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## **DVASH (Which is Hebrew for Honey)**

This memoir was submitted by David Tessler on 22 December 2003 with the following note: "The following 'essay' was handed down to me, from my Aunt Nena Tessler about forty years ago. There was no indication as to when it was written by hand. I typed it out to make it easier to read and preserve. It is believed to have been written by Dora Segal, but this is strictly a guess on my father's part. It is interesting because it gives an insight into the "old world" and to inter-family relationships and attitudes. I offer the following without comment ... "

David Berner added the following: That story was written by my mother (may she rest in peace), Helen Deborah Berner, nee Segal. The story is about my Zaida and bubba, in whose house I grew up at 439 St. John's Street in Winnipeg. Peretz Segal was a sewer of furs for Kim Furs, and his wife, Raizl, spoke no less than 8 languages. My mother spoke 4 languages, one of which was a very Parisian French."

I am the product of an alliance between Peretz Isaac Segal and Raize (Rose) Tessler, The Segals and the Tesslers are Jews. The Segals and the Tessler are Levites. The Segals are neared to God and are better Jews than the Tesslers, who are still Jews but are Idealists in name only.

My parents grew up together in a small Russian-Ukrainian town of 30,000 people. The town was called Kremenetz and it no longer exists because the armies of Mr. Hitler and Mr. Stalin had a violent disagreement there in 1942. Hurling their hate against each other with massive explosives, they bombarded that beautiful valley and razed that town out of this earth.

It was a beautiful city with cherry trees standing like bridal attendants arrayed in their beds in a procession down each street. It was the site of the Russian military barracks. The people of the town were either Russian or Jewish and they lived peacefully together with what foreigners there were. The town was surrounded by large hills and in the outskirts the street went up or down and the children used them as slide in the winter for their sleighs.

Everyone not only knew everyone else but they knew who everyone's ancestors were. The Ukrainians said of the Jews that they were clever and kind. The Jews said of the Ukrainians that "for ignorant Gentiles" they were good neighbours.

Every year performing artists came and did their best and if they pleased the natives they returned. The people lived simply. There was no point in try to keep

with the Joneses. First, there are no Joneses. It is only a people who are recent converts to civilization who keep up with the Joneses, and these people were rooted in the soil, and grew as naturally as any weed. They knew it was nonsense for a cabbage to pretend to be a rose. A cabbage must concentrate on being the very best cabbage it can and not waste time and energy of God and man in pretence, especially since pretence would fool nobody but themselves.

Some of the people were illiterate. They had little knowledge of the three "r's" but everyone had knowledge of the four "L's" They lived every second of their lives. They loved their own families first and other Kremenzers second. They laughed whole heartedly at their own faults and at the foible of their neighbours. Their charity was great and since they gave full of themselves they learned.

All the Jews spoke Ukrainian and many of them also spoke Russian. All the Ukrainians spoke Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish in that order. When the Czars armies invaded Kremenets, the Ukrainian teachers were driven out of the schools and replaced with Russian teachers. But those Ukrainians were such good Jews that they just laughed at the foibles of their Russian taskmasters. "Well" they said as any good Jew would say, "if God means us to learn Russian we shall learn Russian since the Big Bear is paying for our education." And our children will be just as good Ukrainians because after Russian school they all learn their own language at free schools, which we will operate from our own community funds.

When the Versailles treaty of 1919 made Kremenets Polish, the Poles threw out the Russian teachers and replaced them with Polish teachers. "See" said the little Ukrainians, having learned from their Jewish brothers, "how God loves us. Obviously he feels we are bright enough to learn a fourth language."

So they sent their children to the Polish schools and after government school the children went to Ukrainian free school. A half hour was added to their school time so that Russian would remain one their tongues. "For who knows when the big bear will be back with his soldiers and we will have to communicate with them once again." So every child after 1919 learned Jewish, Hebrew, Ukrainian, Russian, and Polish.

There a division in Kremenets society on two levels. There was always the Rich and the Poor and there was also the Knowing and the Ignorant. The Ukrainians greeted everybody with "God give you good." and the Jews with "blessed be he who cometh with Peace and Joy."

Every man's home was his castle and everyone had a garden with a fruit orchard and a vineyard. There were a very few alcoholics in Kremenets since every child who was old enough to be taken off the breast was give bread dipped in brandy. Fruit brandy is the water of life as our French brother's say. And who does not

want life? Peaches, plums, apricots, apples, could be had everywhere by stretching out a hand and picking,

Wine was made from grapes and wild roses and from fermented berries which grew like weeds. Brandy was made from every fruit. In the summer everyone drank cider made from apples and fermented honey from the bees feeding on the rich gifts of God.

Military service was compulsory and from all over Volynia recruits were sent to Kremenz. The people loved the soldiers. The uniforms were so colorful and their church parades were a free show. They brought prosperity to the Kremenzers because soldiers far from home solace themselves for their homesickness by spending money freely. A soldier must be a fool because his aim is to kill and what good is a corpse. A soldier away from home is a bigger fool since he is parted from his money so easily.

The Kremenzers both Jew and Gentile were in love with music for they had to make their own pleasures and there are instruments that cost next to nothing. A mouth organ cost one Kopek and what parent could not afford so inexpensive a pleasure for the treasure who was his own flesh and blood.

Every soldier played some instrument. The best musicians were in the official band. Then there was a second band and a third band and so on. The Ukrainians and the Jews both concentrated first on church and synagogue music and then on the music of life, lullabies, children's poems, songs of young love, and marriage, and then on the songs of romance, and adventure, and then of all the sorrows known to the sons and daughters of God.

The End (author thought to be Dora Segal)

Retyped by David Tessler