

Aron Breido As Corps Man During World War I



My father Aron Breido, he is 27 year old here.

When WWI broke out in 1914, the Tolstoyans arranged a Petrograd Municipal Medical-Nutrition Detachment, which set up nutrition stations for starving people and a mobile surgery hospital at

the Western frontline.

My father was member of that detachment and worked as a corpsman at that hospital, which was situated in the village of Voleyka near the town of Molodechno in Belorussia.

Father was an employee of the Red Cross Russian Society, which was headed by Yekaterina Peshkova, wife of the famous Soviet writer Maxim Gorky. Father knew her very well. Working at the hospital, he reflected a lot on the fate of the Jewish people and kept a diary, which I read as a grownup.

Here are some excerpts from that diary: "...Those fascination and sorrow I feel for the Jewry are not comprehensible for Russians. I would love to have the freedom and faith in myself, which Brother Alexander has [Russian Orthodox Priest], but I will never give up my belonging to the Jewry, until there is this universal faith, love and freedom.

I would give away my head, rather than agree to change the "Jew" in my passport into "Russian Orthodox", the same for my children... I noticed how my Jewish belonging effaces itself among those who are close to me in faith; and how I speak about the Jews with a shade of pride and dignity among those who humiliate them.

I will be a staunch Jew among those who persecute and oppress Jews in any way; but in an environment where there is no such persecution and where there is equality in the eyes of God, I will be equal... I feel that being a Jew I am most of all bound with the sufferings of the Jews.

I like this faith, ancient and clear of any idols; I continue to love it, to understand it, to place it as the foundation and to reveal more future in it than past; something the Jews nurtured in their heart and did not give away to the market of outside books, 100 times deeper and more than is known of them. Their covert teaching Kabbala is too early for our century...".

Father was recorded in the wagon train as a civilian as he had an army service delay for 10 years based on bad sight [he had progressive myopia]. He worked at the hospital between December 15th, 1914 and the end of 1916.

When gas was used on the frontline, 100 Tolstoyans signed the "Appeal to Soldiers and Officers" about the necessity to put an end to that monstrous and senseless slaughter.

The signers were arrested. Father was in bed sick with purulent pleurisy and was not arrested, but they did not want to keep him on the frontline, as he was a Tolstoyan.

They ordered him to go to the Polotsk Military Affairs Management, where the issue about the extension of his release from military service was to be considered. But it was the cause, not the reason.

He was to go to Polotsk because he, as all Jews, was ascribed to the Jewish Pale of Settlement and was considered a petty bourgeois of the Polotsk District. Notwithstanding all solicitations from the frontline, father was sent from the frontline in 1916, though combats took place and there was a lot of work at the hospital.

He was transferred from Polotsk to Petrograd hospital for examination, after that to Vitebsk hospital for after-examination, and finally, he was taken away from the frontline.

Father got acquainted with mother in Polotsk and in 1917 he took her with him to Petrograd, to his mother, who was her aunt.