

Obituary To Jakob Fischbein



This is an obituary to my father, Jakob Fischbein. It was published after his death in August of 1975 in the Jewish paper Folks-Shtime. The author, Henryk Piasecki, described the political and social activities of my father's before and after the war. He stressed also his merits for the Jewish community in Poland, especially the period when my father worked at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. This memory was written in the name of my father's friends and co-workers in the Institute. Before the war, I remember my father as the disappearing man. He was a member of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine. Several times he was in jail in Stanislawow. He spent 11 months in prison in Bereza. He came back in the fall of 1937. During World War II, in Tashkent, my dad was a porter at the railway station. Later, in Lunaczarsk, since he knew how to sharpen a razor on a belt, he got a job as a barber in the military hospital for the soldiers evacuated deep East. There was a psychiatric ward at that hospital I was very afraid of; the war gathers a rich harvest of mental diseases. I don't know whether he got references or took advantage of his acquaintance with the staff of the hospital where he was the barber, but later, when we were back in Tashkent, he got a job in the storage room of a military canteen. His job was to move boxes and take crates, sacks and other heavy things off the trucks. My mother, when she decided it's safe to leave my sister in my care, went to help him. There were many Poles in Tashkent, but I hardly knew anyone. My father must have made contacts with ZPP, Union of Polish Patriots, already there. We came back to Poland in the summer, June or July, of 1946. My father was the chair of the local Jewish Committee in Walbrzych between 1946 and 1949. It was an organization in which Jews gathered to help other Jews. At the same time my father made many enemies, because he tried to persuade Jews not to leave Poland. He argued they should stay, because Poland is going to be a different place. After the Kielce pogrom in 1946, however, I'm not sure how many there were whom this argument would stop from leaving. Everybody who could, who had some family, who found sponsors, thought about emigrating. My father constantly preached internationalism to me. I remember in 1952, personal ID's were being issued for the first time. Up until then we had no documents. My birth certificate or its copy arrived with an error, most likely caused by the clerk's haste or a simple mistake. My name on it was Rena Fischbein. ?Dad? -- I said -- ?we have to correct his, one syllable is missing.? I'm telling this story to show how paranoid my father was after all. He glanced at me and said, ?You know what, let's leave it like that. Maybe Rena sounds better than Regina.? He didn't say out right that Regina Fischbein sounds rather unambiguous [i.e. explicitly Jewish]. My parents moved to Warsaw at the beginning of 1950. The party [PZPR] suddenly remembered my father. At first, my father worked for NIK [Supreme Chamber of Control, which

controls the activity of all state institutions] in the Department of Personnel and Training. Then he worked at the headquarters supervising Construction of Housing for Workers. Afterwards he worked at the Agency for Peace Uses of Atomic Energy. After the war, some of those who spent time with my father in Bereza, wrote memoirs. It was expected of him to write one, too. He said to me then, "You know, I don't feel like going back to that. Let them only note the name and dates in the index?" In 1964, he went to a meeting at the 30th anniversary of the establishment of that camp. It was organized by the Historical Department of the Party's Central Committee.