

Emma Balonova's Father



I don't know when and where this photograph was taken. It shows my father and now I'll tell you about him.

My daddy left home when he was very young, and began to earn his living. He was not educated: finished only cheder, but he was a person of capacity. He had very good memory, and he was gifted in general.

He coached pupils from rich families, helped them to get prepared for school, and then to span gaps in their knowledge. His name was Mendel Kalmyk.

He was born in 1897 in Vilno region. He died in Gorky in 1943 in evacuation.

My father served in the tsarist army. I know no details about his service, but once father's photo in his uniform stroke my eye. He told me that he took that photograph before leaving for the army.

By the way, during his service in the army father had been ill with typhus and lost his hair. Since then he had to cut his hair close to the skin.

People thought that he did it in conformity with the latest revolutionary fashion of those years. But here in this photograph you can see him still having thick hair.

Having got married, my parents lodged in a small town in Belarus (I've forgotten its name). Soon they moved to Minsk. And I was born on April 17, 1920 in Vitebsk.

Mum did not want to give birth in Minsk, because she was afraid that father would not allow arranging bar mitzvah for the newborn boy (she was sure a boy would be born).

But it was me who was born, and our family remained in peace: I already told you that my father was an atheist.

When he was a child, he used to sing at the synagogue because he had got a good voice, but when he grew up, at the age of 19, he broke with religion and became a communist.

He always told me and my sisters that there was no God. And it went without saying that our family members could arrange no bar mitzvah for newborn boys.

My father joined the Russian Social Democratic Worker's Party of bolsheviks in 1919 and soon became a professional Party worker. [The Russian Social Democratic Worker's Party (of bolsheviks) appeared in 1917.

In March 1918 it was renamed the Russian Communist Party, in 1925 renamed All-Union Communist Party, and in 1952 - Communist Party of the Soviet Union.]

He worked there almost all his life long, only in his later years he became a director of the Evening Pedagogical Institute in Gomel.

In Minsk he worked as the first secretary of MOPR.

What an odd mixture is human memory! I do not remember the number of rooms in our apartment, but can recall some political events clearly. Probably it was connected with my father's work.

Well, in 1927 two Italian communists Sacco and Vanzetti were executed because they were communists and were in touch with the Soviet government.

[Nikola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, Italians by birth were workers and revolutionaries in the USA.

In 1920 they were charged in murder, brought in a verdict of guilty and sentenced to death penalty.] In Minsk there took place a great manifestation of protest against that execution. I remember the large square in the central district of Minsk.

It was overcrowded with people carrying banners and slogans. Leaders of the city mounted the rostrum, and my father was among them. He even made a speech. And he took me (what a mercy!) with him to the rostrum. It was impossible to be forgotten!