

Rita Wilkobrisskaya's Father Michael Vilkobrissskiy



My father Michael Vilkobrissskiy wearing a uniform of the Red army photographed in Minsk in 1922. He had his photo taken to give it to his fiancée (his first wife to be, she was my mother's sister Musia). 75, Sovietskaya Street.

The story of birth and youth of my father Michael Vilkobrissskiy is tragic. I don't know his parents. All I know is that my grandfather Moisey Vilkobrissskiy was a coachman in the town of Wilno [present Wilnius - the capital of Latvia]. He married my grandmother around 1900. My father, born on 14 November 1902 was their first and only child. My grandmother (I don't know her name) died shortly after my father was born. I don't have much information about what happened afterward. All I know is that my grandfather left the child. My grandmother Hasia, my mother's mother, told me about it. She heard this from some acquaintances of hers. My father never told me anything about it - he couldn't stand any mention of his father whom he had never seen.

My father was adopted by the Jewish family of retail grain merchant, their family name was Ioffe, Ioffe's family moved to Odessa. Childless families used to adopt orphan children. I guess, they moved to avoid any talks about adoption. They didn't want their boy to hear that they were not his parents. In 1906 adoptive father Ioffe died and his widow and my father moved to Vitebsk, in Russia, where her relatives lived. I don't know the name of the woman that raised my father. I only know that she went to work after her husband died. My grandmother Hasia told me that the woman became a traveling agent that was not a typical women's job. She traveled to other towns selling commodities of a company. I have no information about religiosity of my father's adoptive parents. My father never observed any Jewish traditions, although he knew Yiddish. He went to primary school and in 1912 - 1915 he studied at High School in Vitebsk.

In 1915 some people, probably neighbors, told my father that he was an adopted child. His reaction was weird and I still cannot understand or forgive him for what he had done. He left his adoptive mother and home. He had to give up his studies since he had to earn his living. He never saw his adoptive mother again. A neighbor said that after he left her she fell ill and died in few months. I believe, my father was sorry for what he had done for the rest of his days and this was the reason why he never talked about his adoptive mother.

My father began to work at the electro technical shop of Mr. Mendelson, a Jew, in Vitebsk. He was an apprentice and finally became an electrician. He worked there until the end of 1918 and at the beginning of 1919 he got fond of revolutionary ideas and went to work at the factory of agricultural machines that belonged to the Unemployment Committee.

This was the period of Civil War, and on 15 October 1919 my father volunteered to the Red army. He became a private in reserve rifle battalion. This battalion was formed in Kazan. On 13 December 1919 my father became a member of the Communist party and then their regiment was sent to fight with the white guard units. My father took part in battles with General Wrangel units. There were military from various parts of the country. They were mainly workers and peasants that believed in the ideas of communism. My father told me that they had sufficient food and uniforms. They lived in barracks that they built themselves. Their living conditions were far from good. In 1920 my father was severely wounded and stayed a long while in hospitals until he was sent to an advanced training course for professional military in Minsk, Byelorussia, in January 1922. He was eager to study and willingly went to Minsk to study aviation.