

The Buslovich Family

by Joseph Buslovich

Great-grandparents: Shaja and Raisa

My great-grandfather was Shaja Buslovich. He was born in Nikolaev around 1850. I do not know exactly what year he was born, but I can estimate the date because my father told me that once he was studying in Heder and his grandfather Shaja came into classroom without being noticed and dropped a silver coin on his study book. I guess my dad was at the time about 6 or 7 years old. So this happened in 1916 or 1917.

Shaja was a shoemaker. When he was young, he won gold rubles in a lottery in Nikolaev, which enabled him to move to Byerazino. With the money, he could afford to marry and to build a house (it had an orchard, with wonderful pear trees). He worked as a shoemaker in Byerazino, and his son, my grandfather, was a shoemaker too.



Shaya Buslovich at the grave of his wife Raisa in the Jewish Cemetery, Byerazino

Shaja's wife (my great-grandmother) was named **Raisa**.

This first marriage produced two children: a girl named Alta a boy named Zalman. Raisa died and Shaja remarried. His second wife also passed away and he married for a third time. I do not know names of his other two wives. This photo of Shaja shows him at Raisa's grave. I guess he passed away in Berezhino around 1936. The Jewish cemetery was destroyed around 1970, so their gravestones and many others were lost.

Shaja and Raisa's children: Alta and Zalman

Shaja and Raisa's oldest child was a daughter named **Alta Chernye**. She was born about 1870 in Byerazino. Alta married Shmuel Perres and they had five daughters, including **Dora Perres**. Dora's grandson, **Howard Blue**, has written a separate story about Alta and her family, which is also part of this KehilaLink. Howard and I went to

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Byerazino/>

Byerazino together a couple of years ago - see the end of this story for some photos we took.

My grandfather, Zalman Buslovich

Shaya and Raisa's second child was a son named **Zalman Buslovich** - my grandfather. Zalman was born in Byerazino around 1884. When he was 17, the family found a girl for him. Her name was Ester Gorlin, and she came from the shtetl Chervyn (Igumen), which was very close to Byerazino. She was only 13. The way Zalman told it, when he opened her veil, he fell in love. Zalman and Ester had ten children, including **Haim Hirsch Buslovich** (my father). The first five died in early childhood. Of the next five, two died in WWII. The three children who survived were **Hirsch, Dora and Alter**.

Zalman was a very successful tailor. Hirsch remembered his parents as proper and proud people, looking very dignified on the Shabbat in their nice fur coats. They built their own home, diagonally across the street from Shaja's house. It was a typical, one storey house made of wood, with three windows on the front, an outhouse, a vegetable garden and a shed for the cow. When my cousin Howard and I visited Byerazino in 2010, we found the house was still there. In the photo below, it is the brown house, second from the right.



My grandfather Zalman was proud of the fact that he made tuxedos for Count Potocki. The count was a member of the Polish nobility. He owned all the land and forests around Byerazino and had a manor house in the town that he visited from time to time. Since Count Potocki could have bought his evening clothes in Paris or in Warsaw, where he had a large palace, it was quite a compliment that he chose to have them made in Byerazino by Zalman Buslovich. Ester Buslovich (my grandmother) also worked for the Potocki family. Count Potocki and his wife were good to the many Jewish families who lived in the shtetl. On every Jewish holiday, the Potockis gave presents to my grandparents.



Potocki mansion, 2010

As a boy, my father Hirsch used to play near the iron gates of the Potocki mansion. He developed a bit of a crush after seeing the Countess through the garden gate. He later told me "I never saw such a beautiful woman in my life." I said, "Dad, you were only 12 years old - what could you know? " But my father insisted, "She was absolutely stunning!"

My father, Haim Hirsh Buslovich

My father married Manya/Malka **Gelfand** in Leningrad in 1937. She originally came from Mogilev, Belarus, where she was born in 1912. I - their first child - was born in Leningrad in 1938. When I was three years old, Russia entered World War II. In June 1941, my father was drafted into the Red Army as a Junior Lieutenant (he had been in the Reserves). He served in the Tank Corps. My mother Manya, my brothers and sisters and I, were evacuated to the Ural Mountains, where we stayed until the war ended. After the war, we went back to Leningrad to live. My parents, my sister, my wife and I moved to Minnesota in the 1970s. My father Hirsch died in Plymouth, Minnesota in 1981. My mother passed away in 2011.

My father used to talk a lot about Byerazino, and I remember his stories very well. The town, located on a main route between Minsk and Mogilev, was in the path of every army from Napoleonic times onward. Hirsch was eight years old in the summer of 1918 when German troops occupied the town, and he described it this way:

We heard a tramping noise, a band playing, and then we saw a column of soldiers in grey helmets. They had buckles on their belts that said "Gott ist mit uns" (God is with us). This was very strange. Then an NCO officer came to our house, and said that we would



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have to billet three soldiers. Among them was one Silesian Jewish guy. The soldiers didn't come in the house right away and this surprised us. Instead, they brought a big, tall vessel full of hot water, put it outside, stripped themselves naked and washed themselves! This was a big shock - totally against all Jewish practices to see them naked in public! But the atmosphere was friendly. On Friday, the whole population of Byerazino was invited to the town's main square. A wire was strung up, and some German soldiers (they must have been circus people) walked the wire and did tricks.

The Germans occupied the town until November 1918. Hirsch remembered that suddenly the soldiers were wearing red pieces of cloth and saying "Kaiser Kaputt! Kaiser Kaputt!". Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated his throne on 9 November, and Germany surrendered two days later, so the troops quickly disappeared from Byerazino.

There was a short period of calm, but then the Russian Civil Wars hit Byerazino. From 1918 to 1921, battles erupted between the Bolshevik Reds and their White opponents while the former Russian empire disintegrated. Fighting occurred on both sides of the Berezina River. Masses of Red soldiers were moving west, carrying portraits of Trotsky bearing the slogan "Doyoz Warshaw' (Give me Warsaw). White battalions, including Polish troops, were pushing against them. The soldiers swept back and forth through the town and nearby villages, pillaging, looting and burning as they went. As Hirsch remembered it, there were few native Russians in the Red Army. Instead, he saw Chinese infantry and Hungarian Hussars. At one point, a Chinese soldier was standing on guard, tasked with holding Byerazino's bridge against oncoming Polish troops, and Hirsch felt sorry for him. The townspeople, who were fleeing to the countryside, told the Chinese soldier to leave but he stayed put, saying "Soviets put me here - Soviets will tell me when to leave this post."

In 1919 and 1920, the Soviet-Polish war was also going on, and the Berezina River was a war front. The occupiers were brutal and angry, and the Polish troops, especially, were violently anti-Semitic. The Poles declared Martial Law and enforced a rigid curfew in Byerazino. This had terrible consequences for my family. My uncle **Alter**, who was about 17 at the time, was caught by Polish soldiers one night when he came home after curfew, having been out late, courting a girl. The soldiers hung Alter up by driving bayonets through both his shoulders and began torturing him. His cries woke my grandfather Zalman, who ran to the Potocki manor to beg the Count to intervene. Count Potocki convinced the soldiers to let the boy go, saving his life. My uncle Alter had survived, but due to the terrible wounds he suffered that night, he was never able to properly move his head again.

My aunt **Dora** married a man named Peisha and they lived in Byerazino. Their three children were quite young when Peisha was sent with the Red Army to fight on the

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front lines. In 1941, when my grandfather Zalman heard that the German Army was approaching Minsk, he started running towards Byerazino to help Dora. But he was killed, trying to get to her. Dora grabbed the three kids and started running, but in all the confusion, she got separated from her children. She managed to reach the city of Karaganda in Kazakhstan, and there she was reunited with two of them who had been brought to a children's' home: Aaron (5 years old) and his sister Fira (8 years old). But the youngest girl, just a toddler, was lost.

After the War was over, Dora and her husband came back to Byerazino to find that strangers had taken over the family home! Peisha, Dora's husband, was an army veteran, so he went to the authorities to complain, wearing his uniform with many medals on his chest. The authorities helped him evict the strangers. Dora and Peisha lived in that house until 1953. Dora passed away recently in Minsk.

Around 1938, contact was lost between the branch of our family that remained in Russia and the branch that went to New York. But a few years ago, my cousin **Howard Blue** and I found each other. We met for the first time, thanks to the Internet. A special, unusual family photo triggered the discovery. It showed an old man with a long white beard, standing with his hand on a tombstone. Because the wind was strong on the day the photo was taken, the old man's beard was blowing sideways. I had always been told, "If you ever see this photo, you'll know the person who has it is a member of your family, because the man with the beard that's blowing in the wind is your great-grandfather". It turned out that both Howard and I had the same picture. Zalman and Raisa were his great-grandparents, too.

In 2010, Howard and I went to Byerazino together to look for traces of the family. Although our great-grandparents' house no longer existed, its foundations were still there! But somebody had built a new house on the old foundations (see photo, right).



Site of Shaya and Raisa Buslovich's home, 2010; somebody built this new house on top of the old foundations.