

Asia Matveyuk's Father Shoilik Leikind With His Friend Solomon Levi



My father Shoilik Leikind in hospital on 10 June 1943. He sent me this photo to the front enclosed in his letter to confirm that he was feeling very well and was dreaming about the time we met.

My father like many other representatives of poor Jewish families he got fond of revolutionary ideas and dreams about a better life and construction of a communist society. I cannot say what particularly had this effect on my father: it might have been the communist propaganda. My father stopped going to the synagogue, joined Komsomol, and became the leader of the village poor. My stepmother Freida was raised in a religious family, but my father forbade her to observe Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays. He became particularly strict about it after he became a communist in 1927.

In the early 1930s collectivization took place in our village under my father's supervision. There was a Jewish kolkhoz established. It was named '120' after 120 Jews who perished during the Civil War. My father became chairman of the village council. People liked my father and called him with the Russian name of Sasha converted from his Jewish name of Shoilik. My father was a charming, handsome and very strong man.

In 1932 an accident happened. Authorities were taking away grains from farmers and denouncing the kulaks. My father was kind to people and couldn't take away what they had earned working so hard. One summer night in 1932 NKVD officer came for him. They turned the house upside down:

there was a search and they found a bag of grain that they had put there themselves. My father was arrested and taken to prison in Nikolaev. 36 people were arrested in Novopoltavka then. My father was charged of sabotage and wreckage of the plan of state grain procurement plan and he was to be sentenced to a long-term imprisonment. In autumn the famine broke out. People were swollen from hunger and were dying in the streets. We were also starving: my great grandfather, grandmother Zisel's father, and my grandmother Zelman starved to death. We were picking herbs and spikes in the field and my mother made some kind of flat cookies from them. My father got some bread in prison. He dried it and sent us a bag of dried bread from prison. My father was imprisoned for almost a year and a half. Mother Freida, a common Jewish woman, realized that she had to rescue him. She took whatever miserable savings she had and went to Kharkov that was the capital of Ukraine at the time. She was away for almost a month. She told us that she had an appointment in the Party Central Committee. I don't know whether it was for this reason or because Yezhov was appointed Minister of the state security, my father's case was reviewed and he was released. He resumed all his rights and his Party membership. He became chairman of the village council again. He returned in spring 1934.

My father volunteered to the army in early July 1941. He was commanding officer of a mine firing company and was severely wounded in combat action near Stalingrad [present Volgograd, today Russia]. He had gangrene of his leg, but his doctors managed to save his leg. My father spent in hospital six months and then he left for Begovat town in Tashkent region where many residents of Novopoltavka were in evacuation. In 1945 he returned to Novopoltavka. Fascists tormented my adoptive mother Freida Leikind to death in 1941. My father asked my advice about Fenia, our neighbor, whose husband perished during the Great Patriotic War. He wanted to marry her. I understood that my father would have a hard life alone and encouraged his intentions.