

Grigory Gendler With His Parents



This photograph was taken in 1940 in Moscow. It shows me together with my parents.

My father Haim Shayevich (Efim Issaevich) Gendler was born in 1897 in Ukraine (in Korosten of Kiev province, 200 km from Kiev). He moved to Kiev approximately in 1920, there he worked as a math teacher.

Later he became a handicraft man. He had got a knitting machine, and knitted caps. Later he lost his job, and in 1926 parents moved from Kiev to Moscow searching for work.

My Mom Berta Georgievna Smyk was born in 1903 in Korets (in Poland) and in 1920s she moved to Kiev. Mom was afraid to talk about the place where she was born. She was very nervous, because she suffered much.

Mom told me that when she was young and not married, she lived on the 2nd floor of a wooden house in Kiev, near a monastery.

During the Civil War gangs under the command of Petliura occupied Kiev and arranged pogroms. They tried to catch my mother, therefore she was forced to jump down from the 2nd floor, escaping from Petliura's soldiers. Unfortunately it affected her mind detrimentally.

In Kiev she did not work, at that time I was a baby. Parents observed Tradition partly: they were not deeply religious and did not observe kashrut.

In 1927 our family moved to Moscow. At first we rented a small room in Lossinoostrovsk (suburb of Moscow). I remember that in Lossinoostrovsk our samovar fell down accidentally and burned my leg. Parents took me to a doctor in a sledge.

Later we moved to the center of Moscow. Our room was situated in a cellar. Father worked as an accountant, later he became a bookkeeper, and his last 20 years he worked as a warehouse manager at the Ministry of Chemical Industry.

During the war father was in evacuation with his warehouse in Kirovochepetsk (a city in Kirov region). A chemical industrial complex was situated there.

Father died in 1961 in Moscow. Mom helped Daddy at his warehouse and worked there as a packer.

Later (after the end of the war) she sold newspapers in a kiosk in the center of Moscow. Later we moved to a room on the 3rd floor (12 square meters) near the Kiev railway station.

At school I had got a friend Tolya Myagkich, later he became an actor. His father was a member of the Moscow CPSU committee. But soon he was expelled from the CPSU, and worked as a roofer.

Mom's brother Tsale Smyk lived in Vinnitsa (Ukraine). In 1916 Tsale was a CPSU member, worked as an economic manager. He frequently visited us in Moscow, and economics occupied my attention.

In 1937 Tsale was arrested and declared a Polish spy. He was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment with confiscation and exile (it was equivalent to execution). His wife and his son were deported to Kazakhstan.

During the war his son perished in the Battle of Stalingrad, and his wife Sonya was rehabilitated in 1953.

My parents read much, but never subscribed to newspapers. In Moscow my parents often visited the Jewish theatre of Mikhoels. Parents were not CPSU members. Their wedding ceremony was carried out according Tradition.

In 1939 I finished my school. I usually spent summer vacations in Moscow, and sometimes went to pioneer summer camps in suburbs of Moscow. Before the school I did not attend kindergarten.

After school (in 1939) I entered college without entrance examinations (because my school leaving certificate was full of excellent marks). My parents did not interfere and I chose the Moscow College of Philosophy, History and Literature named after Chernyshevsky (philosophical faculty).

I studied 3 months and a half, and was called up for military service. Later my parents helped me to transfer to the correspondence department of the Moscow State University (by the way, during the war the Moscow College of Philosophy, History and Literature was liquidated).