Kishinev Cousins,
written by Shmuel Fisher

I have been involved with family history for the past twenty years. Like a number of people, only when I retired did I find the time for this exciting endeavor. And indeed I have made much progress with my mother’s Polish family. My father’s side is another story. My father died when I was eight and so the only information that I had was passed down to me only from my mother.

Her story was that my dad was born in Kishinev and came to Canada when he was a young child. His father, the story goes, died either before he was born or shortly thereafter. His mother remarried and that man Joseph he was told was his father. He grew up thinking that Joseph ROTHSPAN was his father. Only when in his late teens, when he was going to be married, did his mother tell him that Israel FISHER was his real father. To me some of these details especially about how his father died seemed too outlandish for me to swallow. The story that my mother told was that he was killed by a bear. I did find his application for Social Security which contained his father’s name.

I was of course familiar with the pogrom in Kishinev in 1903 and did look to see if any FISHER was among the dead. And I knew that the family’s arrival in Montreal was after the pogrom. It also occurred to me that just as a person from neighborhood of a large city talking to other people about where they came from might use the name of the city as opposed to the actual town. So I took with a grain of salt that my father came from Kishinev.

But to my astonishment a few years ago researching the Bessarabian databases, I found the marriages of my paternal grandmother, Gitlya Gesya KHMELNITSKY, first to Itsko Yitzkhak FISHER then to Joseph ROTPAN shortly thereafter (notice the slightly different spelling). See the table below for records 2 and 3.

Looking at maps I discovered that my grandmother’s name corresponds to a city in Ukraine and my grandfather is described at a merchant from Zhitomir. When I looked at the record of the marriage of my grandparents I noticed that her father’s name was Shmuel. From that I found many other children from that same Shmuel. And on some of those records was not only his first name but also his middle name, Mordko. After all these years I had finally found the person who I am named for. That information was very important to me. I had always wondered and now I knew. So now it seemed that my attention should move toward the Ukraine in particular Zhitomir and Khmelnitsky. But that is for another time.

At this time I was off solving other genealogy programs. Fast toward some years and I looked again at some of the photos that my mother had taken. She was a business woman and it carried over into her personal life. She annotated most of the photos she took in her life. She has been gone over twenty years now and as most genealogist say, I started too late. The people who had so much information are gone.
One of the photos in her albums was of a man, Nathan DREZNER. There he was in a sailor uniform with the date 1944 on the back of the photo. Not only did I have my mother’s photo albums but among her papers was a list of all the invitees to my wedding and my daughter’s Bat Mitzvah and whose name should be on both of those documents but an Abraham DREZNER. And to put the icing on the cake, I had a Western Union telegram that was sent to my wife and I offering congratulations on our wedding from Mr. and Mrs. A DREZNER. Therefore I was 95% certain he was a relative. Why I thought he was from my father’s side of the family, I don’t recall but the feeling was strong. Then I found an Abraham DREZNER living in New York City in the 1930 census with a son named Nathan. That lead to Abraham’s Naturalization Papers and that contained the information that he came from Kishinev. That did it. Nathan was related on my father’s side.
Figure 1 1930 Census

Figure 2 Petition for Naturalization
Figure 4 Table of three Genealogy Records

So four years ago using the Whitepages.com I searched for Mr. DREZNER. I found one in Florida of the right age and I called. We spoke only for less than five minutes and it was obvious that he really was not interested in my research. He did confirm that he was in the navy in WWII. Discussing this with my walking buddies in the following days, they suggested that I may have just caught him on a bad day. With that in mind, I wrote him a letter and included the scanned copy of the photo. Time went by and nothing. After some time I just wrote him off.

This May four years after the conversation I get an email from a woman who maiden name is DREZNER. Nathan died and his brother, Murray, going over his papers found my letter. Murray gave the letter to his daughter, Elaine who contacted me on May 1 of this year. Now the problem was to find how we were connected if at all. Elaine has a facebook account and we became friends. Looking at her page I noticed that she had formed a group in facebook called of all things, Kishinev Cousins. That did it. In the few weeks in May we exchanged many emails asking and answering many questions.

But now back to the Bessarabian databases. I found the marriage of Yosel DRAZNER to of all people, Ginda-Mirlya KHMELNITSKY. And she was the sister of MY father’s mother Gitlya Gesya KHMELNITSKY.

And now I have thirty five new cousins who I hope to meet some day. However we are friends on Facebook and that will have to do for now.