

The Story of Esther Bogaridov

**A
Woman
from
the Borderlands**

Joseph Graham

**The Story
of
Esther Bogaridov**

For
Addison Rachel Miranda Graham
on the occasion of your
eleventh birthday.

Prepared by Grandpa Joe
in consultation with your
great-granduncle
Jack (Jacob) Wolofsky
and with
Philip Resnick

July 2022

Dear Addison,

Given your love of horses and your strong, confident nature, we thought to choose this story to help you understand this aspect of your heritage.

When we first chose this subject, there was no war in Ukraine, but the connection to the horses, of course, was always there. Today, the family has no direct connection with this part of our shared past beyond Uncle Jack's and his daughter Sandy's explorations and visits for the purpose of learning.

A good part of your heritage is on both sides of the Black Sea, but with the Yaroslavsky's business in Bolshoi Takmak having to do with horses and Esther's plans to join her family in Winnipeg, where they were also involved with horses, we thought the north side of the Black Sea to be the place to look further back through time.

Our best wishes for your 11th birthday and for you to nurture your passions.

Love,
Grandma and Grandpa

The Pontic Steppe

Esther Bogaridov and Moses Yaroslavsky, Grandma Sheila's great-grandparents, came from Bolshoi Takmak, north of the Sea of Azov and near Donetsk, in Ukraine.

What we call Ukraine today describes a country that is among the largest in Europe. Its population is slightly greater than Canada's, but it could fit snugly into Manitoba — England could fit into Ukraine four times. Once, it was called The Ukraine, and it came from the term Borderland. This was a meaningful name because it is a rich country with mountains, plains and the Black Sea, coveted by all and bordered by many. There have been wars there, off and on, for centuries.



The many provinces of modern Ukraine. The current war with Russia is taking place mostly in the east.

A large part of Ukraine is situated on what is called the Pontic Steppe, a part of the central steppes, plains that stretch well into Asia and are the home of the horse, the area where the horse was first domesticated, or where it joined human society.* People on horseback rode into world history many times out of these steppes, and the warriors who rode on the horses were both women and men.



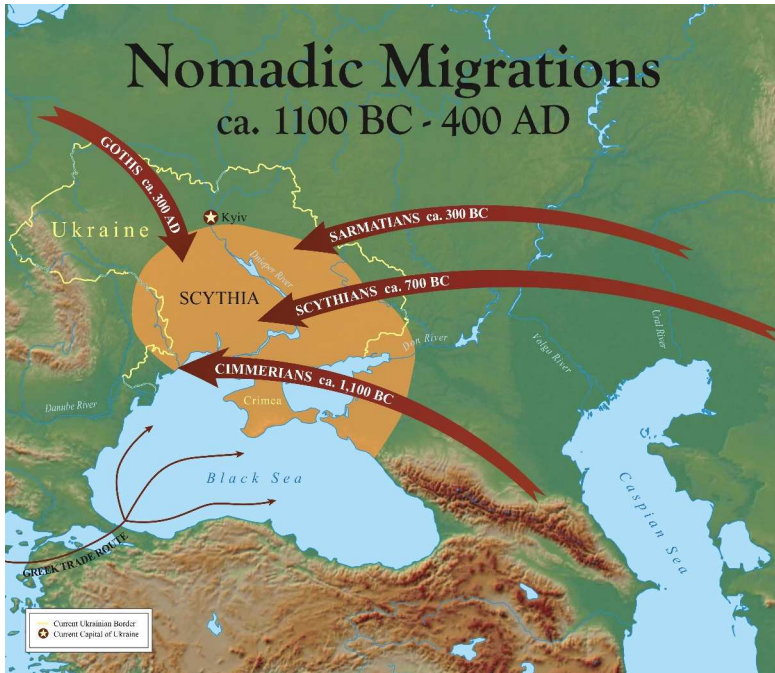
The Pontic Steppe is a part of the steppes, or flatlands, that continue east, through Mongolia. This is the land of the horse.

** A genetic study of horses across Eastern Europe and Central Asia has traced the domestication of horses to wide-open grasslands shared by Ukraine, southwest Russia and Kazakhstan.*

Researchers generally date the domestication of horses to about 6,000 years ago. The new study suggests the possibility that horses were tamed independently in several different places.

Dr. Vera Warmuth from the Department of Zoology at Cambridge said she and her colleagues had used a combination of genetics and math to narrow down the origin of horse domestication to the "western Eurasian steppe."

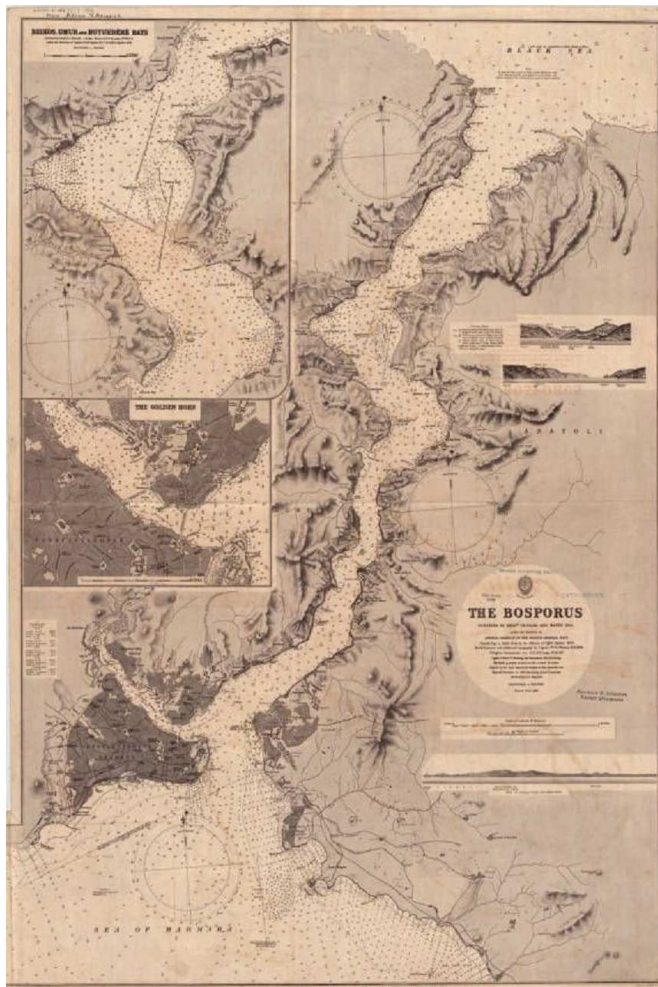
The Ukraine, this borderland, was a rich prize, not just because of its plains, but also because of the Black Sea and its connection through the Bosphorus with the Mediterranean Sea.



The dates of arrival on this plan do not match other sources, but all of these people came on horseback.

The Black Sea is also a good source of fish, but the sea itself has one peculiarity. Two large European rivers flow into it, bringing fresh water and agricultural pollution. That pollution feeds a deeper problem. If you go more than 150 metres down, you reach a sub-sea that is dead. For two kilometres of further depth, it has no oxygen because of a strange flow of salt water that comes into the sea under the lighter, outflowing fresh water. These currents travel both up and down the Bosphorus Strait that joins the Mediterranean and Black Seas. That lower water has no source of oxygen, and worse, the bacteria that can

survive in it turns the pollution into hydrogen sulfide. Therefore there is a two kilometre deep sub-sea that is toxic. This process of salt water travelling up to the sea through the strait is not new. It has been ongoing for thousands of years. It did not take away from the wealth and attractiveness of the surface.

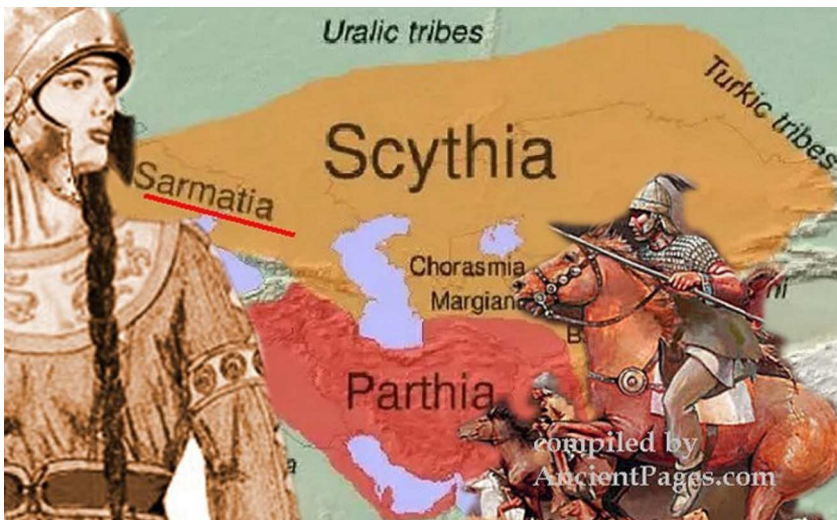


A 19th century map showing the Bosphorus between the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea.

Scythians and Sarmatians

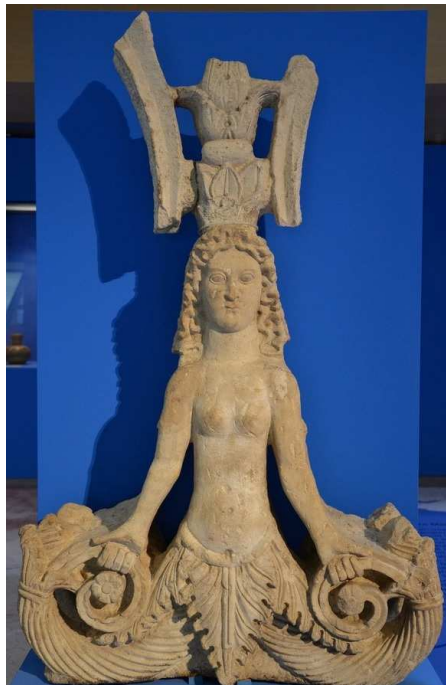
The Scythians arrived north of the Black Sea around 850 BCE. They were excellent horse-borne warriors who could not be defeated. They did not use a saddle or stirrups, but simply a blanket. This would imply an ability to cling to their horses with their legs. From the back of a horse, riding that way, they were excellent archers too. Imagine shooting an arrow from the back of a moving horse that you are clinging to with your legs.

Later, the Scythians were pushed west by the Sarmatians, known for the skills of their women warriors. Like the Scythians, the Sarmatians were a people from the cultural group centred in Iran, or Persia, one of the oldest and most sophisticated cultures of those times. Modern Iran is located between Iraq and Afghanistan, but Persia spread over most of the region south of the Black and Caspian seas. Their presence to the north was expressed through the Scythians and Sarmatians.



In those earlier times, one of the myths that the Scythians brought with them from Persia was Mixoparthenos, the woman who was human from the waist up, but whose legs were two serpents. Did they evoke a horsewoman's legs wrapping themselves around the horse's chest?

The Greeks also moved into the Black Sea community during the time of the Scythians. Around the 5th century BCE, the Greek historian Herodotus documented some of what he had learned about these cultures, including the story of Mixoparthenos, a mother figure of the Scythians and a part of the Persian cosmology. She had three sons, the youngest, Scythes, becoming the ancestor of the Scythians.



Mixoparthenos

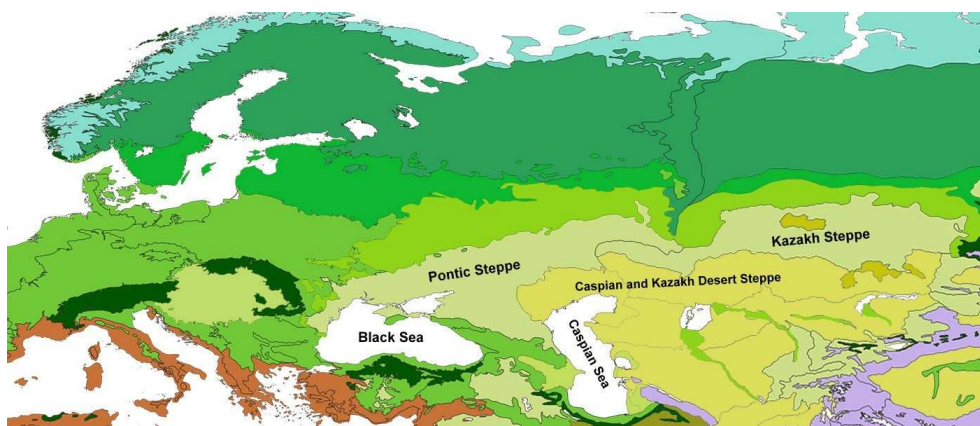
Whatever Herodotus reported back to Athens, the story that survived in Greek mythology was that Mixoparthenos met Hercules and insisted he mate with her if he wished to recover his lost horses. He therefore fathered the three sons and thereby brought Mixoparthenos into the Greek religious cosmology.

Unlike the Scythians, the Sarmatians wore a kind of armour that protected them probably just enough to be more effective as horseback warriors. It could be argued that the highly decorated armour was an influence of the women warriors, but the Scythians and other riding armies of the time often had women warriors. Among the Sarmatians though, they excelled. This kind of military pride was deeply engraved in the women, and a woman on horseback who had not killed a man in battle was considered not yet ready for marriage. Strangely, these same Sarmatians brought the idea of chivalry, a male-oriented code of honour, to Europe hundreds of years later.

Among some groups, respected men who were not necessarily adept in war would give up their gender and live like supportive women, changing their habits, and even dressing like these women. Others would simply give up all attributes of manhood and meditate, living a spiritual life and making prophecies, sort of evoking a chaste priesthood.

The female body is better adapted for horseback than that of the male, having wider hips that wrap more stably around the horse's chest and no male parts to damage. These female warriors excelled at shooting an arrow from horseback, riding without stirrups, perfectly balanced. Graves commemorating great women warriors included their jewelry and the harness for their horse. These warrior women received the same respect as the men, and even in death this can be seen. In those times humans were killed to accompany important people into the afterlife. Some of these women's graves found by archeologists contained a young man's sacrificed body, laid across the warrior's legs, to accompany her on her journey.

You can see on the maps the territories described here. The Steppes were said to be like an ocean, flat and continuous. These Steppe peoples were present for centuries, from way before 850 BCE. Their



The Steppes, Home of the Horse, continue to the Asian Western Steppe, the Eastern Steppe and to Mongolia.



Sarmatian cavalry, lizard-like scale armour made of stitched together hoof plates (from istock.com)

culture, gender balanced, was probably the most stable period in the history of Ukraine. They were the ones who hosted the first Greek people who came by sea around 700 BCE. The Scythians rapidly learned that these Greeks would pay handsomely for wheat. Their vast plains had deep, rich soil and Ukraine soon became the breadbasket of the Mediterranean. As wheat farming grew, horses served as draft animals.

The Greeks never sought to dominate north of the Black Sea, even under Alexander the Great in the 330s BCE. Nor did Persia. The Sarmations, a peripheral Persian people, arrived in the 200s BCE (the third century BCE), and managed to join in the established trading community of the Greeks and Scythians.

What followed, though, were the Goths, 400 years later, then the Huns in 370 CE, and after that, the Khazars in the 8th century CE, and the Turks two hundred years later. These were all Steppe horse people, all different in terms of their level of violence.

They were followed by the Mongols, called the Golden Horde, in 1240 CE, and over time, the few that survived into the 20th century were the Sarmatians and the Khazars. The Sarmatians did so by fighting for the Romans, and their descendants eventually joined the people who they were with when the Roman Empire collapsed, while some of the Khazars became Jews, no doubt bringing their knowledge of horses with them. Uncle Jack even mentioned that in the Hasidic community, the men dedicate their lives to study while the women work, feed them and maintain the home, and that this shows an influence of the chaste priesthood of the Scythians and Sarmatians. The problem with that, though, is the Hasidim are not chaste.

Then, later, a new group of Turks, the Ottomans, took over Anatolia, south of the Black Sea and the access to the Mediterranean. They brought that region into our times and their country is called Turkey today.

Esther Bogaridov



Esther Bogaridov and Moses Yaroslavsky

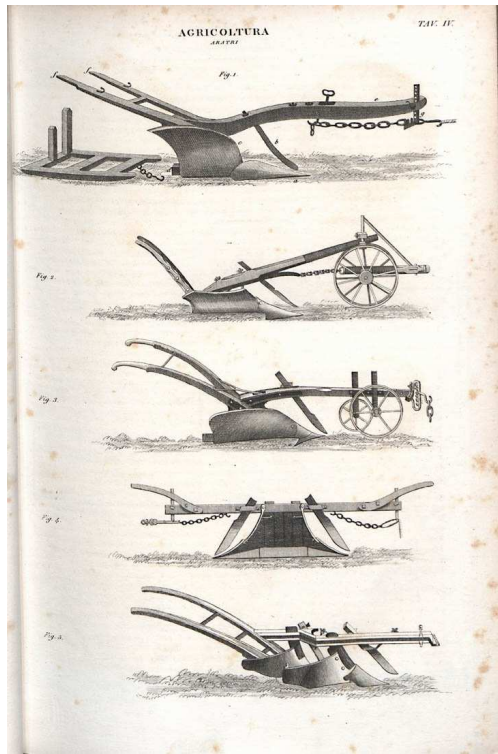
There is an element of strong, independent women in the history of the Steppe horse people, and it has been argued that it had its impact on the descendants of the people of Ukraine. The Greeks, Romans and Western Europeans, male-dominated

cultures that saw women as the property of their men, could not get their minds around these Steppe cultures: independent women who belonged to themselves, just like men do, was just not a part of their experience. At the same time, their example of male-dominated families influenced the men of the Steppes. People have studied these differences from many perspectives, and in our time, finally, the Western-European thinking is beginning to crack. Until not long ago, it was assumed by them that male-dominated cultures were simply the natural order of things and that if other cultures were different, well, they would evolve. Thanks to a determined line of strong women who refuse to fit into that category, the crack is opening, but there is still a lot to do, as the older thinking is not simply disappearing.

You have a number of these strong women in your ancestry, and while we cannot suppose a direct line of descent from one of the Steppe peoples, their influence can be seen in Esther Bogaridov.

Esther and Moses owned a business in which they made the kinds of farm equipment that horses were used to operate. They needed to have a knowledge of horses to do this work, and they also needed a deep knowledge of how to work with the metals used to make their products.

In theory Esther and Moses had a secure life in a



Farm equipment of the type the Yaroslavsky shop made.



A farmer and his horses turning a field

small community that their ancestors had lived in for a long time. Every once in a while, though, the area would rise up into a cauldron of war, as mentioned above and as is happening again now. Esther was well aware of how these risks were rising in the very early 1900s. She had three boys and a girl, and even though her eldest son was a capable worker in their business, that did not guarantee that he or his younger brothers would be safe from military service in the Russian army. Because they were a part of a small community of Jews, surrounded by a huge Christian community, and because the Russians had made it very clear that they did not want Jews in their Christian empire, her sons' military service would doom them to an early death. She had to get them to safety.

I have heard many stories of people in similar positions trying to save their sons. Often, the son is helped to leave in the middle of the night, and then he is on his own. These boys were usually in their early to mid teens when they had to escape. Esther wasn't having any of that. She would send her husband off with the two eldest boys. She had cousins, the Philcos, the Belles and the Snukels, all in Winnipeg. The Philcos were the closest to her and they were horse traders... in far away Canada.

Moses Yaroslavsky, a Russian-speaking Jew, and his

sons Berel and Max left their home in Ukraine around 1911 and came to Montreal where Berel and his father quickly found work using their knowledge of machinery and metal, at Canadian Pacific's Angus Shops. In Bolshoi Takmak, they left a machine shop that made horse-drawn farm machinery. In Montreal, their horse was the Iron Horse, the railway engines.

One other thing they did was shorten their family name from Yaroslavsky to Yaros, because Canadians had a lot of trouble pronouncing the longer version.

Esther continued to handle their business, waiting for news and confirmation that Moses and her sons had settled. When it came, she had to find a buyer for their business. There is little doubt that her



Stable of the Iron Horse. They would replace the horses in Bolshoi Takmak too

competitors were gleeful and would not have felt a need to buy her business, but she knew who really valued it and would pay for it; her own employees. She sold the business and all their other assets, took her daughter Riva and her youngest child Harry, and followed her husband to Canada. Max, a cellist, supported himself in sales, married an opera singer, and moved to Toronto and later to Chicago, while Harry became a lawyer in New York.



The Yaros children, Harry, Max, Berel and Riva

A few years ago, Uncle Jack and his daughter Sandy returned to Bolshoi Takmak to try to discover the original location of Jack's grandparents' business. When they visited the mayor to ask if he could help, he was intrigued and chuckled. He said he knew where their shop had been because a museum of horse-drawn and manual farm machinery now sits on the site.

Rebecca (Riva) Yaros, born in Bolshoi Takmak, Ukraine, on October 1, 1898, was 15 when they arrived in Canada. She was registered as being only thirteen, and until her birth certificate was properly translated many years later when she was applying for her old age security pension, she thought she had been born in 1900. You have seen her picture as The Woman in the Pine Tree. She is your grandmother Sheila's maternal grandmother and she died on April 26, 1986. She was 88 years old.



The Woman in the Pine Tree

Angus Shops, the major machine shop for CP Rail, was no small place. It covered hundreds of acres and manufactured all the parts of the conventional steam locomotives and rail cars. The father and son became tool and die makers, creating tools and tools that can be used to make other tools. Their expertise was so good that I saw a pair of fine pliers, once belonging to Uncle Berel, that had broken and he had welded the broken piece back, lining it up perfectly.



Angus Shops, Montreal

So much for Winnipeg and the horses, though. Esther also had a cousin in Montreal, a tailor named Gregory Nevitt, who had a shop on Rue Villeneuve (Esther would call it Wilnieu), and her uncle Philco would still come to Montreal from time to time with horses for the horse shows. Moses and Berel were both well-employed at the Angus shop and the family soon found a house on a street named Cadieux, that

Esther always called Cadew.

Esther would never learn English or French but she often declared "If I spoke their language, I would tell them..." In Ukraine, she had spoken Russian and Yiddish, two of the languages in common use, and so there was nothing unusual for her to live in the languages that she knew. The Yiddish-speaking community that she joined in Montreal was large enough for her to not need to speak any other language. Even her daughter Riva, an adolescent, returned to school at first in Yiddish. Yiddish was in such broad usage that even as a 'dead' language it is still the third largest body of published Canadian literature after English and French.

Esther's great drive had to be expressed in a more confined world than she had enjoyed in Bolshoi Takmak, and her power could be felt by her family and those close to her. She was consulted on every issue, but one had to be ready for her advice or for what actions she would take.

World War One began a few years after the family arrived in Canada. One of the great leaders of the Jewish community raised a Jewish company to fight for England, but many of the Jews had a different idea. Tired of the violence that Jews had dealt with throughout the history of Europe, they wanted to fight with the Jewish Legion, fighting for the original Jewish homeland. Since only men went to war, this left Riva with other tasks. She accepted to become a volunteer writing letters to the men who had gone to war. She also chose to write for the Jewish Legion



*Phil Wolofsky, Leon Cheifitz and an unnamed person
at Suez in 1918-19*

in Palestine, and soon was writing to young men who had gone there from Montreal.

After the war, these men became her suitors, and she accepted to marry one of them. His name was Phil Wolofsky, and his father, who came from Poland with him, was the owner of the Yiddish newspaper, the Keneder Adler. Soon, Riva and Phil were married. The wedding reception was held in the home of Phil's father, Hirsch Wolofsky. That house was on Esplanade, across from Fletcher's Field, and beyond that was Mount Royal Park.



Phil Wolofsky and Riva Yaros outside the house on Esplanade

4163 Esplanade is a really special house and the most meaningful property the family has ever owned in Montreal. Some years after the wedding, with Phil and Riva living on Cadieux not far from Riva's parents, Phil began to show signs of an illness. The Yaroses and the Wolofskys got together and Hirsch sold the Yaros family the house. Along with Esther and Moses, Phil and Riva also moved in. As Hirsch's

eldest son, he was also working at the Keneder Adler, Hirsch's newspaper.

Their first child was born in that important house in 1928. She was named Goldie Toba for Esther's mother, Golde Tube Bogaridov. Esther's father was Judah Bogaridov, and while Riva would certainly have known them in Ukraine, they never moved to Canada. Three years later, Jack was born, Uncle Jack or Jacob, the family historian. He was named for the Wolofsky side, Pinkus Yacov, or Peter Jacob, and four years later, Judah was born. Riva must have



Goldie, Judah and Jack Wolofsky with their maternal grandmother Esther Bogaridov Yaros, spring 1940

deeply loved her maternal grandparents to name two of her children for them – or maybe Esther had a say. In the house on Esplanade, Esther did all the cooking and, sergeant-major-like, she ran the place. Poor Riva never really learned to cook well as a result.

One day when the children were young, early in the 1930s, the Keneder Adler, Hirsch Wolofsky's Yiddish newspaper, received a letter addressed to *The Yiddish Newspaper, Montreal*, nothing else, but it was delivered anyway. It came from a man named Zimel Resnick, a Russian American. He had also served with the Jewish Legion, and, training in Nova Scotia, he remembered a man from Montreal, the owner of a Yiddish newspaper, who came to help with military discipline. He learned that this man's son was also in the Legion but they never met. In the letter he said that the Americans had closed the border to Russian Jews, a part of the antisemitism that deepened through the 1930s and '40s, and he wanted help to get his three brothers and his sister into Canada. Hirsch gave the letter to his son Phil.

The Jewish Legion was the military company that your grandmother's grandfather Phil (Felix) Wolofsky had served with in World War One. The Legion was sent to Palestine. Phil did not know the man who wrote it. The man's brothers were Noah (Noyach), the twins Itzik and Nisha, and their sister, Zlata, all Resnicks.

Esther and Riva felt an immediate need to help this unknown family come to Canada, and they appealed to Leon Crestohl, a lawyer and later a Member of Parliament and husband of Hirsch's daughter Sophie. The Resnicks were their long-lost cousins, they decided, and how could the family remain separated now that they had found each other again.

Somehow, they succeeded and Noah arrived, followed by the twins, getting out before they would have to serve in the Russian army. Zlata, their sister, arrived later. Esther wasted no time in appointing herself shadchan, or marriage broker, for Noah. Soon, in spite of a warning from Itzik that the choice of spouse was not a good one, she proceeded, dismissively telling Itzik to wipe his nose, a Yiddish expression insinuating that he was too young and inexperienced to know such things and was being impertinent.

Noah's marriage was a disaster. They had a daughter, but soon Noah's wife refused to stay with him or to let him see his daughter.

After all of these problems, Noah just wanted to leave Montreal, to leave Canada and to go live with his brother Zimel who was involved in an amusement park in Asbury Park, New Jersey.

Esther, probably feeling some responsibility for Noah's sad life, took it upon herself to get him into the States

illegally and deliver him to his brother. Since Esther never learned English or French, she had learned to play well upon her inability to communicate properly. It allowed her to not answer questions that she did not want to answer. She took her son-in-law Phil's papers (with his knowledge?) as well as her own, and dragged poor Noah to the train station, booking a berth on the Delaware and Hudson rail service to New York. When the two of them reached the border, she told Noah to climb into the berth and pretend to sleep. When the immigration officer came to their door, she stepped into the corridor with Phil's and her own papers, indicating in pantomime that her son-in-law was sleeping. She told the man to come in quietly by putting her fingers to her lips and indicating where he was sleeping. The officer conspired with her to make sure they did not wake him up and he soon left, satisfied.

Esther's smuggling plan worked, but what she did was filled with risk, as the family would have known because Itzik's twin, Nisha, scolded Itzik for being too timid when Itzik warned him that walking across the United States border through a woodland was not a good idea. Nisha was apprehended, arrested in the United States, and shipped back – not to Montreal, but to Russia. He never got back to Canada but eventually did make it to Israel.

When your great-grandmother Goldie brought her first boyfriend home, Riva and her mother Esther met a serious American university student named Yaffe. He was at the beginning of a fine career, but he had a terrible stutter.

When they left, Goldie's mother Riva asked Esther what she thought of the young man.

"Why are you asking me? Ask Uncle Philco. He's a better judge of horses." Comparing the young man to a horse, especially in Yiddish, she expressed her opinion.

Goldie, the eldest child of Riva and Phil, was named for her own great-grandmother, and that couple is pictured below. Sadly, they could not follow Esther and Moses to Canada.



A photo of young Goldie Wolofsky sitting in the park across from her parents' and grandparents' house on Esplanade.

*Golde Tube Bogaridov
and
Judah Bogaridov
five generations ago in
Ukraine*



The Story Continues

Esther died in 1957 and her husband Moses had died in the winter of 1939-40. Their daughter Riva, who had lost her husband Phil in 1947, inherited the house and, as you no doubt saw in the picture of the Woman in the Pine Tree, her face radiated happiness, a face one does not forget.

It is the way of the world that the first person I met in your grandmother's family was not your grandmother, but hers. She had advertised for a tenant for a spare room in her house. I was looking for a place for my cousin Philip, who was living with me further north on Esplanade, and he had become a burden. I thought that if I found him his own place, his own family could take over his care. The Lady in the Pine Tree took one look at him when she answered the door, and in the most charming way told us the apartment was no longer available. She was a good judge of problems and never learned that this poor soul at her door had the same name as her deceased husband.

Some days later, I met my cousin's sister at the Emergency Room of the Royal Victoria Hospital, and after a short interview with the psychiatrist, they told us that they would keep him, that he was too sick to live elsewhere. He was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia and never really recovered.

Esther's son Berel became a respected metal worker and machinist and Max and Harry moved to the United States. Riva had three children, your great-grandmother Goldie Wolofsky, who married Benoit Eskenazi, Uncle Jack Wolofsky who married Kay Rothman, and Uncle Yudie, (or Judah) Wolofsky who married Sandy Shulman. She passed away many years ago.

Noah Resnick joined his family in Asbury Park, where they smuggled weapons through their stand in the park, which they sent to Palestine for the war that created Israel. His estranged daughter went to school with Uncle Yudie (Judah) Wolofsky. Her father found her there and she eventually moved to the United States to join him. Itzik Resnick and his children were like members of the Yaros/Wolofsky family, and his sons Phil and Lazar, and daughter Devorah are still close friends of Uncle Jack's.

Some family photos



Phil Wolofsky with his daughter Goldie, his wife Riva and Riva's mother Esther at Trout Lake, July 1947.

Philip Wolofsky contracted Parkinson's, a neurological disease that causes shaking and eventually can cause difficulty speaking but that does not interfere with cognitive functions. He had an attack and drowned while swimming in Trout Lake in 1947. This may be the last photo taken of him.



*Ethel and Harry Yaros, Philip Wolofsky, Berel and Diana Yaros
Sitting, Riva Yaros-Wolofsky and her parents Moses and Esther*

Yaros family



This photo was taken around 1910, and may have been the last family photo taken in Bolshoi Takmak. It shows Berel, Moses, Riva, Max, with Esther sitting in front of him, and Harry on the far right



*Sarmatian necklace with amulet
Even warriors wear jewels*

From the Land of the Horse



**Ukraine is the borderland of the great
steppes that run from eastern Europe to
Mongolia. These steppes were the home of
wild horses and wild women and men who
domesticated each other,
human and horse.**

**Next they rode in great hordes and
took over the world.**