

Tulchinsky's Family

Below is a story of life of Isaak Tulchinsky and his family. Before 2008 I only knew that my great grandmother Khova Kogan had a maiden name Tulchinsky. On April 4, 2008 I found on website www.jewishgen.org that someone else is looking for Tulchinsky's family lived before the war in Tiraspol. On my email I received a reply the same day from Aleksandra (Ala) Gamulka (Tulchinsky). When Ala told me her story, I was convinced immediately that we are related. Below is an interview with Ala's father Isaak, who was a brother of my great grandmother Khova. After several letters I met in Vermont with Ala and her husband Larry. Later I got many letters from Ala and other Tulchinsky's. In our Family book now there is a large chapter dedicated to the Tulchinsky's family. Thanks to Ala Gamulka for this great work.

Yefim Kogan, 2009

Edited transcript of interview of ISAAC TULCHINSKY made by his granddaughter, Beth Gamulka, in 1982.

I am Isaac Tulchinsky, of a family of 13 children, born in Tiraspol, Bessarabia. My family lived there for about 250 years. I attended school there, first in heder, ages 4-10 and then high school for 4 years. I had to continue high school in Bender, a town 10 miles away, because of "numerous clausus". This meant that only 10% of the Jewish boys could go to high school in our town, so I had to go to the nearest town. I attended what my father called the "Goyshe School". He was sure that I would convert and stop being a Jew. The Russian Revolution followed and Jews could not freely attend high school or university. I attended university for one day only because they wanted me to become a Communist and I was afraid.

My parents were Yaakov Yosef and Hannah (Shenker). My grandfather was Hanoch. He died when I was 2 months old and my brother Harry (Hanoch) is named after him. My parents were in a relatively good financial situation. My father was an alderman in city hall and was very popular. We were 7 brothers and 6 sisters. All 7 brothers were active in the Zionist movement. My oldest brother, Fishel, was in Mizrachi and my second oldest brother, Leibl (Aryeh) was active in the liberal Zionist movement. The other brothers were Daniel, Ber Shloime, me, Isaac, Hanoch (Harry) and Berl. My brother Berl is 5 years younger. My mother was 45 years old and she was upset when he was born. She thought she was too old and she cried a lot. We were afraid to say anything to Berl. He was spoiled and did not want to study. Now he is a big "Macher" in his synagogue. He goes every Saturday and he knows what to do. Harry went to Yeshiva and I prepared him for high school. He finished high school, but it was the time of the Revolution and no one was serious about school. We were all involved in politics.

My sisters had a rebbe at home. They also learned some Russian. My oldest brother was a religious man. He was a friend of Bialik and others. He was always full of humor. When my father died in 1920 we sat shiva. It was hard to remain serious because every word my brother said made me laugh. The Communists came a month later. They would have killed my father because he was a capitalist. He owned 10 houses in our small town.

Mizrachi was founded in Tiraspol in 1902 by my brother Fishel, Rabbi Maimon Fishman and Rabbi Wertheim. Fishman was later the first Minister of Religious Affairs in Israel in 1948. Ben Gurion loved him like a brother. When Zahal (Israel Defense Forces) was founded, Fishman said that the food in the army had to be Kosher. Ben Gurion replied that soldiers could survive with kosher food too.

I joined the Labor Zionist Movement when I was only 16. My friend, David Wertheim, was a popular man in the Zionist movement. He was a member of the Jewish Agency. On December 31, 1916 he met me on the street and invited me to a meeting. He was older than me and he wanted young men and women to join. It happened 66 years ago. I have been in the Labour Zionist Movement since then.

I lived in Russia, moved to Rumania, to Israel and then here, to Canada. I was always active in the movement. I even met someone from that first group 60 years later. His name was Nathanson, but he changed it to Natan(Natanyahu?). He became a university professor. Another member of that group was a professor in England. Our home was religious, but I was not religious. I finished high school in 1919 and I ran away to Rumania in 1920. I was in the Zionist movement and it was very dangerous for me. There was a lot of anti-Semitism.

I was first married (to Fanya) in 1920. My daughter Rita was born in 1925. She is living in Israel with her husband. I was divorced in 1931. I have two married grandchildren and great-grandchildren in Israel.

I escaped from Bessarabia to Rumania because I knew I would be arrested by the Communists. I found a smuggler who took me at night and brought me across the river illegally. There was no other way to go. I came to Bucharest where I had many friends. I was well-known in the textile industry because I was the manager of a textile factory. This was a very good position. Because of the Depression, the factory closed in 1928 and I started my own business. I did very well.

I married Bussia(Bracha) Bercovici in 1933 and my daughter Alexandra(Ala), your mother, was born in 1939. The war between the Germans and the Russians began in 1941. There was a lot of anti-Semitism from the Rumanians and the Germans.

I decided to leave Rumania in 1942 because of the pogroms. There was a big one in Yassi, the second city in Rumania. I registered to go on the Struma, but 3 weeks before we were supposed to leave I decided to give back my tickets and to find another way. There were 800 people registered to go and room for only 200. I thought it was not safe.

The Struma was destroyed by a submarine in Turkish waters. We would have been killed if we had gone on it. Only one boy survived. He was the son of Frida's cousin – David Stoliar. He is now a rich man in America. I bought a ship, the "Mircea" – 17.5 meters long and 3.5 meters wide. I organized others to join me. We sailed on April 10, 1942 from a small port in Bessarabia called Tulcha. We were 40 people on the boat and we spent 40 days and nights on the way until we arrived in Haifa. The British found us because we were illegal. They took us to Camp Atilit. We spent 100 days there and then we were freed. Your mother was only 2 years old on the trip. My wife and my mother-in-law were also with me.

Your mother saved our lives. It was a very important event in my life. We were in the Mediterranean and we passed some Greek islands occupied by the Italians. Our ship looked like a Russian underwater ship. We were 500 meters from the Italians. When they saw us they thought it was a Russian underwater ship and wanted to destroy us. I took my 2 year-old daughter in my arms and I waved a white sheet to show them we were not a naval ship, but just ordinary people. The Turks had shot at us earlier. The Italians took all 40 of us to a school building. There were no beds there. Two officers came to us. One, a doctor, brought some milk for my daughter. He then also brought jam and half a chocolate bar. They also did not have much to eat. My wife spoke to him in French. He began to cry and she asked him why he was crying. He was a beautiful man. He told us that Mussolini had sent him there a year and a half ago. He left his children behind and the youngest looks like my daughter. This is how your mother saved us. Life in Israel was hard because of the Arabs and our own terrorists. The Palmach with Yigal Alon had the best soldiers. They won the war. During the 1948 war I was standing on the street not far from Jaffa and the Palmach arrived in vehicles. They were booed by Begin's followers. I could not stand it and I left. Begin brought a ship full of arms from Europe, the Altalena. He did not want to hand it over and Ben Gurion ordered it destroyed.

During the war I could not join the army, but I was a civilian volunteer. Every night I had to check the streets for blackout. All men had to do this duty. I knew many people who achieved high positions after 1948. Once, Moshe Sharett was speaking in Tokyo which had a small Jewish population. He told them even the only survivor of the Struma left Israel. A man stood up and said he was the one. David Stoliar was then living in Tokyo. I spoke to Sharett about it. In Atlit there was a Polish man who had worked in the consulate in Bucharest. He had gotten involved with a woman and was on the Struma. He had made himself a false visa for Palestine. Since Poles were allowed to enter Turkey he got off the Struma. His papers were checked and were found to be false. He was sent to Palestine and was at Atlit with us and when I heard Sharett's story I thought he was talking about this man. I did not know David Stoliar was in Tokyo. I knew Golda Meir very well. In 1976 I was in New York with Bubby Frida. It was the last time Golda Meir was in America. She had been invited by Nixon. In her speech she said that the best immigrants to Israel were the Rumanians who arrived after 1958. There were many professionals among them.

I first met Golda Meir in 1945 or 1946 at small meetings of Vaad Hapoel. I spoke to her in Russian. In 1948 Golda Meir was Minister of Labor in the government. David Wertehim's brother was her secretary. When David Wertheim died I went to the shiva. The brother did not know me, but I told him my name and that I was Fishel's brother. He was very happy to meet me. I also knew Beba Idelson. She was one of the founders of Pioneer Women. She also spoke a beautiful Russian.

One time when I came to Israel I did not have a hotel reservation. I stayed in a hotel on a day-to-day basis. I met Beba Idelson at a Vaad Hapoel meeting and I told her about my hotel. The next morning, at 7:00 am her secretary came with a car to show me the work of Pioneer Women. I spent two hours visiting different places. Beba Idelson remembered my story and sent her secretary to show me around. She is no longer alive. This happened in the seventies.

This is it.