

Jacob Pelix



This is my uncle, mother's brother Jacob Pelix.

The picture was taken in Minsk in 1912 on the eve of his departure for Switzerland. He went there to study.

Mother Anna Kabakovà came from Pelix family. She was born in Minsk in 1897. My mother's history is also unique. All people having the last name Pelix are close relatives.

The last name of my maternal great grandfather was Levin. He was to be drafted in the army. My great grandpa was strongly against it. He was an educated man, knew how to read in Russian which was very rare among the Jews from hick towns. He read some book about Polish life and he liked the character Felix.

My ancestor came up to the clerk of the synagogue and offered money to change his son's name to Felix. The clerk was not very knowledgeable in Russian and put down Pelix instead of Felix. That was the way such a unique last name appeared.

My maternal grandfather's name was Haim Pelix. He was involved in timbering. He owned plots in the forest. Byelorussia was rich in forests. It started exporting timber to the Western Europe a long time ago. Haim Pelix was not rich, when he was young.

His wife, whose name I do not remember, came of the family Kogelman. That family was not rich, but it had some inconsiderable profit.

The money grandpa was to receive after wedding as a dowry was enough to start his own business. First, he had nothing, but grandpa Haim managed his business so well, that he finally got rich. He was able to get all his children educated. Mother had 2 brothers Jacob Pelix, Solomon Pelix and sister Esfir' Pelix.

Mother Anna Pelix studied at conservatories in Saint Petersburg. She had a good voice. Her siblings studied in Lausanne, Switzerland. For a Jew to study in conservatories at that time, it was necessary to have a wonderful voice as well as wealthy parents who would be able to pay tuition.

Mother's family was one of the richest in Minsk. There was a house in Minsk with servants and maids and there was a house out of town, where his office was located.

After revolution Bolsheviks demanded money from rich people and arrested their children, threatening that they would be killed if money was not brought.

Mother was among those arrested children. It proves that grandpa was one of the wealthiest people in the city. The money was collected and children were released.

There are terrible recollections of the time being cooped up in ChK. Later on grandpa Haim was murdered in 1918 during civil war. He took the wages to the forest and on his way he was attacked by a pack of gangsters, who robbed and killed him. Grandpa was buried in Jewish cemetery in Minsk. His grave was not preserved.

Mother's elder brother Jacob Pelix studied at Lausanne University. He did not come back to Russia. He stayed in Switzerland. He had lived a long life and died in Bern in early 1970s, when he was over 80. He was buried in Swiss cemetery. He was baptized.

His wife Matilda was a Swiss German. They had two children. They are still alive. Edward Pelix is rather odd, though not insane, is still studying in the Swiss University in spite of a mature age.

He and his mother are living on a dole. My wife and I stayed with Edward in Matilda for two weeks in 1993. Unfortunately uncle Jacob was not alive, when I came there. German speaking Swiss speak the language approximated to Yiddish.

At an old age all kinds of things are coming back to the memory, so I started remembering the forgotten language. I was able to communicate with them. It was a very lucky time.

The only thing I know about another Jacob's son Robert is that he is married, has a daughter and lives in Bern. I've seen him only once during my stay in Bern.