

Shulman Leyb, Grandfather Of Mera Shulman, His Daughter Perl Berkovich And His Son-In-Law Abram Berkovich



This photograph was taken in Riga in 1930. Judging from the romantic background, it was taken at a photo studio. Obviously my grandfather came to Riga from a small town Livani, and to commemorate that festive occasion they went to a photo studio.

My paternal grandfather was very silent and modest man. He had typical appearance of a handsome Jew. He frequently walked around the house wearing tallit and tefillin. He used to read siddur. He never played with children. Probably his character was influenced by the absence of one eye: once being engaged in sewing boots, he wounded his eye by an awl and his eye came out.

My maternal grandfather was quite irreligious. However, observing Jewish holidays, he arranged circumcision for all his sons. He visited synagogue on holidays and sometimes on Fridays. Sabbath celebration at his house was something like celebratory family dinner. Kashrut observance was reduced to purchasing of kosher meat. They never bought non-kosher meat. Jewish holidays were celebrated without fail.

My father had a house in Livani, where I spent first five years of my life. This sort of houses keep their visage for years, therefore I think, that at that time I found it the same as it was long before. Its outer entrance hall was very dark: the walls were papered with Russian newspapers. Russian letters seemed to me very strange, and at the age of three I asked my Mum 'What do these hen tracks mean?' Mum named the letters, and that was the way I learned to read Russian. Earlier there was a garden around the house, but later it disappeared. I got to know about it from my father: there grew plum-trees, they gave rich harvest. Grandfather sent my daddy to collect plums from the ground, and my daddy simply opened the garden gate and let in pigs from the neighboring gentile's garden; the pigs quickly helped my daddy to manage his task.

My memory keeps almost nothing about neighbors of my grandfather. From the story about pigs it is clear, that the neighbors were different: both Jews and gentiles. Livani was, perhaps, more Jewish shtetl, but many Latvians lived there too. Daddy told about their neighbor, a tailor Moshe Sandler. When he wrote down client's measurements, he wrote 'Di' (he meant the Yiddish feminine article) and then the figure. Then again 'Di' and again figure. His explanation was the following 'The first 'Di' means 'Di Leng' [length], and the second 'Di' means 'Di Breyt' [width].

My grandfather did not manage to educate his son well. My daddy finished cheder. The schoolboys were guaranteed that after they finished that educational institution they would be able to write 'Jewish letter with Russian address'. That was their maximum program. By the way, I keep my father's letter in Russian: 'My dear children, I am THAFE and THOUND, and THISH you the THAME.' [It should be read the following way: I am safe and sound, and wish you the same. But it was written in Russian with very specific mistakes (Yiddish accent)].