

FAQ 67
(February 15, 2008)

67.1

Q: In reading your book I know your grandparents emigrated from Russia. Were you close to them as a child growing up? What were they like?

My paternal grandmother, Esther Leov Hodel died before I was born. She contracted tuberculosis and passed away in a sanitarium in Los Angeles in 1937.

My brothers and I did have sporadic contact with our paternal grandfather, George Hodel Sr. I have fond memories of riding the "Red Car" from Hollywood to visit him in Santa Monica. We called him our "1-2-3 Grandfather" because on the rare occasions we saw him, he would reach out, grab us by the waist, and lift us high into the air as he called out the words, "1,2,3".

My memories of George Sr. are few. As young children, I doubt that my brothers and I saw him more than 3-4 times. Unlike our father, who was over 6', grandfather was quite small in stature. (5' 6") He was very dark complexioned, and I recall him being quite introverted. He died in Los Angeles in 1954. My mother attended his funeral and I remember her remarking a number of times about how surprised she was at the number of people that came to the service. Mother's words:

"When your 1-2-3 grandfather passed away, you would think it was like a Hollywood star or some very famous person had died. Hundreds of people attended his funeral. I was shocked. I never really understood why so many people came. All I knew about your father's father was that he sold insurance."

From my BDA research, I now know that my grandparents were strong supporters of "The Arts" in early Los Angeles. They had a number of very influential friends who they either knew from pre-revolutionary Russia or had met in Paris. (These included: Sergey Rachmaninov, Prince Paul Troubetzkoy, and Russian architect, Alexander Zelenko, who grandfather commissioned from Russia and who came to the U.S. and designed my grandparents home in Northeast L.A. (Also included in Zelenko's blueprint was a separate "tea house" and private residence on the same property. Grandfather gave this private home to his son, George Jr. as a 15th birthday present. (See original *L.A. Times* 1922 article below)



**Esther Leov Hodel
circa 1912**



George Hodel, age nine. Photograph from the *Los Angeles Evening Herald* of July 17, 1917. George, a musical prodigy, was selected to play a piano concert at the L.A. Shrine Auditorium in honor of Bastille Day.



This Hodel family photograph was believed taken circa 1917 -1924 at the a Hodel residence in South Pasadena. (possibly pre-Monterey Rd?) It depicts composer Sergei Rachmaninov

seated between the Russian Minister of Culture and his wife (possibly the Zelenkos). On the occasion of this photograph, George Jr. , considered a child musical prodigy, played a few compositions for his father's family friends.

BOY'S HOME IS PLANNED BY RUSSIAN

ALMA WHITAKER

Los Angeles Times (1886-Current File); Oct 15, 1922; ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times

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BOY'S HOME IS PLANNED BY RUSSIAN

*Famous Architect Decides
to Remain in City After
Completing Work*

BY ALMA WHITAKER

Not many boys can boast that a famous architect came over from Russia to build them a house as a fifteenth birthday present.

This was the distinction which fell upon young George Hill Hodel, who attained his fifteenth birthday on the 10th inst. and fell heir on the same day to a beautiful Swiss-Russian residence high on the hill at 6512 Walnut Hill avenue, built and completed by M. Alexander Zelenko of Moscow to the day.

M. Zelenko, life-long friend of M. and Madame G. Hodel, was invited to come to this country six months ago for this purpose—to build a worthy house for their son. The result is a most interesting structure comprising nine rooms, and two oriental outdoor rooms. Terraced gardens lead up to the house, which is a last-word model of modern efficiency although outwardly having all the charm of the old Russian and Swiss architecture.

Everything inside, including the heating arrangements, work by electricity—a mere pressed button warms any room. An unusual feature is a sunken fireplace with inglenooks, framed in Russian carving.

M. Zelenko is an artist as well as an architect, and four hand-painted panels of great beauty bear witness to his skill in the main living-room.

M. Zelenko is not a stranger to the United States, having been deputed with a mission from the Czar's government in 1913 to visit Europe and America to study educational methods. His report in book form graces the Russian archives today. When the Bolsheviks came into power M. Zelenko was offered the portfolio of the Ministry of Education, but being out of sympathy with the Bolsheviks, he declined in favor of Maxim Gorky, his friend, who now holds it.

And now he is so enamored of California that he has built a home in the Japanese style, replete with faithful detail, where he intends living with his charming wife on Walnut Hill—never to return to Russia as a subject.

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Zelenko built Hodel Residence and Tea House at 6512 Monterey Rd in Northeast Los Angeles.(Note: In 1922 the street address was listed as:

6512 Walnut Hill Ave., so apparently the street was renamed to Monterey Rd., at a later date.)

(2005 photo)



6512 Monterey Rd



6511 Short Way

Thanks to the hard work and tireless effort of CHARLIE FISHER, a Northeast L.A. historian and preservationist, and president of the *Highland Park Heritage Trust*, the “Hodel Residence and Tea House” was declared a Historic Cultural Monument No. 802 by the Los Angeles City Council on June 1, 2005.

I took the above photos of my grandfather’s home in 2005. Ironically, my father’s “Tea House” residence (built behind the main house) had its own street address of- 6511 SHORT WAY!

Map shows birthplaces of author's maternal and paternal grandparents.

Grandmother, Esther Leov born in Shargorod, Ukraine 4/15/73

Grandfather, George Goldgeffer, born in Odessa, Ukraine 2/5/73.

