

MEMORIES OF LITHUANIA

Greta Tedoff writes: my great uncle Julius told this story about 60 years ago, talking about life in, as he called it, Vorna. He was born in Varniai to Avram Abba Levine in 1878 or so.

We asked Julius Levine of Greenport where he was born. "Well," he answered, "it isn't the same country today." We felt that he didn't want to tell us more because it was too painful a subject. The European scene has changed in things deeper and more tragic than mere national boundaries or bomb scars. But our curiosity got the better of us. "What country?" we persisted.

"Lithuania," Mr. Levine said. And he told us a few of his recollections.

"We lived in a small town. The nearest city was Kovna. My father was a singer and choir master. We lived in one side of a huge house that belonged to my mother's father. Grandfather lived in one part of the house and one of my uncles lived in another. Grandfather was a bookbinder and a very important man in the town.

"One winter evening a sleigh came to take Father to a singing engagement. They had to cross the frozen lake. The ice broke and Father went through. The others rescued him and they arrived at last in Germany. But Father got pneumonia from his plunge in the icy water and he died there in Germany.

"I remember that we had very little fruit over there," Mr. Levine continued after a moment. "There were apples and pears but no peaches, oranges or grapefruit. We ate much of the good black bread. In the fall we bought geese, then dressed them, salted them down, and had the goose meat until spring. Every morning there were rolls for breakfast. The baker had his shop just across the street from us.

"Once when I was about four or five years old - I can see it as though it were yesterday - I woke in the night and came downstairs crying. My mother wanted to know what was the matter, so I said I was hungry. She went across to the bakery and brought back some bagel. I ate some and felt better.

"Bagel are tiny rolls shaped like doughnuts. Instead of being cooked in fat, the dough is dropped in boiling water and then put in the oven. They should be eaten while still warm, for soon they become as hard as rocks.

"When I was nine my mother brought us children to this country. We lived in New York City and the first thing that happened to us was the big blizzard of 1888. My mother couldn't get over it. She thought this country would be nice and warm and she saw as much snow as they had back in Lithuania."

Greta says "great Uncle Julius' father was a rabbi/cantor who apparently traveled the area. My father told me that his grandfather's sleigh fell through the ice when he was traveling to East Prussia. He got pneumonia and died and was buried in Konigsburg. My father also told me that smuggling may have been part of his grandfather's activities. I

believe that the grandfather Julius speaks of was his mother's father, named Jacob Sher. The widow & her 3 children from that marriage came to New York in 1888.”