

Morris Schiff



This is I, apprentice of clock mender. The picture was made in Tallinn in 1947.

Upon our return from evacuation I went to school. I had completely forgotten Estonian during the years of evacuation, so I had to go to Russian school. I was down-in-the-mouth for being the eldest child in the class, though Tallinn. It was hard for me to study. Frankly speaking I was also rather lazy. Languages were the hardest for me. I spoke good Russian as I learnt it in evacuation, but my writing was poor. The teacher was surprised to see my mistakes as they were so untypical. As for Estonian, both oral and written were literate, but I did not have a very good vocabulary stock. My handwriting was poor. I was pretty good with humanitarian sciences, where I could retell things, but it was hard for me to remember names and dates. It was also hard for me to learn poems by heart. I was bad at drawing. I had no ear for music. Alas, I had no capabilities. Finally, I started cutting lessons. Mother knew nothing about it of course. Only by the end of the fifth grade, she found out that I had poor marks in 5 subjects, and she went after me. When I came back home from school,, mother gave me some food, and had me study right away. She sat next to me and checked my homework. Though, I was not a gifted student, but such diligence was fruitful: I had good marks in almost all exams. I did not want to study when I was in the 6th grade. I told mother that I wanted to learn some profession. In 1947 I became apprentice of clock mender. It became my profession for the lifetime.

I was very small and feeble and was not supposed to be drafted in the army. When I turned thirty, I was told to go to the military enlistment office. It was the first and the last time I went there. My military career did not last long. During one month I cleaned the gun following the instruction of the officer. I was not allowed to shoot even once. Then I saw a tank, even looked in the hatch, but I

was not willing to get in there. Then, I was given the military card, where it was written that I was an expert in tank electric equipment. Though, all I can do with electrics is to change a light bulb. Other soldiers treated me well. I had two nicknames in the army: "brave soldier Schweig", and the second - "professor", maybe because I was the only one wearing glasses. All of them were educated, but I dropped studies in the 5th grade. For some reason, all of them came up to me with questions, asking me to tell them something. Often they even suggested doing something instead of me so that I would tell them a story in the evening. Officers did not hurt me. On my first day I was straightforward enough to say that I would not become the defender of motherland and added that I was not interested in military science. Other thing if I were the war with Germany, when Htler's troops attacked Soviet Union. In general, I did not have any patriotic feelings and was no going to defend that regime. Though many Jew, especially the Russian ones, sincerely considered themselves to be patriots, but not me. Estonia was my motherland, not Soviet Union. I served in the vicinity of Kiev, and once when I had absence without leave to see the city. My military service passed by very quickly and I came back in Tallinn. There I regained work of the clock mender.