

Semyon Levbarg's Father, Ovsey Levbarg In The Village Library



This is my father Ovsey Levbarg photographed in the village library when reading newspapers. I do not know, the woman beside him. This photo was taken around 1943.

Levbarg means 'lion's hill' in Yiddish. . My father Ovsey Levbarg, born in 1883 in a small Jewish town in Kiev region. He grew up in the religious environment of his home. He studied at cheder and later had classes at home with a melamed. My father got a religious Jewish education. He knew prayers and read the Torah and the Talmud in Hebrew. My father didn't study any crafts. He was preparing to be a religious activist.

My parents got married approximately in 1908. I believe they met each other through matchmakers and their parents' agreement that was a usual procedure at that time. Shortly after they got married my parents moved to Kiev where my father bought a small two-room apartment on the 2nd floor of a 4-storied building in Elenovskaia Street in Podol after he sold his parents house.

My father was a gabbai at the synagogue in Schekavitskaia street in Podol [the only functioning synagogue in Kiev during the Soviet time] and a shochet at the kosher slaughterhouse near the synagogue. Early in the morning my father put on his tallit and miniature boxes with parts of the Torah on his hand and forehead [tefillin] and prayed in his room for a long time and then he went to the synagogue. He spent at the synagogue all day. My mother was also very religious.

Religion and religious people were persecuted in 1930s. My father became even a bigger conspirator than he used to be. He only wore his kippah at home and at the synagogue. In summer he wore a cap and in winter he wore a warm hat. However, my parents kept observing Jewish traditions, but I didn't. The synagogue in Schekavitskaia street never closed except for during occupation and my father continued working there.

My father was very concerned that I might have problems due to his religiosity. Therefore, when in 1937 I was offered a job at the Komsomol construction site in Nakhodka [Far East, 8000 km from Kiev] where they were building a shipyard he was even glad that I got an opportunity to move away. Even though this meant that we were not going to see each other for a long while, he was glad that I would be away from Podol and the synagogue and would be involved in the construction of a new life. My friends and I went to the Far East on a Komsomol assignment.

In July 1941 my parents informed me that they were going to evacuation. They went to the Far East and got accommodation in a small settlement near Vladivostok. I don't remember its name. I received several letters from them that I responded to.

In December 1945 I demobilized from the Soviet army. I had a number of orders and medals and a wonderful Letter of Recommendation from our commanding officer Lieutenant-Colonel Levitski. I returned to Kiev.

I immediately went home: there were other tenants in our apartment; I stayed with my school friend Lyova Golfman. In few weeks I met my father, who returned from evacuation. My father looked old and exhausted. He was grieving hard after my mother, she died in 1943 in evacuation. My father cried when I hugged him. He told me that he prayed for me every day begging the Lord to save me. He said 'Son, our Lord that you don't believe in has guarded you'. It occurred to me that I wasn't even wounded once during the war.

Life was difficult during the postwar years, but my father never stopped observing Jewish traditions. At first he attended the synagogue in Schekavitskaya Street that opened recently. Then, when he got ill and it was difficult for him to walk there he began to pray in a nearby house where a minyan was put together. In 1948 my father died. I tried to organize a Jewish funeral in accordance with our traditions. Although my father was buried in a coffin his body was wrapped in cerement and a rabbi recited prayers. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery.