

Grigoriy Stel'makh's Father Isaac Stel'makh



My father Isaac Stel'makh photographed in his Soviet military uniform of the 1940s; there are combat orders and medals on his chest. This photo was taken at the front in 1943. He sent this photo to Shantala in Russia where we were in evacuation.

My father's life story is quite interesting. He was the product of his epoch. He was born in 1912. He went to cheder like all Jewish boys and then finished a Jewish school. And then... I would say he was drawn in with the 'wheel of history'. The revolutionary outburst had its impact on children: Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and Jewish boys and girls had gatherings and marched across the town with slogans and banners in support of the soviet power and Lenin calling to refuse from religion: 'Away with rabbis and priests'. My father left his home at the age of 14. He headed to Kamenets-Podolskiy, 100 km west of his home where he joined Komsomol. He became a Komsomol activist. Komsomol sent him to the Kiev region where he was involved in various Komsomol activities: struggle against kulaks, organization of kolkhozes and Komsomol units in towns. By the age of 20 he already joined the Communist Party. My father married a Russian girl, his comrade, in Tarascha village of Kiev region in 1933. I don't know her name. He didn't even tell his parents about his marriage since his marrying a Russian girl would have been a reason for another conflict with his parents. My father's wife died at childbirth, and grandfather Abram and grandmother Yenta took little Raya to raise her forgetting their resentment. She lived with my grandparents for about a year. After my father married my mother the girl came to live with them. In the latter 1930s our family moved to Kiev where they received half a house in the distant outskirts of Stalinka [it's one of the central districts of the city now]. I don't know exactly what work my father did for a living, but he earned well and was prosperous. He bought a motor cycle, a film projector and a piano for the

children to study music when they grew up. There were many Jewish and non-Jewish friends. Although my father was a real communist, he continued to believe in God at the bottom of his heart, I think. He didn't go to the synagogue. To go to the synagogue was like throwing away his Party membership book and an employment records book: the new regime adamantly struggled against religion. However, our family always celebrated Jewish holidays, even in the late 1930s when Stalin's arrests began and people could suffer a lot for their faith.

On the first day of the Great Patriotic War, 22 June 1941 my father was going to a football match of his favorite team 'Dynamo' Kiev and my mother told him to take an umbrella since it looked like a rainstorm. My father heard about the war on his way to the stadium. He went to the military registry office with his umbrella and they recruited him to the army. He was sent to study in a flak/artillery school. My father finished his artillery school in Gorliy town and went to the front. Fate guarded my father, though he was wounded several times. After hospitals he went back to the front. My father reached Berlin. After the victory he got in a car accident and stayed in hospital Sharita in Berlin for almost a year. Then my father resigned from the army, but was assigned to the Soviet Military Administration of the town. In 1947 he came to take us to Berlin.