

Yakov Bunke And His Family



This is our family. My maternal grandfather Mende Ril is sitting to the left, grandmother Golda Ril is next to him. From left to right standing: their younger daughter Ginda, I, in a kap, my sister Genya, to the right is my mother Taube Bunke. The picture was made in Plunge in 1930s in Plunge.

I was born in Plunge. I have lived here all life long. My cognates lived in Plunge 400 years ago. Grandmother said that her parents, whose name I cannot recall, were rather well-off. They had their own bakery. Besides, great grandfather was also a rather good tailor. Their daughter- my grandmother Golda Kagan- also worked all her life. My grandfather Mende Ril was a trader and grandmother helped him. Both of them were born in Plunge in middle 1870s. Mother said that one of the things she remembered from childhood was when the parents processed flax, and it was their main business. She helped them standing on the stool to be able to reach the processing machine. The clients who came over to her parents, treated her with sweets. Grandfather was also a tailor and a baker. Grandparents owned a small bakery. When I was a child I remember that grandmother sold grain and grandpa was a gabe in a local synagogue. He was almost blind. Grandparents had their own house. Even now it is in the heart of Plunge, where old houses are preserved.

My mother Taube Ril was born in Plunge in 1895. Mother finished elementary Jewish school and was rather literate- she knew written and spoken Yiddish, spoke Russian and Lithuanian. When she was single, she helped parents in their business, often replacing grandma in many house chores as grandmother was busy with sale. Nobody told me how my parents met. I think it was prearranged by shedchans, who organized almost all Jewish marriages. Their wedding took place 1920, in a

chuppah in Plunge synagogue.

My parents never had their own house. After wedding they settled in the house of grandpa Mended and had lived here for several years. Here in 1921 my sister was born, who was named after my grandmother Dina. On 13 July 1923 I was born. I was named Iosif after paternal grandfather. There were five more children born after me. One of them- a boy, lived couple of days only. He even was not given a name. In 1925 Abram was born and in 1932 - Genya, in 1936 - Channa , and in 1938 - the youngest Mena.

We lived very moderately. Father was not a gendarme. He received timber at the saw mill. Mother took care of children and modest household. We often ran up to grandparents who lived in 4 or 5 houses from us on the same street. Grandmother was always busy. She sold grain which she took on the mill, located not far. Then she sold it at a higher price (couple of cents up from miller's price) and made some money this way. Besides, she and grandpa baked very tasty challahs and pretzels, the latter were very popular with the neighbors and they were sold out very quickly. Almost every morning grandpa Mende brought us a bundle of freshly baked pretzels and we drank them with milk or cocoa. Grandpa also saw a little bit. He was an expert in all cloth making - he could make clothing for kids and he could make things from leather. With time his sight got worse and he stopped sewing. He had a rare gift. Now people would say that he was a psycho. People often asked him for help and he treated them with his methods.

Our family was of the largest in Plunge. There was one poor man who had 11 kids, who were constantly hungry. We were neither poor nor rich. We were helped a lot by mother's brother Nehemia. My elder sister Dina was raised by grandparents. She lived with them, and it helped to accommodate our large family in two rooms, besides it was easier from the standpoint of expenses.