

# Alexander Paskov

*I, Alexander Moiseevich Paskov, was born in the city of Leningrad on May 31st, 1931. I am my parents' only child. Mama began working when I was four months old. I was taken care of by a nanny, a young village girl by the name of Sasha. When I grew older, I began attending kindergarten. During the summer, I was often sent to live with relatives in Starodub or Klintz. Sometimes Mama went with me, sometimes I went alone.*



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## My family background

My grandfather on my mother's side, Moisei Beniaminovich Levitin, was born in 1865 in the city of Pogar, in the Bryansk region. He finished Hebrew school and was an Orthodox Jew. His native tongue was Yiddish. He lived with his wife and children in the village of Starodub, formerly of the province of Chernigovski (now the Oryol region). He was a minor trader and handicraftsman. He made honey, wine, and artificial fish fat and other lubricants, which he then sold at a stall in his town's market. His wife, Sosya Shaevna, was a housewife. They had five children. Grandmother died young, in 1914, when my mother, the youngest in the family, was only eight. They had a one-story stone house with a high porch and a garden.

After Grandmother's death, Grandfather Moisei lived with his oldest son, who was a shop assistant. After the death of that son in 1920 he lived with other children. In 1921 the entire family began organizing the Jewish agricultural commune "Unity" on a farm in Starodub Uyezd. Grandfather worked there until 1924, until he lost his ability to work at the age of 60. After this he became dependant on his son Zinovi, the former chairman of Unity. Grandfather died at age 70 in 1935. I was visiting Starodub at that time. I was only four years old and therefore wasn't brought to the cemetery. I remember, however, that Grandfather was buried according to Jewish tradition. I watched everything from the high roof of the house.

My paternal grandfather, Yankel Girshevich Paskov, was born in 1864 in one of the small Jewish enclaves in Chernigovski Province. He was adopted and brought up by his foster father, Girsh Paskov. The last name given to him at birth was Reizen, but there is no information about his birth mother. People said that his foster father wasn't drafted into the army because he was the father of an only son-and that is why he adopted my grandfather. I don't know if this was true, or if there were other reasons. Grandfather finished Hebrew school and was a true believer, following Jewish tradition, going to synagogue. He was a member of the Jewish community. He circumcised his

sons, but wasn't Orthodox.

Grandfather Yankel was a carpenter by profession, but he also knew "turnery" making objects on a lathe. First he worked in the railroad workshops, then alone in his carpentry workshop. Sometimes he would take on an apprentice. He taught carpentry to his sons. In 1919 he was an instructor at the trade union school. He knew carpentry and turnery well, and had 30 years of practical experience. From 1920 to 1922 he worked on the construction site of a drying factory and power station.

His wife Sarah ran the household and raised the children. I was named Alexander after Grandmother Sarah. She was Orthodox. Their native language was Yiddish. They both died during the Holocaust, shot by Germans, along with their son Samuel's and their daughter Hannah's families, in the ghetto-camp in Belovshina.

Grandfather Yankel often corresponded with my father, writing cards in Yiddish. My father received the last two cards from my grandfather on the 3rd and 4th of August, 1941, in Leningrad. He got no further information about the fate of his parents and other relatives. When Starodub was liberated from German occupation, he learned of their deaths. Sixteen members of the Paskov-Levitin died in the Holocaust.

I would now like to describe how the city of Starodub used to be. That city has been documented as far back as the 11th century. As described in records from 1612, the soldiers of the second False Dimitri, known as the "Tushinski Thief," gathered there before heading for Moscow. In 1906, when both my parents were born there, it was a small town in Chernigovski Province.

Many Jews lived in Starodub; it had a synagogue. I visited several times when I was a child, in the summers between 1935 and 1941. In the center of the city was "Red Square," a large marketplace. People traveled by horse, so there were tethering posts around the square. On the edge of the square stood a small one-floor building, like a barn. My grandfather Yankel Paskov lived inside. In this building were two little rooms with very low ceilings. The entrance to his lodgings was through the carpentry workshop, in which his tools hung and his workbench stood. And at the end of a yard was a cart.

The closest railroad station was called Unecha. We traveled there by horse. In the city was a narrow gauge railroad, used to transport timber, and also railroad workshops.

During the war the city was occupied by Germans. All the Jews were destroyed by the beginning of 1942, although it was said that some were able to escape into the woods, even from the ghetto-camp. During the German retreat the city was greatly damaged: according to a witness, my father's math teacher Mikhail Kibalchich, 250 houses were burned, including those of my relatives. After the war the city was rebuilt, but today there is no railroad in Starodub. It is a "Chernobyl zone," forgotten by God and man. It will probably not become a destination for pilgrimages. Still, one hopes that the memory of the ancestors will be kept alive.

My father, Moisei (Moisei-Girsh) Yankelevich Paskov, was born on February 19th, 1906, during the pogroms. Father first studied at Hebrew school, then at a Jewish academy. From 1917 to 1924 he studied at the school of Soviet workers, in the former Starodub Gymnasium. He studied carpentry with his father and combined schoolwork with a summer job. He worked on the construction of an

electric station and a drying factory for the regional timber committee.

In 1924 he graduated from school. He and his twin brother, Mark, the youngest sons of the family, left for Leningrad. He worked as a carpenter in the Volkhovstroï, at Timber Processing Factory #3, on the Okhta River, and at the Aurora plywood factory. While working, he attended evening classes in the Polytechnical Department of the Builders' Academy.

He changed his job often because he had no specialized education. One year he was even unemployed. Not working was not possible for him, as his parents were poor and couldn't help him materially. By the end of his education, he was working as a junior technician on the construction of a paper plant, and as a draftsman at the Tekstilstroï, the Institute for the Growth of Textile Building.

In 1930, Father finished technical college and started to work as the head technician at Tekstilstroï, which, by then, had been merged with Gipromet (Black Metallurgy) and renamed Stalproekt. From that time until his retirement in 1966, my father worked at that institute. He took part in the creation of the most important centers for black metallurgy in the USSR: Magnitogorsk, Krivoi Rog, Mariupol.

My mother, Estra Moiseevna Levitina, was born on March 4th, 1906, as evidenced by her birth certificate, which was written by the Starodub Rabbi on March 31st, 1916. Mama herself told me that she was actually born at the end of 1905, but her official entry into the register of births was delayed by pogroms. She was the youngest daughter in a family with four other children, two sons and two daughters. Estra's mother died early in 1914 and she was raised by her older sisters, who really spoiled her.

Estra graduated from high school in Starodub in 1924 and left for Leningrad to continue her studies-the only one in the family to do so. Each summer she continued to work in the fields of the collective farm.

In 1927 she graduated from the Mordvinovski agricultural school, having specialized in agricultural techniques. She had dreamed of becoming an agronomist, working with crops, but in 1926 the school changed its specialty to animal husbandry. After graduating, Mama worked at various livestock farms as a laboratory assistant for milk and milk product analysis: in Peterhof, Pella, Starodub, and at the Leningrad milk testing station. This work didn't make her happy, but finding work as an agronomist with her zoo-technology degree was not possible in Leningrad.

In 1929 she began working as an assistant to the agronomist of the Kustov collective farms of the Starodub Regio. There, she also served the Jewish farm community. Then she left to work as the agronomist for the Kustobedini Collective Farm in the Serpuhovski Region. Here she endured the "Cleansing of the Soviet System" in December, 1929, and remained at her post without reprimand.

She really liked working as an agronomist, and the only reason for leaving her work was that she married my father and moved to Leningrad in 1930. There she worked in her former school as an instructor of field crop cultivation.

In 1930, my parents married. They had known each other for a long time, since studying together in Starodub. However, in my mother's words, during school, "Father didn't notice me." Then they

met in the Starodub Zemlyachestva in Leningrad and in Starodub. These meetings led to the formation of our family. In 1931 I was born.

After my birth, from 1931 to 1934, my mother worked close to our home. This work was only marginally concerned with farming: it was at the Selhozgiz, the state publisher of agricultural literature.

In 1934 she began work at the Leningrad Agricultural Institute as a laboratory assistant, first in the department of soil science, then in the department of horticulture on Kammen Island, 2nd Beryoz Alley, next to the Kinofabrika. She dealt with soil analysis and enjoyed her job. All the facts about my parents' activities before my birth, I took from their autobiography, which they wrote in 1938 and kept in the family archives.

## During the war

During the war our whole family was evacuated to Nizhni Tagil, where Gipromez had a branch. Mother worked for that branch and as a cashier at the building site. She was later awarded a medal for "Valiant Work during the Great Patriotic War 1941-1945." After returning to Leningrad in 1946, she worked as a laboratory assistant in the microbiology section of the well-known institute of experimental microbiology, VIEM (All-Union Institute of Experimental Biology), where vaccines against diphtheria and whooping cough were being developed. She left her work due to illness. She was talkative and curious even in her advanced years, and she passed away in 1983.

I obtained an understanding of Jewish traditions from my grandfather's house in the city of Starodub, but I was only a child then and remembered very little. After they moved from Starodub to Leningrad, my parents became completely assimilated. I grew up in a non-religious atmosphere. They knew Yiddish from childhood, but didn't follow Jewish traditions. Neither did the other young people, their friends from the Starodub Zemlyachestva in Leningrad. (A zemlyachestva is formed when people move to a new location from the same village; it's a little diaspora in one location. They meet, spend time together, celebrate holidays and study together.)

The Starodub Zemlyachestva in Leningrad was made up of active and friendly young people, almost all the same age and in the same classes. They had much in common and were very close to each other, especially in their youth, but also as they grew older, keeping in close contact with each other's lives and families. I spoke with members of the Starodub Zemlyachestva mostly at family holidays, and I know more about them from the stories my mother would tell and her photos. As a child I called all the members of the Zemlyachestva "Aunt" or "Uncle," or by their last name. Most of the women kept their maiden names and first name-patronymic, at home and at work.

Among the oldest Starodub Zemlyachestva compatriots was the famous writer, Grigori Reilkin, who later worked in Moscow. The composer Alexander Manevich, laureate of the Stalin prize, was a reason for pride among the compatriots. How great was their bitterness when, at the last minute, his opera was not premiered. Lev Mendeleev was one of the heads of a large construction trust. Before the war he built the Baburinski Zhilmassiv in Les. He also ran the student's practicum at LISI. His wife, Dasha (Judith Levovna Knopova), due to her literary bent, was a teacher, and became

the deputy head of pre-schooling for the city department of education. Her sister Zhenia was a journalist. Lev Aronskin was an officer in the Engineering Corps. He finished the war as a colonel, and until 1952 was the head of the military training department at LISI, where he trained reserve officers in pontoon bridge building. He also taught camouflage to the girls from the architecture department. Not long ago I met the bard, Stanislav Slutzker, captain second class, and it turns out that his father, Boris Slutzker, is also from Starodub. In the 1920's, the artist Yurski lived in Starodub, a fact which his equally famous son, the artist Sergei Yurski, recalled.

In the summer of 1941, when the war began, Mama and I were vacationing with relatives in Klintz. After a telegram from my father, we were evacuated to the Urals. We lived in Nizhni Tagil, where my parents worked and I went to school, until 1944. After our return to Leningrad from the evacuations, I studied at school #222, "Petershule".

When the war began, my father was supposed to be drafted into the army on July 5th, 1941. He was assigned to the home guard, but on June 11, 1941, by order of the director of Gipromez, he was sent on a lengthy business trip to Sverdlovsk in order to carry out important governmental directives. He was therefore taken out of active duty. At this time an armored rolling mill was transported from Kolpino, a village near Leningrad, to the Urals. My father's task was to set up this mill. He worked at a branch of Gipromeza and built blast furnaces in Nizhni Tagil.

In 1944 he returned to Leningrad and brought the mill to the Izhorski factory in Kolpino. He later took part in the creation of metallurgical factories in the USSR (Cherpovetz), in India (Bhilai), and in China (Anshan). In 1958 he graduated from LISI evening school and continued to work at Gidromez, but by this time as an engineer/designer. He was a very active person at work, both during his youth in Komsomol and when he was much older. He received many awards, including the Order of the Red Worker. Outside of work he was a quiet and modest person. He wasn't religious. He knew Yiddish from childhood and corresponded with his father in that language, but in Leningrad, Jewish traditions weren't observed. He passed away on September 6th, 1972, and was buried in the Cemetery for Victims of January 9th.

## **After the war**

From 1949 to 1954, I studied at the architectural faculty of the Leningrad Institute of Engineers and Builders. After graduating from institute, from 1955 to 1992 when I retired, I worked as an architect at Giprolestrans, the state institute of timber transport and forestry, working my way up from common engineer to leading expert. I took part in the design of a great number of projects in our country: Bratsk, Ust-Ilimsk, Petrozavodsk, Baikal- Amur Magistral; and abroad, in Laos, Vietnam, Mongolia and Cuba.

My father's twin brother Mark (Meer-Haim) Paskov graduated from the Leningrad Chemical Polytechnical School. Because this school had the status of an institute, Mark received his diploma as a specialist in engineering, metallurgy and casting. Until the summer of 1942, he worked as a technical engineer at the "Bolshevik" factory in Leningrad. In 1943-44 he was evacuated to Nizhni Tagil, where he worked in his field. After his return to Leningrad, he worked as an engineer and junior scientist at the NII-13 Scientific Research Institute. He died in 1961.

Mark's wife, Fanny Grigorievna Shapiro, was a doctor. Before the war they lived in the city of Pushkin, and after the war in Leningrad on the island of Vasiliev. Their twins, Alexander and Rosita (Rita), were born in 1937.

Alik (Alexander) graduated from the Gorni Institute and worked as a constructor of cranes in the factory of lift transport building, as well as for Baikanur.

Rita graduated from the Institute of Film Engineering and then worked as a engineer/chemist in the "Arsenal" factory. She was married in 1959 to Samuel Goldin. Her son Ilya graduated from Polytechnical Institute as an engineer/metallurgist, and her daughter Anna graduated from LISI as a sewer system engineer.

The fate of my father's older brother and sister was quite different. The oldest brother, Samuel, was a carpenter like his father, and worked at the Detkomissi workshop. The oldest sister, Hannah, married a salesman, Efim Blumkin, who became the head of a food store. The youngest sister, Haya, suffered from epilepsy and was unable to work.

When the war began, none of them evacuated. At the end of the war Father sent requests for information on their fate, both to official organizations, such as the Starodub city council, and to acquaintances, including my father's math teacher, Mikhail Kibalchich. From the answers to these questions it became clear that all our relatives had been killed. Kibalchich wrote the most in-depth explanation of their fates, in a letter dated November 25th, 1943. Samuel's daughter Mina was killed by a bomb on the third day after the Germans' arrival in Starodub. After 10 days, Samuel Yankelevich, his wife Rahil Davidovna, their son Dodik, and my father's parents-like all the Jews in Starodub-were sent to a ghetto camp set up in Belovshin on a former collective farm. Each Jew was allowed to take as many of their personal possessions as they could carry at one time, and the rest was confiscated. Three days after arrival, all the men were shot. The women and children were kept in the camp until Spring. They lived there in cramped quarters, in the cold, and with little food. In March, 1942, the Germans shot everyone who was left.

The Starodub city council sent a letter dated December 10th, 1943 that confirmed this information, and added that this horror also touched the Levant family, my mother's sister, and the Blumkins. Hannah, her husband Efim, and their son Alexander also died.

Hannah's two other children, Igor (Isaac) and Fanna, had been studying in Moscow before the war, and survived. Igor, after graduating from a military academy, enlisted in the Baltic Navy and then became the director of the cafeteria at the Institute of Physical Culture in Moscow. Fanna (whose married name was Shaikevich), moved with her son Alexander's family to Israel.

My father and Uncle Mark were very close to their cousin Adolf (Alter) Velkanski. He was their age, having also been born in 1906 in Starodub, and they left for Leningrad to study together. He graduated from the Leningrad Institute of Water Transport and became an engineer and builder. Before the war he worked on the construction site of the large Ferganski Canal and the military port in Tallin.

During the blockade, he was a colonel engineer on the Leningrad front. He was injured. After hospitalization, he finished the advanced military political academy in Central Asia in four months, and went back to the front as a zampolit (second in command) in an artillery division. However, in



his first battle after joining our soldiers near Smolensk, he was badly injured in the stomach by shrapnel from a mine. He lost consciousness and lay in the crater. After the battle was over he was retrieved and sent to the military field hospital, and from there by plane to Moscow, where he was checked in to the Burdenko Hospital and his life was saved. He remained an invalid and was demobilized.

After that he worked first as the head engineer at the Zhilishni Trust on the Petrograd side of Leningrad, and then as a designer at Giprospeztgaz, the institute of projects for the gas industry. He was a very active and energetic person, an activist in the Komsomol and the chairman of the Profkom at Giprospeztgaz for 15 years. Because of his shortened participation in it, he didn't like to talk about the war.

Mark and Adolf married the Shapiro sisters, Fanny and Marie, from Zaporozhia, at the beginning of the 1930s. Their father was a minor craftsman and died in Leningrad. Adolf and Marie's children are Irma (whose married name is Kozub), born in 1932, and Asya, born in 1948. Both now live in Petersburg.

Mother's older brother was a salesman who died young, in 1920. Her second brother, Zinovi (Zalman), born in 1900, was one of the bosses of the agricultural movement and one of the organizers of the Jewish agricultural commune "Unity" in the Spring of 1921. At one time he was Unity's chairman. The commune was located on a farm on the Belovshina Starodub administrative unit. In 1934, when the commune moved to the Crimea, the Levitin family stayed in Starodub. Zinovi worked as an accountant for MTS, the machine and tractor station. During the war he served in the Rokossovski Army as a senior lieutenant and was awarded the Red Star and a medal for heroism. After the war he worked in the finance department of the Regional Agricultural Administration in the city of Oryol. He died there in 1981. He had no children.

Mother's oldest sister, Sonia, was married to Avraam Levant, a farmer. I remember him as bearded, in boots, and with a whip. When the commune moved, Sonya and her husband transferred to another agricultural community. Their children, Lyonya and Raia, were schoolchildren older than me when the war began. The entire family stayed in Starodub and were killed in the ghetto- camp that the farm was turned into.

My mother's other sister, Liza (whose married name was Shifrina), was a salesman's wife. They lived in Klintsi, where they perished during the war, along with their daughter Raeya, who was my age.

My mother's cousin Zinovi Lokshin was a violinist and an accountant who spent the war as an officer. After the war he lived in Leningrad and worked as the head accountant for the October 25th Hospital. His son and daughter both have higher education. His son is studying technical science and his daughter is a philologist. We often speak with this family.

## **Marriage life and children**

I met my wife, Galina Zotova, at work; we worked at the same institute. We were married in 1959, and our daughter, Anna, was born on June 8th, 1960. My wife then quit her job and both brought up our daughter and took care of the household. My wife is ethnically Russian. She was born in

Leningrad on October 9th, 1930. Her parents were from Arkhangelsk. Her father, Dimitri Moiseevich Zotov, was a salesman. Galina graduated from secondary school in Volhova, where her family lived at that time. She began to work at the Leningrad Institute Giprolestrans in 1953, and in 1958 she graduated from the Leningrad branch of the All-Union Correspondence Builders' Institute as a hydrolic engineer. She majored in water supply and sewer systems, and worked at this until our daughter was born.

My daughter Anna obtained her diploma in power engineering at the Leningrad Shipbuilders' Institute. Today she works as a programmer. Her son, Yegor Paskov, was born in 1987 and attends secondary school. Anna and Yegor live with us.