

Albert Tsessarskiy



This is me at the age of 1. The picture was made in Odessa in 1921.

My parents were from Vapnyarka. It is a small town in the vicinity of Vinnitsa [about 200 km to the south from Kiev]. My father Benjamin Tsessarskiy was born in Vapnyarka in 1888. He became orphan at a young age. He was raised by his only elder brother, who lived in Odessa at that time. Elder brother painted and plastered walls. Father finished cheder in Vapnyarka. Then he finished Realschule in Odessa, but he was not involved in commerce. Like most modest poor people he started repairing watches.

My mother, nee Novokovskaya was also from Vapnyarka. Mother's name was Esfir. She also remained an orphan at a young age. Mother had 2 sisters- Sonya and Raya. It turned out that my parents knew each other in Vapnyarka and fell in love. When grandmother was dying she asked them to get married. When grandmother died, sisters left for Odessa, where mother met father. They got married in 1907.

Father worked as a repairer of watches. He had a small shop-a booth, where he had been working from dawn till night. I remember that he repaired watches at home. He must have been a good expert as he always had a lot of work to do. The family had lived in a constant feeling of fear. Mother was a housewife. When NEP was cancelled and expropriation commenced, father was arrested for 3 times as they thought that he had some precious things that should be requisitioned. But he did not have anything, so he was held at the police station for couple of days and released. Father took after grandfather and had a literary talent. Father was a religious man. He observed Jewish rites the best way he could. I remember that on the balconies of the houses, where a lot of Jews used to live, sukkaths were installed. Father tried doing that as well. He took me to the synagogue. He did not go there regularly, just on Sabbaths and holidays. He wore secular clothes. He did not realize his talent. He was capable in many ways. He was very good at mathematics.

Mother was not religious. She was secular. First she started working as a janitor with skimpy wages. She was not educated, but she was very active. My parents had three children. The first girl Luba died young, and then my sister Alexandra was born in 1908 and I was born in 1920.

Mother and father got along very well, though they were rather poor. They had such vastly different characters! Of course, our energetic and brisk mother was the head of the family. They rarely spoke Yiddish, they mostly spoke Russian. We lived in Odessa on the third floor of a 3-storied stone house, located in the place very close to the center.

Mother was a housewife, but she could not tend me as she was not patient enough to take care of me. I was on my own, spending most time in the street. As far as I remember at the age of 5 or 6 I was given to the group of children headed by German governess.

It is difficult to say who impacted my character more. I think that not only my family had influence on me. We, boys and girls, practically stayed on the street. There was a small saw-mill in the neighboring yard. I remember how we, guys, built a hut from the waste wood of the plant. We organized commune there. It meant that all of us snatched the products from home, took them to the commune and shared in equal pieces. In general, I was a convinced communist. The formula itself 'liberty, equality, brotherhood' was so close to my heart that I thought that there could not be anything higher than that.