

WHEN AND WHERE BORN

VLADIMIR

I was born in the city of Gladimeir, Russia, on or about the eleventh of April, 1865. That was as near as I could gather from my dear mother. Mother used to say that I was born a week before ^{EREV} ~~erev~~ Pesach 1865. After many years in looking through a calendar, I found this ^{EREV} ~~erev~~ Pesach was April the eleventh, so I took this date as my birthday and have kept it ever since.

I am very grateful that I was born in that year of freedom for many people. It was in that year, 1865, that Abraham Lincoln liberated the Negroes in these United States of America and my mother used to tell that in that same year the Russian Czarina asked the Czar to liberate the white serfs of Russia, which then existed in some parts of Russia. This the Czar did as a birthday gift to his Queen. What a wonderful birthday gift. There was great rejoicing in Russia at that time.

In that wonderful year I was born also after my father received his honorable discharge from the Russian Army where he had served eight years, and where he had lost his health. So that I am really the daughter of a free man - free from the Russian Army.

Those were dreadful times. Men were taken to army service for twenty-five years. It was the ill health of my father that saved him from such a fate. Often my mother used to tell us her experiences in the Caucasus where my father was serving, having been sent there two years after they were married, about 1853. The Russian Army sent the men taken from one part of the country to another. So they took my father from a small city of Kalveria in Lithuania, first to ^VVLADIMIR Gladimeir and then to the Caucasus.

My father was a Yeshivah Bochor, a learned man, very religious and very observing. For him to be transferred from Kalveria to the Caucasian mountains was a terrible change in his life. He could not stand it so

he sickened and might have died had not my mother worked hard to get him an honorable discharge from the Army.

My mother used to tell how father went to a Rabbi to ask what he should do about his morning prayer. He saw he could not put on his Talis and Tiffen in the barracks. The Rabbi told him, "My son, if you say the ^{SHEMA} ~~Shema~~ Israel, that is enough for you. You are the servant of the Ozar."

My mother went along with my father just like the young wives did in pioneer times. It was a very hard journey. The soldiers, of course, went with their companies. The women going with their families as best they could, either by wagons, by ox carts, on rafts and on foot. It was a wearisome way and took a long time. At last when they reached their destination my mother's money was gone. The Army did not provide for wife and children. All a soldier got was two cents a day and three pounds of black bread. This tremendous change in the mode of my father's life sickened him and I do believe that these eight years shortened my father's life, for he died a young man.

What to do after they got to ^{CAUCASUS?} ~~Caucasus~~? Mother, like father, was a small town girl. What could she do? She did not know. So she said, "Now I guess I will starve." My father said, "No, you must not starve, rather you must become a business woman." What kind of business could she do? Well, she could cook best of all work, so she opened an eating place for the soldiers and officers. They liked her cooking and baking so well that in a short time my mother became well liked and well respected, so much so that when a man got too much liquor in him in some place, he would come to mother and leave his money with her until he sobered up, then she would give him back his money.

They lived in ^{the caucasus} ~~Caucasus~~ for eight years. There their first three children were born and there they died at childbirth, for there were no good doctors as we have here in America. ^{FOR} ~~But~~ at the birth of the third child they called in the Army doctor but it was too late. Mother suffered too much and too long and ^{THAT} ~~the~~ baby died at birth. He was a large baby. The doctor asked her what she ate and she told him just ordinary food. He said, "Well, you must not eat this, that or the other", in fact he put her on a diet as we do now in America. After my father's honorable discharge, they moved back to ^{VLADIMIR} ~~Gladimeir~~ and there my brother was born. When this boy baby came my parents were overjoyed. They took all precautions to keep him well. He was a handsome baby and, by the way, he grew up to be a handsome man. The very first thing they did was to hire a good nurse, or Nana, as she is called in Russia. She stayed with us a long time for she nursed my sister Rachel and me. She stayed until we left Russia. You see, Mother became a business woman so she hired a nurse to care for us, but she was a loving mother as well, so it was mother who looked after our health, our education and our religion for mother was a most devout woman, very religious and very observing of all religious rules. As I said, we children were born in ^{VLADIMIR} ~~Gladimeir~~ after my parents came back from the Caucasus. There we lived until I was five years old. We lived in a great court. ^{that} ~~This court~~ belonged to a Russian gentleman. We had three rooms there, one ~~would be~~ our living room, the other room was partitioned off from the other side of the living room and this was my parents' bedroom. We had another bedroom and I sort of remember a big oven built at the side of this bedroom that I suppose was our kitchen. The oven helped to keep our other rooms warm. The people who lived on the other side of the courtyard were all grown up so they made great pets of us, especially of my sister Rachel and me. I was the little one and they really loved us and they loved to tease us. They would offer us beautiful velvet dresses if we would let them convert us. We would cry, "No, no". Then

they would tell us to go home and wash our eyes because our eyes were black. My sister had beautiful black eyes so would come home and wash and wash her eyes until mother would convince her that they were only teasing her. Our neighbors were very fine people. There were two daughters and a son. The girls' names were Anna, just like mine, and the other was Sasha, The son's name was Ivan. I tell this because there is a funny story connected with these girls and myself. About the last year that we lived in Vladimir, we had quite an adventure. One day as we were in this big courtyard, (I wish I could describe this place as it was lovely, there were bushes of all kinds of fruit growing around and the lady used to come out with us and let us pick some of the berries which she then cooked in a great big kettle in the middle of this court. She made the best preserves. She would even let us lick the spoon.) As well as I can remember myself and by repetition of my mother and sister, I think I remember it all. But this story I do remember because we laughed so much about it and the girls wanted to kill me, as the saying is, because I told on them. One day we were out in the yard playing, my sister, myself, Anna and Sasha. Just then an old soldier came wandering into this yard, He saw us children so he came nearer and nearer. He asked us if we wanted to see a living Panorama, and we all said yes, so he placed us all in a circle in different positions. He promised us a kopek if we would sit as he wanted us. We were very glad to so as he wanted us to, so one he put on her knees, one he sat down with her hands up to her ears, one sat one way, one another until he had us all placed to his satisfaction. Then he said he would get the money for us out of his pockets. He walked to the end of the line, fumbled with his pockets, then turned his back to us, let down his trousers and showed us his bare hindie.

We all gave one scream and ran into the house. We were convulsed with laughter and fright. Unfortunately, Ivan was home, he ran out to see what was the matter but could see no one as the man ^{by them, had} disappeared. He asked his sisters, but they would not tell him. He asked my sister, she would not tell him. Then he took me over ~~on~~ his knee and said, "Now little one, you tell me all about what happened." I, being the little one, not knowing anything was wrong, I told him the whole story, how we were to see a living Panorama. Well, he started to laugh, he called his mother, he called the whole household and had me repeat the story. All the time he was holding me in his arms for he knew if he would let me go the girls would have given me a good shaking, if nothing worse. Well the living Panorama became a byword with us and their brother for many weeks. Every time it came to mind we had a great laugh.

As children we had a very pleasant life but as children we also gave our mother many moments of worry. One day we wandered over to a creek to where the women were washing their clothes. My sister being older and more venturesome took off her shoes and waded out into the water. I, seeing her, waded after her but being so much littler I went down like a brick. Fortunately the women saw me so they pulled me out by my hair. Mother might not have known about this but in the excitement my sister lost her shoes. One time I was nearly pecked to death by a flock of geese. I went out into the road and there I saw a lot of little goslings. I went to pick one up when the whole flock started after me. I fell in my fright and before I could get up, the whole flock of geese were picking at me. It was only the great noise of the geese and my screaming that brought mother to my rescue. Many, many incidents come to my mind, but I do not know if I remember these things or only know of them through my mother,

sister and brother talking these things over. But it was from this home where we were loved and respected by all our friends and neighbors that we had to leave to go to America. We suffered great hardships, great privations, illness and friendlessness for some years before we established ourselves in our house in Pittsburgh. My one regret is that I was not born in America, My Country. I have often said that I am almost without a native country, My father and mother and all our people were born and raised in Lithuania. My sister, brother and I were born in Russia. We came to America when I was still very little and young. I went to school here, I had my home here. Here I had my friends: here I loved my teachers, and here I loved my Mr. Dolan. What did I know of Russia? Only what I heard from my dear mother. Many of her stories were not so pleasant. Then the things I had heard of from other people and what I had learned from reading, I had no love for the country where I was born. But my America, my Pittsburgh, that is my home and my country and I love them both. God Bless America, my country.

I often tell my children and grandchildren that I am more American than they are, for I sing all the patriotic songs of long ago which they say is old-fashioned. I have always been and still am interested in everything that befalls my country. I have lived through two wars and am now living through this third terrible war. God grant that this will soon be over and the world will be at peace. Amen.