

Gold/ Pinn/ Leibowitz Family

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My mother always spoke of Sveksna as “home” and would have liked to have visited there in her old age - but poor health and lack of finances prohibited that. In a way, I would now like to do this for her - from my computer.

Her father was Sam Gold, Hebrew name Shevach. He came to South Africa in 1915, shortly before my mother was born - she only got to meet him in 1927 when she was about 12 years old. He died during World War II, whilst my mother was nursing in Egypt - she was amongst the first contingent of S.A. nurses to join up during the war and served in Egypt for almost the full duration of the War. It was her way of doing her “bit” for those who were left behind in Europe.

Her father left Sveksna for various reasons - he was a tailor and they lived a hand-to-mouth existence as subsistence farmers - a few goats, geese and cows. He had been conscripted into the army during the Russo-Japanese war and had served for many years. Jews were not allowed to hold any rank in the army and the soldiers were poorly paid. He was afraid that he would be conscripted again during World War I and feared he would be unable to support his wife (who was pregnant with my mother) and 5 daughters. So he came to S.A. where my grandmother`s brother, Moola Pinn, lived. (I am not sure how to spell his first name but that is how it is pronounced.) My grandmother was Gita Gold, nee Pinn. I am unsure if this was the original surname, or the name adopted by the Pinn family when they came here. Several Pinn relatives emigrated to S.A. Many immigrants changed their surnames upon arrival - for various reasons. I remember an Eva Pinn who was probably about my mother`s age and was a cousin. There was also a Joey Pinn. And a Leah Alpert, nee Pinn (Moola`s daughter). I do not know if they were born in Sveksna or here.

My mother`s oldest sister Reichka, married Boruch Leibowitz in Sveksna. He was several years older than her and they had a daughter, Sylvia. Reichka and Boruch probably got married after my grandfather came to S.A. The second oldest sister, Leah, was the next to come here and was eventually joined by the rest of the sisters - Esther, Zelda, Zizka and my mother, Reevea in 1927. They brought Sylvia (who was 2 years old) with them and were later joined by Reichka and Boruch. They came by ship through the Baltic Sea, via Southampton. My grandmother came here before her daughters, but I do not know in what year.

She had sisters who remained in Sveksna. One was Doba, after whom I am named. Another was Reevea, after whom my mother was named so I think she must have died

before my mother was born in 1915. My mother often spoke of an uncle Gerson (?Gold ?Pinn) who was a very kind man and loved birds. She said he would take in sick birds and nurse them back to health. I read on the Sveksna website that there are many exotic birds there and I think these are probably the sort that he looked after.

Here are memories that my mother told me about Sveksna:

One day when we were driving past a park, she rolled down the car window and said that the place smelled like "home." We realized that the grass in the park had just been mowed - so that is what Sveksna smelled like to her - new-mown lawn. She always recalled her memories with much affection and warmth. I think she probably always hankered after that way of life.

Although she was about 12 (no one in the family knew their exact birth dates because births and deaths were not registered in Sveksna) when she left, she did not recall any active anti-Semitism. But my aunty Zelda remembered a pogrom shortly after 1 Rosh Hashanah. The Cosacks came into town and the whole family had to run for their lives. Zelda said she only had time to grab her new shoes - her Rosh Hashanah gift.

Incidentally all the family had estimated dates of birth because the exact dates were forgotten. My mother was told she was born 3 weeks after Pesach, so she gave herself the birthdate of 24 May and this is what we celebrated every year. I suspect her sisters did something similar, based upon the proximity of their births to a particular Yom Tov.

My mother also remembered that there was a lake which froze in the winter and they would go skating there. Sometimes they would harness a goat to a makeshift cart and would get the goat to pull them along on the lake. She told me that before a Yom Tov they would fatten the geese on kneidlach to fatten them up. I don't know what their house was like, but I know that sometimes the farmyard animals were taken into the house for shelter.

My bobba always told her daughters that the animals should always be fed first, before they ate. It was something my mother always remembered and always fed our pets before she ate. It is something I have always done in adulthood and which I passed down to my 2 children.

My bobba used to tell me when I was a child that the rest of her family members were all shot by the Germans after they had been forced to dig their own communal grave. I always wondered how she knew this, as there were no survivors. I would dearly love to know more about my family and what became of them.

There was a person in the village called Shlomo die Plexter - which I think is a kind of fish. I think he was a bit of a simple soul and once had some kind of accident by

climbing into some sort of outdoor oven which apparently collapsed and fell on him. I don't think he was hurt but the village made much fun of this incident.

I do not know anything about my grandfather's family. My uncle Boruch Leibowitz also left family behind and I do not have any details of them either.

My bobba died of a ripe old age in 1963. My mother and all her sisters, apart from Reichka, married here and had children. Most died of old age. My mother died in 1995. None of them, nor their husbands, are still alive. My father was born in S.A. of Lithuanian parents. I do not know if they came from Sveksna, probably not. His surname was Goldman, which was not their original surname. I do not know what the original surname was or when it was changed.

I was born in 1950, the youngest of all the Gold grandchildren, an only child. Sadly I no longer have any contact with my cousins - the family has drifted apart and live all over the place. I have contact with only one relative - a paternal cousin who lives in Toronto and with whom I have daily contact via email. He is an amateur genealogist and has tried to trace our family (his mother and my father), without success so far. Because I feel like I have been cut off without roots, finding my family history has become very important to me.