

Yakov Bunke And His Family



These are my parents Taube and Leibl Bunke. Mother is holding me and father - my sister Dina. My brother Dovid Bunke is standing. The picture was made in Plunge in 1924.

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.

My father Leibl Bunke was born in Shilale in 1895. He was just couple of months older than mother. Father finished elementary school in Shilale, but he could not continue his education as he was an orphan. He was very gifted and he was self-taught. He was literate. Apart from Yiddish, father also knew Russian, Lithuanian. He composed verses and songs, and could sing them. When he was young, he was often invited to the weddings, where he sang songs composed by him. He was invited both for Jewish and Lithuanian weddings. Father loved Lithuania. He was a patriot. During the World War One, he was not drafted in the tsarist army as he was the eldest in the family. In 1919 during the civil war in Russia, Lithuania founded volunteers' army to fight for the independence from Russia. Father joined the army. I struggled against Red army regiments, Poles and Germans and finally Lithuania got independence. Father took part in the battles and was even wounded on the cheek. He had the medals and orders. When Lithuania got independence, all volunteers got land plots. Father was given 8 hectares in Plunge. For a while he worked at the customs on the frontier with Russia, checking the cargoes and the people who were going to cross

the border. Then he was a gendarme in Plunge. When he was in police, he met mother and in 1920 they wedding took place 1920, in a chuppah in Plunge synagogue.. I kept their marriage certificate, issued by rabbi, but I gave it to the Jewish museum along with father's awards obtained in struggle for independence.

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. He was a literate man, he calculated the volumes and made the settlements with the suppliers. Illiterate Jews and Lithuanians often asked him to write a letter or a claim. My father, who had not got any education, and learnt everything himself due to his talents, was also a very kind person and did not refuse anybody. Father's voice was still good and he was invited to Jewish weddings. He was a mirthful man. He managed to compose the verses about the people who surrounded them and sang them. Besides, he took part in amateur Jewish theater in Plunge. Mother took care of children and modest household. Our apartment consisted of two rooms and a kitchen. Parents took bedroom, where younger children also slept. The elder ones stayed in a drawing room, where four or five of us slept on a large bed. The kitchen was poky. Russian stove, used for cooking and heating, took most of its part. The water was taken from the well in the yard. We had a small kitchen garden, where mother grew flowers and some herbs.