paid him around 100 roubles, I really don't remember how much I paid him.

So, there was one Jewish family, an elderly family, the only one left. The younger people left the place but that old couple stayed there. That soldier was supposed to take me to that old couple but he didn't. He took me across and he left me off and said you'd better go because you can hear shooting somewhere. He was afraid for his life and I was afraid too. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know where to go.

Marla: How old were you at the time?

Dora: I was nineteen years old [*this differs from her often-stated birth date of September 1898. If 1898 is correct, then she would have been 22 in October 1920*]. So he left me near the lake in water to my knees. It was cold and I didn't know where to go. It was still dark. Anyway, around 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning, a woman took the cows to the lake, to the Dneister, to water them. She saw me sitting there under a tree and said what are you doing here? So, I said I am going back home. They sent me back home from Romania.

Marla: Did you tell her the truth?

Dora: No I didn't tell her... no, I didn't tell her nothing.

Marla: Was she Russian or Ukrainian?

Dora: She was Ukrainian. So she said, you know what, come to my house but be very quiet. My husband is sleeping and I don't want him to see you. But come you'll have a cup of tea and I'll give you a piece of bread and maybe you'll dry your shoes. I was very cold. So I did that and I stayed for maybe an hour. Then she took me over to the place where the old Jewish couple was. So I came in and told them where I wanted to go. So they went to look for that man that had to take me to Kryzhopol. So the man came and said it is too late now. It'll take... it was forty miles from that place to Kryzhopol by horse and buggy. So he said you stay overnight and I'll come around 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning. Then it started to rain. Anyway we went just the two of us. We couldn't see another thing - a horse or a horse and wagon or a man walking. Nothing for forty miles. The fields were black, everything was taken off, the wheat, all the vegetables.

It was late in the fall. It was October I think. It took the whole day and when I came to Kryzhopol, it was dark. My mother didn't know. They thought I was in Canada already, because I couldn't write home. They didn't know where I was.

When I got home my two brothers were in Odessa. They went there with sugar. One brother was older and one was younger. Joe was the older brother and Abie was the younger. I couldn't call them and I couldn't write to them. They didn't know that I came back. It took a week until they got back.

Marla: Were they pleased to see you?

Dora; They didn't know. It was like I came from heaven. The whole town came to see me. Nobody came back when they went away, they just went! I couldn't help it because I didn't have the money to pay the people, the contraband people, who took you across, I didn't have enough money. So I had to return. My life was in danger but at that time life didn't mean nothing to you. You were not afraid for anything. You had seen so many people die from sickness, from bombs from aeroplanes, from cannons. People died like flies. So life didn't mean much to you. You were not afraid and I was young. I just wanted to take the family.

Marla: So they had thought you were going on to Canada? They didn't think you were going to come back.

Dora: No they didn't. They thought I had went away to my father.

Marla: You decided on your own to come back?

Dora: Sure. Otherwise, my father sent the money. I can't go away and leave them there. I couldn't write to them. They didn't know where I was. Anyways, my brother came and he arranged a man with a big wagon and a lot of straw. We were ten people. We just take the bedding, the blankets, and the clothing we had on. We left everything. It was a Thursday morning, I think. We left early Thursday morning.

Marla: Did anyone in town know you were leaving?

Dora: We kept it quiet. Nobody knew that we were going away. My older sister was married, Rachel was her name. My mother was the second wife, her sister was married to my father. Joe and Rachel were from the first wife. At that time Canada wouldn't allow married children to go to the father. A man could take over his wife and unmarried children. But she was married and had two children of her own. So she remained in Kryzhopol and took everything that we had in the house.

Marla: That must have been very sad.

Dora: Sure it was very sad but we couldn't do nothing. So when we came at night. It took us the whole day to go to the border, to go across to Romania. There we stayed in the wood, the forest, until a man came with a little canoe. He took one person, just two people could stay in the canoe, and we were ten people.

Marla: How old was the youngest?

Dora: Tillie was about six or seven years old [*she was born in May 1914, so she would have been six*]. She came with my mother...the last one. Then the man took us to that city [*Soroca*] where I was before. That time it was Friday morning, a market day. He took us to the market and said quick get out of the wagon because they could arrest him too. Everybody had to go to a different place, not to stay in one place. I told him where I was going to be. I didn't give him the money before.

He said to me, I'll come there but if you don't pay me, other people are going to suffer. I didn't even think about not paying him! Anyway, we got there to that cousin and then that man came and I paid him off, and he went back.

Marla: Was he Romanian?

Dora: He was a Romanian man. Then I had a passport because I was there for about three months. There was a, like here, a Jewish Congress that used to work with the Romanian government and the police. Then they all got passports, Romanian passports.

Marla: What did you say to get them?

Dora: That we were from Russia, but that we were refugees. They had a place where they used to give dinner, one meal a day. We had to go to get a hot meal. Then my brothers got work. They used to go chop wood, do all kinds of things, because until we wrote to my father again, at that time it used to take three or four weeks until you got a letter. So, we were there over the winter. We struggled. We lived in one room. We struggled. It was very hard. But then my father sent a man for us with the tickets.

Marla: Where did he get the money?

Dora: He had a little bit of money saved up. His cousins gave him some money, and he borrowed some money. He was working in Toronto for McCaul Brothers, today it is called McCaul and Frontenac. He got a job there. They used to make barrels for oil so he worked there. He made \$5.00 a week at that time. So we came in 1921. He had saved money all that time because he couldn't send it to us. So we went to Romania.

Marla: How long were you in Romania from the time you arrived?

Dora: Oh, for about six months I think we were there. We came in April [*arrived 11 April 1921*] to Canada, through Halifax I think [*Saint John, N.B.*]. It took us a week by train to go from Romania to Belgium, no, yes, Belgium [*Antwerp*]. From Belgium we took a small boat to England [*Southampton*]. From England we took a big boat to, I think, to Halifax.

Marla: What was the name of the boat?

Dora: Victoria....Victoria [*it was a Canadian Pacific steamship called "The Victorian"*]. It was a boat - it was a cattle ship. They used to carry cattle. So they made shelves. There was no lobby. Everybody sat on the bundle what you had, sat on your clothing, on a box. There were no benches, no nothing. It took two weeks - fourteen days we went by boat. And it was rough. Everyday they used to send us up a deck so they could clean up. So you had to go up on the deck until they cleaned up. The dining room they made tables from boards and the food was terrible (laugh). But the last day they gave us tea, coffee, milk and I think they gave us ... bacon. I didn't know what it was. They gave us a good breakfast. Then we went off the boat. Then we took the train to Toronto. My father waited at the station, Union Station. We didn't have money for a taxi so we went by streetcar, the whole gang, you know (laugh). With the bundles and everything on the streetcar (laugh). Then we got a job here and my father bought a house. Then later, we

settled down. And that was then.

Marla: You started to tell me a bit about Kryzhopol.

Dora: It was near Odessa. It took about eight hours by train. It was about two hundred families, it was a train station.

Marla: Were there only Jews there or was it was mixed?

Dora: It was mixed. The train was in Kryzhopol... it wasn't far to go to the train.

Marla: What kind of house did you live in?

Dora: We had a nice house, it wasn't our own house, it was a rented house. It had a garden and we had all kinds of fruit, you know, cherries, we had a lot of. We had a good life when we lived in Kryzhopol. We had a cow and everything. But after my father lost his job...

Marla: Why did he lose his job?

Dora: Because the man got broke, you know. So we couldn't have much. My father worked for 24 years for that man, but then business got bad and during the war. So he lost everything so my father lost his job.

Marla: Was Papa from Kryzhopol as well?

Dora: Yeah. We were neighbours. We used to live next door. Sure I knew him.

Marla: What did his father do?

Dora: His father used to build for the landowners. Like years ago in Russia, the rich landowners. He used to build houses, he used to build furniture for them. They had a nice house. They lived better than we did.

Marla: How many children did they have?

Dora: They had six children, five boys and one girl. Papa was the third one. The oldest was a Hebrew teacher, the other one was a service man in the store that my father used to work. He was in the grocery store. My older brother Joe he worked in Odessa, also in a big hardware store in Odessa. That's it.

Marla: What happened in Kryzhopol during the Revolution?

Dora; When I went away, Papa wasn't home. He was in the Army and he didn't know that I left.

Marla: What army?

Dora: In Russia, you had to go with the Bolsheviks, with the Red Army. Otherwise, when the others came they used to kill us, the boys. Of course everybody joined the Bolsheviks because they didn't have an alternative. The others were worse. In Russia, you had to go with the Bolsheviks, with the Red Army. My older brother [Joe] was a prisoner in Germany in the beginning, they took him

prisoner. The others were too young to go into the army.

Marla: What happened to your eldest brother?

Dora: He was in Germany as a prisoner and then when the Bolsheviks took over Russia they let him go home.

Marla: What about your other brothers?

Dora: Joe was a soldier in the Czar's time. He was in the Queen's army, the wife of Nickolai (can't remember her name). He was in the Queen's army.

Once I went to Odessa, I couldn't get in because there were no passenger trains, just cattle trains. The place was filled up. I was in Kryzhopol. You know I went on the roof with a sack of sugar. I don't know how I got up on the roof. But when you go five stations from Kryzhopol towards Odessa there is a bridge and when you go through the bridge you can't stay on the roof. I was afraid to go down. There was no stepladder, no steps. I don't know. It was at night and I got up, people were there, so they pulled me up by my hands. To get down, I threw down the sack but I was afraid, I looked down and I didn't have anything to hold onto. Anyway, I got down and I got a seat inside.

Once I went with my older brother Joe to Odessa. The train stopped in one station for two days - you couldn't go to Odessa. There were Cossacks. I didn't know because I didn't go out from the car. I stayed in the car for two days. When I went with my brother we didn't sit together, we didn't talk to each other.

Marla: Why?

Dora: Because we didn't want trouble, you know. When he came from Germany he had a band on his coat so that everybody knew that he was in the army so they didn't bother him. So, we never talked together and we were sitting apart. A Cossack came in and in ten minutes the train was going to leave the station. A Cossack came in and he said that somebody had told him that a Jewish girl was standing in the window. I had been standing at the door the whole day because I didn't know what to do. I had a red shawl on. So the people in the train ... there was no light.

Marla: Weren't you supposed to be on the train?

Dora: I was supposed to be on the train. A lot of people were there ...but a young girl. So, he came to see the young girl. Because before they had took off a couple of boys from our town and they killed them.

Marla: Why?

Dora: Why? There's no why there. There's no why.

So the people said yes she was here but we don't see her now. A man was sitting near me, a Ukrainian man, who had a fur coat. He said bend down, quick, and he put the fur coat on me. That man (the Cossack) came by with a candle, there was no light or a flashlight or anything at that time. He came and he looked around. My heart was, I don't know, if I didn't get a heart attack. But he didn't see me. It took

about ten minutes and then the train left for Odessa. Since then I was afraid to go because... at that time, anything could have happened to me. Nobody could say anything. Nobody could do anything. The Cossacks used to make pogroms, when they saw a Jewish person they took everything from the house and killed them. It was not only Cossacks it was other bandits from different groups. But that was...

People in town were there but everybody was afraid. Everybody used to hide, lock themselves up in their cellars, anyplace, just to save their lives. Nobody could do anything.

Marla: Did they attack your house?

Dora: No, most of the time we were in Odessa. There, at the station, it was a little different. More safe. In the smaller towns it was bad. So, I was just lucky to get free. So that's all...

Marla: Did Papa's [*her future husband Leib Spector*] family stay in Kryzhopol at this time?

Dora: They stayed, yes, I think so. I guess not. No, nothing much happened but I went away and I don't know. No nothing happened. But then they shot one of his brothers [*Yankel Spector in 1941*]- the whole family. Yeah yeah.

A person's life was nothing there. Once a plane was flying, it was in the summer, and people were standing in a group. Private people. They threw a bomb and it killed a neighbour of ours, they had one son, they killed him and they killed a father with three boys. They killed about ten people. They thought maybe it was soldiers. They threw a bomb- in the middle of the day! Nobody could do anything.

Once in Odessa the police used to check the people getting off the train. I had some whisky in a little satchel. They stopped me and said come on to the police station. I wouldn't go but I said take this satchel but leave me alone. But I had a shawl on me and so a woman came over and she grabbed the shawl and she ran. In Odessa, there are apartments but it is like a courtyard with most of the apartments inside. There is a steel door that at night they used to lock the door and the superintendent lived right near the door. If you want to come in you ring the bell and he opens the window and he saw if it somebody from the apartment and he lets you in. So that woman was in the middle of the street, not that street we stayed on, so she grabs my shawl, while I was talking to the police. In Odessa, they used to have lavatories in every apartment, so you passed by and you could use it at any place. I saw where she was going and I ran after her and sure enough I grabbed that shawl from her.

When I told your Daddy and Uncle Bernie that story they said, Ma, how did you do it? I said don't know how I did it! (Laugh). Because at that time you didn't think about getting hurt or getting killed. Life was so.. You saw them kill people, here they were walking, here they were getting killed.

Marla: What did you do in Odessa? What happened there during the Revolution?

Dora: At that time there was the epidemic of typhoid fever. We lived at that time in Odessa, before I went to Romania [*ca. 1918-1920*]. I took sick in Odessa and I was in the hospital there. I was in the hall because there was no place in the

rooms. You saw the dead people they took out, dozens and dozens, it didn't even bother you. You got so used to it. When I got better. I had it twice. When I got better, a friend of ours was sick, so I stayed there with him. I would take his temperature and mark it down so when the Doctor came, I told him. They used to pay me for that. My brother Joe was also in a different place because he was sick too. The whole family was sick but they were younger so they got better. So it was just myself and Uncle Joe, may he rest in peace. He just died about three years ago. He was 79.

Marla: What about Papa at this time? When you decided to go to Romania, did you tell Papa [*her husband to-be*]?

Dora: Papa didn't know where I went.

Marla: Did you know you were going to get married at that time? Had you already decided?

Dora: We were friends. We used to go together. I liked him, he liked me. We had a lot of friends together. But I didn't know that I was going to go. There was also another friend who liked me too, a friend, a boyfriend of Papa's. So he took me across to Romania. Through him and his brother, and my mother's family, and the cousins there. I had a chance to write to my father and he sent me money, \$500, I didn't know what to do with the money. Then he sent an agent, he came and he took us.

Marla: So you couldn't tell Papa.

Dora: No, Papa was somewhere in Moscow, Siberia, I didn't know where he was. He didn't know that I left. I didn't know where he was.

Marla: So how did he find you?

Dora; It took six years.

Marla; So you left word behind?

Dora: What could I leave word when I didn't know where I was going? When he came back he knew that I had gone to America. There they know America, not Canada. It took six years. He wrote me a letter. He knew because my sister [*Rachel Kravchek*] moved to Odessa, the one that was in Kryzhopol, the married sister, her husband [*Joseph Shture Marantz*] died and her son was in the army. She had a daughter so she went to Odessa. She died in Odessa too, her husband died before in Kryzhopol. The son and the daughter still live in Odessa. When I was there with Papa, and when I was with your father and your mother there. They are still there in Odessa. I get letters - I just got a letter last week. My nephew said that I should live 120 years because they haven't got anyone else but me because they don't know anybody from the family. I was the only one that wrote to them and sent them parcels.

Marla: What about Auntie Tillie?

Dora; Tillie doesn't even remember them. I speak Russian and I write Russian. They don't, they don't remember and they never were in Russia and they don't

know. If they don't get a letter from me, they are terrified if I am still alive. They say that "you are the only one that we have in the whole world". Which is true. My niece's husband died and she has one son. And my nephew, that we went to wedding one time, they have one son, a doctor. My nephew is sick, she is sick. They live in one room and have to work.

That's all.

Marla: I'd like to talk about you and Papa.

Dora: He came in 1927. He came in May. I was in Pittsburgh. My mother [*Bayla Weltman*] had a brother [*one of the Begler boys*] in Pittsburgh. So I went away and thought I would stay in the States. During the summer I got myself a job and I worked there. All of a sudden, I got a letter from home, six years later, that I got a letter from Papa. So I came home. He said that if he can't come to Canada, he'll go to Palestine and I should come there. But we made out papers and he came here. [*he was sponsored as if he was my grandmother's mother's youngest brother - thus the name change from Spector to Veltman - then Waltman*]. So we got married in November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1927, it was fifty years last year. Fifty years..... and he died in July 1968. It's going to be ten years in July. Yeah.....

Well, I guess you'll fix up the tape.

Marla: There's lots more tape.

Dora: Another time.... another time....

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