

Isaac Aizman And His Friend



This is my father, Isaac Aizman, (to the right) in the uniform of a Soviet soldier. The picture was taken in the vicinity of Riga in 1940 when my father was sent for training in the lines as he was subject to call-up. I don't know who is standing by my father. This slightly damaged picture was given to our family by our pals when I came back to Riga from the orphanage. After the war we did not have a single picture of Father, as all of them were lost during the bombing of the train on our way into evacuation.

My father became an orphan when he was a five-year-old. He was taken to the orphanage in Dvinsk. He stayed there until he reached his teens. He went to a Jewish elementary school and most likely to cheder. At any rate, he knew how to read and write both Yiddish and Ivrit. He was also fluent in Lettish and Russian. When father left the orphanage, he could count only on himself. He was supposed to provide for his living. His dream was to become a doctor. Medicine appealed to him since childhood.

I don't know how Father lived for the first couple of years. Then he found work as a nurse's aide at the hospital for the poor. It was a very hard job. He did all the cleaning and washing in the wards and offices, washed the patients, changed bed linen. Of course, his job had little to do with medicine, but Father felt that he helped the sick ones. He also paid attention to the work of the medical attendants and junior doctors and tried to remember those things. He learned more and more and gradually he became a medical attendant.

Later on he entered the medical department. I don't recall in what town. It was hard for him to study. It was because he lacked money and there was nobody to help. On the other hand, he was in a much better position than other students, as he had gained practical experience when working as a medical attendant. Father had to work and study at the same time to pay tuition and to scrape through. He slept two to three hours a day, as he had to do homework for the classes. He lived like that for five years. But still, he coped with the situation and graduated from the neurosurgical department.

He got an offer at the Jewish hospital Bikkur Holim in Riga. Latvia was independent at that time, the pale of settlement was abolished and Jews were permitted to live in Riga. He didn't have anybody in Daugavpils, so he had no reason to come back. Father settled in Riga. He was a surgeon in the Jewish hospital and performed very complicated operations. Only Jews worked in that hospital - both doctors and nurses. The patients were also mostly Jews, but nobody was refused from help. Non-Jews were treated as well. The hospital was maintained by the Jewish community of Riga.

When on 22nd June Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Father was drafted into the army right away. He was a military doctor, but he was a surgeon, so he was subject to call up. When leaving, Father had my mother's word to get evacuated. Mother was against evacuation, but Father said that the Germans would kill the Jews. At that time, very few Jews thought that the Germans would kill Jewish people. In a about a week after Father's departure, when the Germans were approaching Riga, Mother decided that it was time to leave.