

# Alla Yasnogorodskaya

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City: **St. Petersburg**

Country: **Russia**

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- **My family background**

My great-grandfather on my mother's side, Nohum Yasnogorodsky, was born in the settlement of Yasnogorodsk, Belaya Tserkov, near Kiev. The name Yasnogorodsky comes from the name of this settlement. Nohum lived in Kiev. He received no education except cheder, but he became famous for his songs, for which he wrote both the words and the music.

The most famous of them (Sleep my child) immediately became a popular folk song. Nohum was also very famous in Kiev as a journalist.

He focused on Jewish topics in his articles and songs, recounting the lives of the Jewish community. Nohum Yasnogorodky's musical compositions are archived in the public libraries in Kiev and St. Petersburg. He perished during a pogrom in Kiev in either 1906 or 1914 (the exact date is unknown).

Nohum had a sister, but no one remembers her name. She was married to Haim Bernshtein, a Rabbi and a Cantor. They had two sons: Meer and Avreml. Avreml died of consumption at the age of thirty. The fate of the second son, Meer, played out in a more interesting fashion. Meer Bernshtein was born in July 1858 in the city of Belaya Tserkov, Kiev province, to a poor rabbi's family. His father's knowledge of the Talmud and singing fed them poorly, and the family, with little Meer, traveled around Ukraine in search of work. They traveled within the Pale of Settlement: to the Jewish settlements of Rakitnoe, Medvedevka, Voronka, etc...

It was in Voronka that Meer, still a child, became friends with Sholom Rabinovich, who later became a famous writer [known as Sholom Aleichem]. They loved to act out comedies. Meer composed scenes from "The Sale of Joseph", "The Flight from Egypt", and other episodes from Jewish history. He knew the events in Jewish history. He also knew many Jewish songs, which he sang constantly. His friendship with Sholom Aleichem lasted his entire life. The writer even dedicated a chapter of his book "From the Market" to Meer: "Meer from Medvedevka."

Meer lived in the provinces until the age of 17 and then moved to Kiev. He wanted to study [singing] and he had a wonderful voice and tone. His father, however, still had no money. His uncle, Nohum Yasnogorodsky came to his aid.

Thanks to his connections in Kiev, Nohum got his nephew into the Kiev Musical School.

In 1878 an event occurred that sharply changed Meer Bernshtein's life. Nikolai Grigorievich Rubenshtein, at that time the director of a conservatory, came to Kiev to recruit students. Meer's musical gift impressed Rubenshtein so much that he took the boy to study in Moscow.

In order to begin his career as a singer, Meer Bernshtein (like many Jews at that time) had to change his name. He chose the pseudonym Mikhail Medvedev, after the settlement of Medvedevka where he spent his childhood.

Meer's native languages were Yiddish and Ukrainian, therefore at first he sang in Russian with an accent.

Mikhail Medvedev's fame began when he played the part of Lenskii in the opera "Evgenii Onegin," by Peter Tschaikovsky. The premiere was held in March of 1879 on the stage of the Malay Theatre in Moscow. It was one of the composer's first works. Mikhail Medvedev continued studying at the conservatory while working at the theater.

After graduation in 1881, he returned to his beloved Kiev where he quickly became an idol. At that time he was second in popularity to Chaliapin. Medvedev sang in Moscow at the Bolshoi Theatre, at the Marinsky in St. Petersburg, in Kharkov, in the Caucasus, and all along the Volga River. His repertoire of roles was great: Othello, Don Juan, Faust... He won his greatest success and worldwide fame, however, in the role of German in "The Queen of Spades."

At a performance in Kiev, Tschaikovsky came out for a curtain call with Medvedev. He presented Medvedev with a score of the opera and a gold watch with the inscription "The best German."

In 1898, Medvedev left for America, where he received an enthusiastic welcome. He performed in New York, Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago, as well as in Quebec and Montreal.

After returning to Russia he devoted himself to teaching. Beginning in 1901, he was a professor of musical courses at the Moscow Philharmonic Community. After a few years he returned to Kiev where he worked as an educator at the operatic theater. There he taught a cycle of lessons called the "Kiev operatic higher musical and dramatic courses of Professor M.E. Medvedev."

In 1912 he was invited to take up the post of professor of voice at the Saratov Conservatory. It was the first conservatory in the provinces. Among his students was Lydiya Ruslanova, who was to become a famous singer. Medvedev lived in Saratov until the end of his life.

On August 1, 1925, after a concert, he died of a heart attack.

My grandfather, Nohum Yasnogorodsky's son Mordukh, was born in 1862 in Yasnogorodsk. Then he moved to Kiev. Like his father and his cousin Meer, Mordukh was musical and sang well. Thanks to Mikhail Medvedev's invitation to work in Saratov, the entire Yasnogorodsky family also moved to Saratov.

By that time Mordukh had already married Nehama Dovgalevskaya. Mordukh took part in performances and occasionally sang in the choir of the Saratov Operatic Theatre. He also worked there as an accountant. He died at the age of 80 in 1942 in the city of Yalutrovsk (Siberia) where he had been evacuated during the blockade of Leningrad, at the age of 80. Unfortunately, I do not know any details of his life because he died when I was a very small girl.

My grandmother, Mordukh Yasnogorodsky's wife, was Nehama Dovgalevskaya. She was born near Kiev, where she also was married. She was a housewife her entire life, devoting herself to the children. Mordukh was her second husband.

She had married for the first time when very young, but her first husband died of tuberculosis when Nehama was only 18.

At that time she already had a little daughter. The child was taken in to be raised by her first husband's parents but died quite young. Nehama's father, my great-grandfather, Benticion Dovgalevsky was the lessee of a mill near Kiev.

Nehama's cousin was a very famous person: the revolutionary Valeriyán Dovgalevsky. He was born in 1885 in Kiev. He then left to study in France where he graduated from the Toulouse Institute with a degree in engineering and electronics. Beginning in 1904 he took an active part in the revolutionary movement. In 1906 he was arrested and sentenced to life behind bars, but he managed to flee over the border. From 1908-1917 he was a member of the Bolshevik party in Belgium, Switzerland and France. In 1917 he returned to Russia. He took part in the October Revolution of 1917.

In 1919 he worked in the Narkom of communications and transport. In 1920 he was the inspector of communications in Kiev. From May of 1921 he was a member of the Narkom for post offices and telegraph of the RSFSR and then the USSR. From 1924 to 1926 he was the representative of the USSR in Sweden, in 1927 in Japan and from 1928 to 1934 in France.

In London in 1932 he signed the agreement to begin diplomatic relations between England and the USSR. In 1932, in Paris, he signed the Franco-Soviet non-aggression pact.

Valeriyán Dovgalevsky was a prominent government official and diplomat. He died in 1934 and was buried at the Kremlin wall in Moscow.

Nehama and Mordukh had three children: two sons and a daughter. The younger son (his name is unknown) was a very talented boy whose hobby was music, but he came down with scarlet fever and died at the age of 10. The elder son, Haim (Efim), my uncle, was born in Saratov. Then, in 1925, the family returned to Kiev.

In the 1930s Haim moved to Leningrad. Haim was an organizer by character. In the Institute of Civil Officers in Leningrad he organized a club that met with interesting people: writers and composers.

It is known that Babel enjoyed attending this club. In the second half of the 1930's, Haim Mordukhovich (Efim Matveevich) Yasnogorodsky worked at the Executive Committee of Lenplan.

#### • **During and after the war**

In 1941 World War II began and Haim was at the front. His headquarters was located in Beloostrov (Leningrad Region). After the fall of the Leningrad blockade, Haim was demobilized for the reconstruction of the city.

After the war he once again worked at the Executive Committee. He was married, had two children, and died in 1994.

My mother, Broha Mordukhovna (Berta Matveevna) Yasnogorodskaya, daughter of Nehama and Mordukh, was born in 1908 in Saratov, where she finished the 9-year school and studied at the conservatory. Their relative, the opera singer Mikhail Medvedev, oversaw Haim and Broha's musical education. In 1925, after Medvedev died, the entire Yasnogorodsky family moved to Kiev. From 1925 to 1929 Broha studied at the Kiev conservatory. In 1928 Broha met Lazar Futoryan in Kiev, and they were married. Unfortunately, I do not know how they met.

My grandfather on my father's side, Alexander (Sender) Israilovich Futoryan, was born in 1884. Until 1917 he was a traveling salesman and after the Revolution he became a bookbinder. It is known that he bound books for the Vitebsky train station in Leningrad. He took part in military action during World War I. He lived in Moscow. He was married and had four children. Simha, Lazar, Elizaveta and Dora. His wife was Rozaliya, my grandmother, after whom I was named, but I don't know anything about her. My grandfather always had warm feelings towards his daughter-in-law, my mother Broha, even after she and my father were divorced. And Mama, when in Moscow, often stayed at Grandfather Alexander Israilovich's. He died in 1970.

My father, Lazar Senderovich Futoryan, was born in 1906 in Kiev. He was a chemist, a graduate of the State Institute of Applied Chemistry in Leningrad. In Kiev he met my mother, and they were soon married. My father took part in three military campaigns: he was in the campaign to divide Poland and Hungary [the Soviet invasion of Poland], in the Finnish War, and in World War II, where he advanced from Stalingrad to Berlin. Before the war he worked in a vanilla production workshop. After the end of World War II Lazar and my mother divorced and Father left for Moscow, where he worked in a chemical enterprise. He retired at the age of 48.

Father had two sisters and a brother. My uncle Simha was a colonel and builder of railroads. There is very little known about aunts Elizaveta and Dora. Dora married and had two children. Father died in 1996 in Moscow.

In 1929 Broha and Lazar moved to Leningrad. There Broha taught at a musical school. I, Rozaliya-Polya (Alla) Yasnogorodskaya-Futoryan, was born in 1932 in Kiev. In the last months of her pregnancy my mother traveled to Kiev where she gave birth to me, then after a month she returned to Leningrad. Mama always dreamed of becoming a musician, but this was hindered by her birth defect: she was born with a dislocated hip.

She was very embarrassed by this handicap. She had to undergo several difficult operations that brought her nothing but pain – the problem lasted her entire life. At the age of 30, Mama decided to sharply change her fate. After trying out several professions, she chose literature and entered the non-matriculated department of the Pokrovsky State Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad. She graduated with excellent grades after just two years (1938-1940). As an exception to the rule, she was to be allowed to do graduate work, but the war interrupted her studies.

During the war my father was at the front. In the mid-1930s my grandmother and grandfather Nehama and Mordukh had moved in with my parents in Leningrad. Therefore the entire family, mother and I, grandmother and grandfather, were evacuated from blockaded Leningrad to Siberia. This was in 1941. We left by train. Bombs destroyed the train before ours, and our was hit

as well, but thankfully we were not killed. After them, no one else left the city.

Mama taught literature and singing in the small Siberian town of Yalutogovsk. She also organized a school of amateur talent. Under her leadership the entire school studied singing and dancing and put on concerts: this was not just amateur talent. Along with the school director, she got the idea to collect money for the construction of an airplane [to help the war effort]. Their enthusiasm ignited the whole school.

Those who could brought money or toys and books for a lottery that was drawn during concert intermissions. The first spectators were the wounded at the hospital, then there were paying concerts at the Yalutorovsk Theatre.

The end result was that Mama was able to collect 100,000 rubles for which she received a telegram of thanks from Stalin. This money was sufficient to built a plane.

In May of 1944 we returned to Leningrad. New people occupied our apartment and we, for some time, lived with Uncle Efim Matveevich (Haim Mordukhovich). Once again a new life began for Mama – study for graduate work (1945-1948) and at the same time, work as a teacher of foreign literature at the military-political school.

After the war, my parents separated. My mother explained that she had ceased to love my father. He moved to Moscow, but for the rest of their lives they kept up very warm and friendly relations. Neither Mother nor Father had a new family.

In 1950 Mama defended her dissertation on the works of Schiller. After that she stayed on to work as a teacher of foreign literature at the same institute.

In 1952 mother once again lived through a painful operation on her hip, the result of which was that she couldn't get out of bed for two years. When she was finally able to return to work, she discovered that her place was already filled. She was invited to work at the Pedagogical Institute in Tobol (where she had worked during the evacuation) in 1954-55.

However, the difficult climate forced her to leave her work and move to the Pedagogical Institute in Cheboksary (beginning in 1956). There she organized lectures, which attracted interesting people. Mother always leaned towards educational work, just like her bother Haim and like their grandfather's cousin, the singer Mikhail Medvedev. Mama died in 1988.

I graduated from school in 1950. I tried to enter university, but Jews weren't admitted. This was the way anti-Semitism worked. I worked at the Public library. In 1954 I graduated from the philological department (French and German languages) of Pokrovsky State Pedagogical Institute in Leningrad.

From 1954 to 1955 I taught Russian and German at the Pedagogical Institute in Tobol, along with my mother. In 1956 (with the help of my Uncle Matveevich who, at the time, worked at the Executive Committee) I was hired as a translator and researcher on architecture in the department of information of the Leningrad enterprise "Lenproekt," where I remained for the rest of my career.

At the same time I worked as a part-time guide for "Intourist." I was greatly interested in the French language and in 1988, at the invitation of some French friends,

I was able to visit France. I was in Paris, Burgandy and Normandy. Near the small town of Bayonne I visited an ancient Jewish cemetery from the 18th century.

Because of my trip to France, I had to leave my job. I was basically fired.

I taught foreign languages at the Leningrad Mining Institute (June 1969-August 1969) and the Togliatti Engineering-Economics Institute in Leningrad (1970-71). I have been a pensioner since 1989. I was never married and have no children. I live in St. Petersburg.