

Boris Pukshansky's Father



This photograph was taken in Liozno in 1939. This is my father. I have very few photographs of my family members. Let me tell you about my childhood.

I was born in 1924 in Yanovichi. First 6 years of my life I lived together with my parents, brothers and sister in the house of my grandmother and grandfather. You see, my father was the elder son among 7 children, and he made his duty to live with his parents and help them. Father told me that in Jewish families the elder son was allowed to marry only if all his sisters were already married or agreed with his marriage.

We lived in a big wooden house. In the court yard there were many household constructions. There were neither water nor electricity supply. We cooked meals in the Russian stove, it was also used for heating. The house was illuminated by means of oil lamps. There were no paved roads in Yanovichi.

We always had a cow and hens. Near the house there was a large vegetable garden. Vegetables from it were enough only to feed our family, we never sold them. We had no assistants at home. I remember that it were Mum and father who did almost everything about the house. When my father was little, all work about the house was made by my grandmother, and grandfather earned money (by the way, very little money).

At home we all spoke only Yiddish. Adults started speaking Hebrew when they discussed something secretly (not for children). I was 6 when my grandfather started teaching me Hebrew. But by the moment when members of our family ceased living together, I had time to learn only the alphabet.

So I did not manage to speak Hebrew.

Parents were hard on us (children). Since childhood we were accustomed not to break into conversation of adults. 'Sit still and be silent' grandfather used to say, and I remember his words until now. Grandfather used to speak in proverbs. I remember some of his favorite vivid expressions: 'A liar is worse than a thief ', 'Better strike, than insult', etc.

Most of our neighbors were Jews. I do not remember any manifestations of anti-Semitism in our town; of course I was a child, but I also don't remember my parents speaking about it.

I don't remember a market day in our town, but I remember very well that peasants from neighboring villages brought us different products for sale. They were grandfather's acquaintances whom he met during his trips. He had fair name, everybody knew that he would never deceive neither in the process of selling, nor buying.

Now I'll tell you about my parents.

My father Pukshansky Afroim Davidovich was born in Yanovichi in 1884. He finished only cheder. Father (like grandfather) was a very religious person. He earned his living the same way as my grandfather did: peddled wares from village to village. But after a number of years he mastered another profession: he started buying and currying leather. Besides he knew much about domestic animals: people always asked advice from him purchasing cows and sheep. He also was learned in the veterinary medicine. Neighbors often came running to him and asked his assistance in difficult delivery of a cow or in treatment of a diseased horse.

My father was exempt from military service, because according to the law elder son was not eligible for imperial army draft.

My Mum's name was Genye Matesovna. Her maiden name was Levergant. She was born in Belarus shtetl Ostrovno in 1892. She received only primary education. Marriage of my parents was partly arranged by a matchmaker. I say partly, because after their specially arranged meeting, events developed too quickly for that sort of marriage: my future parents fell in love with each other and got married very soon. Their first meeting took place on the neutral territory in Vitebsk. Wedding took place in Yanovichi in 1919, and the married couple lodged in the house of my father's parents. As far as I understand, it was not easy for Mum to live there, because Daddy had got 5 sisters, and all of them gave a hostile reception to their young sister-in-law. They all told parents on her. But Mum was a very clever woman, she carried herself with dignity and never stooped to gossip. Therefore little by little everybody started respecting her.