

Samuel Birger With His Cousins And Grandmother Shifra Birger



This is a group picture. In the center is grandmother Shifra Birger, to the left is me, to the right is my cousin Rahmil Adashkis and his sister Etki. The picture was made in Jonava in 1935.

My paternal grandfather Samuel Iosif Birger was born in Jonava in the 1870s, he were cabmen. I did not see Samuel Iosif as he died in late 1920s. My paternal grandmother Shifra was about five years younger than my grandfather. She had always been a housewife. She took care of the household and raised children. Both of my grandparents were illiterate, but very religious. None of them knew how to read in Ivrit, but they said prayers as they knew them by heart. The family was poor, but not indigent. Grandfather's earnings were enough for the family to get by. The Birgers had their own small house, consisting of three rooms, a kitchen and many larders. There was a big yard, where there was a stable with two - five horses, depending on the season. Grandfather took good care of them. Samuel Iosif did not get his children educated fairly thinking that there was no use in finishing lyceum to drive a cab with horses and transport people and luggage.

There were four children in the family of Samuel Iosif and Shifra: two daughters and two sons. Father's sister Leya was the closest in the family. She was five or six years younger than my father. Leya was the only one from the family who was literate. I do not know where she studied. She knew how to read and write in Yiddish and Russian. She read books and knew the rudiments of accounting. Leya married a local Jew Moishe Adashkis, who was in charge of fire-fighters' team of our town. Moshe, Leya and their children lived in a mansion by the fire-fighters' office and a garage

with the only fire truck in town and all necessary fire-fighting equipment. Our house was right in front of Leya's one. I spent my childhood with my cousins- Rahmil and Etki, children of Leya and Moishe. Rahmil was one year older than me and Etki was about three years younger. When grandfather died, grandmother Shifra lived with Leya's family.

My parents got married in 1930. I was born on the 3rd of March 1931. I was named after my grandfather Samuel Isidore and that name was written in my birth certificate issued by rabbi. In 1933 mother gave birth to a son Nathan. The family called him tenderly Notke. In 1936 my brother Gershko was born.

My parents were illiterate and rather uncultured. That is why we children were not raised to have a thirst for knowledge. I went to school when I turned eight. Before that I used to play with my brother in the yard, ran along with other boys in the street. The only hobby father could afford was football. He was a very ardent fan of that sport. I remember he took me to the stadium with him when football team of Maccabi came in town. There were sports clubs of Maccabi in Jonava as well, there was also Betar. I do not know whether there were other Zionist organizations in our town. My parents were apolitical. I went to the cinema rather often because my aunt Leya used to work in the cinema as a barmaid and she let me in so that I could watch a movie for free. I enjoyed mute comedies most of all.

There was school named after Sholem Aleichem in Jonava, where subjects were taught in Yiddish. In 1939 I went to Ivrit pre-school. Frankly speaking it was hard for me to study. Things teachers told were unclear to me. I was really lacking behind as compared to the others, more well-prepared students. There was nobody at home who could help me out. I did not like school and was looking forward to holidays.