

# My Family from Stavisht

Written and submitted by Karen Isabel Sanders

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My paternal grandparents, Tazi and Beile, were born in Stavisht, Ukraine and were married there in 1908. They were quiet, kind, and loving people. They had little money, but were rich in spirit and family pride. When they were alive, I never knew that they had Americanized given names; I never heard anyone refer to them as anything but Tazi and Beile Sanders. So I was quite surprised to find out that their American names were Isadore and Becky. Their Americanized surname came from some variation of Sanderovitch, Sandrowicz, Sanderovi, or Sandrowitz. The reason for the uncertainty is that my grandparents gave their surname in many different forms on many different documents. I use the surname Sanderovitch, as that is the name that sticks out in my memory from childhood. The name Tazi is a mystery to everyone. His given name, from his ship manifest, was Eisig. Yitzhak Aizik is the Hebrew name on his tombstone. Everyone in the family was told that my grandmother's maiden name was Levine, but all documents show that her family name was Lewit. Go figure!



My grandparents never spoke about their life in Stavisht, the reason for leaving, or the family they left behind. They had died before I was old enough to start asking questions about such things. Thankfully, there were others in the family who were not as reticent about the Sanderovitch and Lewit family life in Stavisht.

When my grandma was still a little girl, my grandfather had fallen in love with her. Tazi told his father that Beile Lewit was the girl he was going to marry. His father, Tevya Leyb, laughed at his son and told him to wait and see what would happen. On May 15, 1908, Tazi married Beile. Tazi was 25, and Beile was only 17. I know that the love my grandfather had for his bride lasted even after her untimely death in 1954.

In May 1910, Beile gave birth to their first son, Nisol. He was named after Beile's father, Nison Leyb Lewit. Tazi wanted money to enlarge and improve their home in Stavisht for his growing family. So he decided to go to America to earn the money faster than he could in Stavisht. Beile was pregnant with their second child when Tazi boarded the boat to America in February 1913. In May 1913, Beile gave birth to their second son, Smil.

When my grandfather arrived in America, he lived with a landsman, Israel Menis. Israel taught my grandfather the fruit and vegetable business. Tazi started out selling potatoes on street corners in Manhattan. Slowly, he was able to save enough to buy a larger cart, and to increase his stock. He lived frugally and was able to start sending money to my grandmother. Within a few years, Tazi had sent enough money to Beile to improve their home and install wood floors. Tazi could not return to Stavisht, because World War I had started. He worried about his family

and continued to work his growing business. He was informed by Beile that part of their home had been destroyed by a gang raid. Tazi would have to earn more money to repair it.

News of the Russian revolution reached America, along with letters from Stavisht that told of the raids and thugs that were attacking villages. Tazi did not send for his family, as he hoped that things would settle down and his family could live in peace in their little shtetl. He did send them money to flee the area until the political situation and violence subsided. Before Beile could leave the shtetl, the pogroms had taken the lives of her mother and Tazi's parents.

Beile's sisters, Sheve and Feige Lewit, were also from Stavisht. My great aunts, Sheve and Feige, lived with their widowed mother, Kayla (nee Shpritzanietski), in a small, one-room house with dirt floors. They lived on Shuglasse Street (Synagogue Street). They made and sold cheese and eggs for their meager living. The street was always muddy, and my aunts had to wear boots all the time. One day, when they heard that a gang was coming to Stavisht, Kayla told her daughters to run into the woods and hide. When the daughters returned, they found their mother had been beaten badly by the gang. Kayla died from her injuries. Shortly thereafter, their brother, Itzar, told his sisters that they all had to leave Stavisht or they would be killed.



Sheve & Feige Lewit w/my father, 1927.

Beile, her two young sons, and her two sisters packed up what they could carry and left Stavisht. I know that Beile had every intention of returning, because she wrapped and buried her Shabbat candlesticks and other valuables in the backyard of her house. The three sisters and two young boys headed toward Bessarabia. They walked at night, hiding in ditches during the day to evade the soldiers and gangs. It was a difficult and dangerous journey. My grandfather realized that their little shtetl was destroyed and that they could never return. He sent my grandmother money to come to America. She arrived in New York in February 1921. Sheve arrived a month later, followed in May by Feige. Itzar and his family fled to parts unknown to me. He did not come to America. He eventually died at Babi Yar.

Tazi worked hard in the U.S. as a fruit and vegetable vendor, selling his wares from a horse and wagon. His third son, my father, Theodore Leon (named for his murdered grandfather) was born in July 1922. His fourth son, Kalman (named for his murdered grandmother Kayla) was born in November 1927.

Tazi moved his family to Washington Avenue in the Bronx. He opened a small fruit store on Bathgate Avenue. This area was very similar to a shtetl in the old country. There were all sorts of little stalls selling all sorts of goods. All of the stores had their stalls outside the store. There were no cash registers; the vendors wrote the prices of customers' merchandise on the brown paper bags and added them up in their heads. Everyone bargained for prices and complained about the quality of the goods (no doubt to get a better price). There were no supermarkets and no large general stores in that area. Instead of one large temple, there were many, many little shuls and houses of prayer. It seemed to me that everyone spoke Yiddish and

held a Yiddish language newspaper in their hands. I always felt that I was in a foreign country when I went to visit my grandparents. Foreign, but nice and inviting.

### Fond Memories

I remember my grandma Beile holding me in her arms and letting me drop the cheese knaidlach in a big pot of boiling water. She wore a fatsheyla (a kerchief so no hair would get into the food), and put one on my head as well. I remember my grandpa Tazi putting a sugar cube in his mouth while drinking tea from a glass. I remember drinking cherry-flavored seltzer water from an old Yizkor candle glass. I remember the bowl of borsht with a boiled potato sitting in its center. I remember the chicken soup, pickles, pickled green tomatoes, and cabbage that were always on the table. I remember going to a little shul with my grandfather and feeling so proud when he marched around carrying the Torah. He was proud, too, watching his little granddaughter sitting in the women's section, happy to be in temple with her grandfather. I was always aware that my grandparents had little money, but much spirit and love for each other and their family.

### Epilogue

In 1928, my aunt Sheve got married to Solomon Woron (Schloime Voronofski), who was from Cherkas. She seems to be the only member of the family that passed along many of the details of life in Stavisht. She and Sol had two children.



My aunt Feige was still not married by 1949. So, following the tradition of shtetl culture, the women of the family gathered to discuss the situation. We had many relatives from Boyarka, the very little shtetl 21 miles from Stavisht. A cousin, Ida Goldberg (nee Chaika Sokol), said that her husband's cousin was in need of a wife. Moishe Goldberg was a widower with three young children and was living in New Haven, Connecticut. The women decided that it would be a good match, and Feige agreed. Feige married Moishe Goldberg of Boyarka in 1949.

My uncle Nat (Nisol) grew up in the Bronx and served in the Army in World War II. He married and had one daughter. He, too, went into the produce business. My uncle Sammy (Smil) served in the Army in World War II. He married and had two sons. He worked in the produce field as well. Theodore Leon served in the Marines in World War II. He married after the war and had three daughters. Kalman served in the Navy during World War II. He married and had two sons.

The Sanders Family, 1951.

L to R; Nathan (Nisol), Theodore, Beile, Sam (Smil), Tazi and Kalman.

