

Marceli Lewin With His Family



This is a picture of my grandparents, Marceli Lewin and Sara Lewin, nee Biderman and their children, Eliasz, Elzbieta and Balbina. It's a studio portrait, it was taken in Warsaw in the 1900s.

My maternal grandfather was a Litvak. His name was Marceli Lewin. He was born in 1859 in Belarus, in a place called Wysokie Litewskie - I found it on the map when my cousin in America was doing our family tree. Wysokie Litewskie is on the other side of the border now. I don't think my grandfather had an education. Neither did my grandmother. I think my grandfather was the first of his brothers and sisters to come to Warsaw, and he and his wife opened a Laundromat. Initially they ran the Laundromat themselves. Because my grandfather did well - he was evidently a confident and capable man - he had his brothers come to Warsaw from Lithuania.

My maternal grandmother's name was Sara. At first I think she worked in the Laundromat. Later, she just kept the house. Their children were born in Warsaw. I know that my mother certainly was. The eldest was Eliasz, followed by my mother - Balbina - and then finally her younger sister Elzbieta. My grandparents had lots of children, but many of them died because of misfortunes, or something bad. My grandmother had miscarriages; she had problems.

My mother's eldest brother, Eliasz, as you can see in the photograph, was much older than his sisters. I think he was born in Warsaw. I don't know whether he went to a secular school, as he was too old to know. He wasn't young when I met him. On the family photograph you can see the

difference between the siblings; it must be well over ten years. I don't know exactly what year he was born in. He worked in his own family firm: it was a laundry and underwear factory.

Next was my mother, Balbina. My mother was born in 1898. Her unique name was the product of somebody's imagination. My mother was always a little ashamed of her name. She blamed her father for that. She asked why he'd given her such a silly name. He joked: 'Well, I asked you but you didn't say it was a bad name.' My mother's younger sister was called Elzbieta. She was born in 1900 or 1901.

My grandparents were traditional. My mother said that even though her parents were traditional, her father ate ham, but never at home. At home I don't think they kept kosher, but nevertheless it wouldn't have been acceptable to eat ham. On the photograph you can see that my grandparents aren't wearing traditional costume, but entirely secular clothes. My grandfather didn't belong to any organization. I don't think he had any political sympathies. In any case nothing has stuck in my mind, or survived in the family history.