

Leizer Gurvich And His Friends



This is a banquet of Kaunas chess club. To the right is my father Leizer Gurvich. I do not know the rest. Kaunas, the 1920s.

My father Leizer Gurvich was born in 1879. I cannot say exactly where he studied. I think he graduated from lyceum and went on with his education. Father was a modern educated man. When he was young he worked for his relatives at match production factory. Then he acquired a printing house jointly with his brothers. It was a large enterprise, where newspapers and magazines were printed in Lithuanian as well as in Yiddish. Father stuck to Bund views. I do not know if father was a member of any Jewish organization. There were a lot of them at that time in Lithuania. Father had no time for social life. He was not a religious Jew. He went to the synagogue on the holidays, mostly when mother asked him.

Father got married in 1909 at the age of thirty. They say, he met my mother with the help of Jewish match-makers- shadhans. They were in love with each other in spite of the fact that their marriage was prearranged by shadhans. The wedding took place in Taurage in accordance with the Jewish rites in the synagogue, where grandfather was a gabai. The newly-weds went to Kaunas, where they settled in the house of grandfather Jacob. In 1910 my elder sister Anna was born and in 1913 - brother Jacob, named after grandfather Jacob Gurvich. I, the youngest, was born on the 20th of April 1920. I was named Eta.

In spring 1927 our mother died. After mother's death father did his best to maintain things at home the way they were. He was yearning, though he never showed it. Then father became more reserved. He hardly had any free time. Usually I saw him only at breakfast or late in the evening with the paper in his hands as if trying to shelter from us and from life.

At that time I did not think of father's solitude. Probably he had some women, but he was not committed to any of them. Once, father wanted to marry a sweet, cultured teacher of elementary Jewish school and my elder sister Anna was strongly against it. It is hard to say what it was- her selfishness or jealousy. She behaved herself indecently practically forbidding father to get married.

My dad, so handsome and clever, was a bachelor. Father's hobby was chess. He was a very gifted chess player, the member of Kaunas chess club. Once famous Lasker [Lasker Emanuel (1868 - 1941) is a German chess player, theoretician and literati, the second world champion (1894 - 1921), the author of many books, including "Common sense in Chess " (1895), "Manual on Game of Chess " (1926). In 1902 he defended PHD thesis in mathematics in Geidelberg University.] had a session of simultaneous game in our city. That session lead to father's success. The game between father and Lasker ended in a tie.

In January 1939 father took a bath and caught cold. Like mother he died of pneumonia. I remember father's funeral very well. In spite of his being unreligious, he was buried in accordance with the formal Jewish rite- he laid on the floor. He was buried without a coffin. We observed the mourning period - shivah.