

Jankiel Kulawiec With His Family In Brest



This is me and my family in Brest - now in Belarus. You can see me standing first from left in the upper row. With me there are: my wife, Anna Kulawiec, the oldest son of my uncle Ilja - Josef Mokobocki, and his family. I don't remember their names. From the Mokobocki family the three brothers who fled with me survived. I found them again at the beginning of the 1960s - it turned out that Josef, the eldest, lives in Brest, and Borys and Jankiel and their families in the Urals. None of the three of them wanted to come back to Poland; I didn't ask why. In Losice there were two brothers from my mother's family - the Mokobockis: Ilja and Mordko, or Mordechaj. Ilja I remember well. He had a cobbler's workshop on 11 Listopada Street and lived there. He made shoes, and his wife - I don't remember her name - sold something or other on the market square; terrible poverty they were in. I remember too, that Uncle Ilja was a nice guy. He was a lefty as well, not very religious, but he knew the history of the Jews, knew the prayers, could read the Torah and argue with the rabbi. I think he'd got that from home. Later on he was paralyzed and his sons took over the workshop. When the war started, Ilja Mokobocki fled with my mama, and only his brother Mordko and his family were left. Later on I joined my parents and Uncle Ilja in the village of Kraysk which is about 350 kilometers east of Losice. The living conditions were very poor; eight of us - my parents and all of us brothers and sisters - in one room in a house belonging to a Belarusian. In fact, there wasn't much difference from how we'd lived before the war in Losice. Father worked in a cobblers' cooperative, and we went to a Belarusian school. I remember that besides us another Jewish family lived in the village, but we didn't have much to do with them. Uncle Ilja Mokobocki lived with his sons in another village about 20 kilometers away, and I used to go and visit them every so often. When the war broke out and the Germans came as far as the place where we were living, they surrounded it in such a way that escape was almost impossible. But I and Ilja Mokobocki's three sons - Josef, Borys and Jankiel - managed to break out of the encirclement and we crossed the Berezina river not far from Vitebsk. I only managed to get away with them because at the time of the German attack I was visiting them. All the rest of my family stayed in Kraysk, and I never saw them again. On the way, as we were fleeing, I lost the three Mokobocki brothers and was left alone. I was soon caught by the Russians because I was a foreigner and didn't have any

papers. When they found out I was from Poland they sent me to Uzbekistan, to a mine. I only went back to Losice once after the war. That was in 1968 or '69, sometime around the end of the 1960s. Josef, the eldest of the Mokobocki brothers, had come to Poland. He came to see me first of all, and then we went to see Dora together, who lived in Warsaw at the time. Before the war, you see, Josef had been friendly with Dora, he'd belonged to the same party - it was the Bund, I think - as her husband Herszko. She said that since we were so close, perhaps we could go to Losice. And because we had the use of Mokobocki's car, it was easy. That was the last time I was there.