

Rubin Kagan



This is my father Rubin Kagan. The picture was made in Liepaja in 1930.

My father Ruvim Kagan was born village Borovka, Latvia (now Vitebsk oblast in Russia) in 1890. Borovka was a rather big village. It was couple of kilometers away from Latvian town Dvinsk, present Daugavpils [about 200 km from Riga]. I have never been to Borovka, but from father's stories I know that there were a lot of Jews in Borovka. They made 30-40% of village population. There was everything in the village a standard Jewish community needed. There was a synagogue, cheder, shochet, Jewish cemetery. Borovka Jews were religious people. They observed Jewish traditions.

My father got Jewish education in childhood. There was a cheder in Borovka and father had studied there until he reached 13, bar mitzvah. Then he went to eshivah somewhere in Lithuania. Father said he lived in eshivah. Every day the students of eshivah went to have lunch in some family in accordance with the custom. There were seven families for each eshivah student. Each of the families by turns fed eshivah student. Grandmother came to see my dad and brought the products to the hostesses who fed my father. For some reason father had not studied at eshivah for a long time. I do not know why grandfather took him home. Father did not become a rabbi, he was not a religious figure, but religion was the main thing in his life. Father did not get secular education. Maybe the reason why father did not go to lyceum was his being older than other students. Grandmother taught him. Father was a rather literate man. His Russian, Lettish and Yiddish were perfect. Not only his spoken language was excellent, he also had good reading comprehension and writing skills.

I do not know what my father dealt with before he was drafted in the army. In 1908 when father turned 18, he was drafted for the mandatory service in the tsarist army. He met mother before he was drafted in the army. I do not know the story how they met. Mother's family lived in Dvinsk, not far from Borovka. Mother said that she had been waiting for father all those years of his army service. He served in remote Siberia, Irkutsk [about 5500 km to the east from Moscow]. Father said that he did well in military service. He was a disciplined soldier, so in the second year of his military service he was granted with a leave. At that time the trains were very slow, so it took father almost three weeks to get to Dvinsk from Irkutsk. He came home, visited mother and left for his service. Father was demobilized in 1911, when he was 21. In 1914 when the First World War was unleashed, father was drafted in the army again. He was in the lines in the vicinity of Warsaw, then his squad was positioned close to Riga. This is all I remember from my father's tales. He was demobilized in 1918. In late 1919 my future parents got married.

Father had his own business- he dealt with wholesale trade of products and had contracts with Germany and England. Our family belonged to middle class. We were neither poor nor rich. Apart from business father was also a representative of the Council of Entrepreneurs in Town Duma, Seim. The latter determined the amount of tax to be paid and father was involved in tax commission. Father was elected for that position unanimously year in, year out. He was much respected in the town: father was a very intelligent, kind and decent man. He was trusted. I remember from the talks of my parents that a conscientious man would levy a bigger tax on the rich and a smaller amount of tax on poor. Father was very handsome, tall and well-built.