

Berta Greben And Her Husband David



In this photo are my father's sister Berta with her husband David Greben. It was taken in Leningrad in the 1950s.

After the death of Grandma Itta in 1915 four children remained, and my father among them. It was 1917. The eldest sister Berta was 18; she had been earlier married to a very pious elderly Jew, whose surname was Greben. And they were bringing up all the children of Grandma and Grandpa together: my daddy Aron, who was 14 at that time, Nina, who was ten, and Samuel, the youngest, who at that moment was only eight years old.

Grandpa Movsha died in 1921 at the age of 50. He wore a beard, so it seemed to my dad that he was a very old man. All his life Grandpa was a tailor, he sewed clothes. It was dangerous to stay in Kiev during the Civil War and the whole extended family finally moved to Petersburg – this was in 1923. There, Berta and David's daughter Ada was born.

Berta always celebrated all the Jewish holidays with lighting of candles and prayers, as she was the wife of a religious man. Her husband, David Greben, had his own seat in the Synagogue, and every time we got together in their large 40-square-meter room in Leningrad with the whole big family to celebrate both Rosh Hashanah and Pesach. There were a large number of people: our family – my mom, me, a baby in Mom's arms, the four-year-old Volodya, my brother, and Dad –, the family of Father's brother Samuel; plus David had a brother, so he came too with his wife and their three sons; the family of my father's sister Nina. Her husband Isaac died early, in 1936, and her whole life long she was good friends with her husband's sister and brother. Thus at the table about 40 persons were gathered! There they sang Jewish songs and danced hand in hand with each other, Daddy danced putting his thumbs in his underarms. But all this was done quietly in order not to attract attention of the neighbors, and David, who was a pious Jew, never wore a beard or side locks.

Berta died in 1968 in Leningrad, a month after her husband David's death. Her whole life long she worked as a dentist, but when they came back after evacuation – during the war they lived in Omsk – she started working as a passport-clerk in the housing office. Her husband didn't work after the

war but was retired; he died in April 1968 in Leningrad. Their daughter Ada, married name Ronina, studied in the Conservatory, and died in 1993.