

Yakov Bunke And His Family



This is our family. My mother Taube Bunke is sitting to the left, she is holding my younger sister Channa, I am standing to the right in a cap, next to me is my brother Abram Bunke, older sister Dina is behind us, our sister Genya is in the front, Plunge, 1937.

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. 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.

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.

Of course, Jewish traditions were observed in our family. There were separate dishes for milk and meat. There was no pork. Hens were taken to shochet, whose shichta was in the yard of the synagogue. I often went there as per mother's request.