

Yakov Bunke And His Sister Dina With Their Schoolmates



Plunge Elementary Jewish school. I am the 4rth to the right in the 2nd row, my sister Dina is the third to the left in top row. The picture was made in Plunge, 1930s.

I was born in Plunge in 1923. I remember myself since the age of five. The years we spent in rented apartment and the years spend in grandma's place were not engrossed on my memory. My first recollection from childhood goes back to 3 years. We lived on the street going up the hill. In winter peasants took the timber to the state authorities. I often sat by the window and looked them painfully climbing the hill. At times even horses fell. At that time I took a pencil and drew what I saw. Sister Dina, who was studying in the first grade of the Jewish school, took that picture to school. At that time there was an art exhibition for children at school. Sister took my picture and gave it out for hers. My picture won the first prize and sister had to confess that it was the picture of her younger brother. I was asked to come to school to pick up my award - an album and a set of pencils. Since that time I had been drawing anything I saw.

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.

There was a melamed not far from house. Jewish boys went to his cheder. My father, being a rather modern man, decided not to give me in cheder, thinking that religious education was the matter of the past. Boys and I even mocked melamed as we did not like him for some reason. Now I am ashamed of it. I went to elementary Jewish school when I turned 6. Studies were in Yiddish and I did pretty well. I went here for 4 years and having finished it went to lyceum in Plunge. Here studies were in Ivrit and it was hard at first. All subjects were taught in Ivrit and even textbooks were in Ivrit. In couple of weeks I started understand a lot and after the first semester I was pretty good at Ivrit. I think in childhood things are better and quicker perceived. I joined Ashomer Ahatsir, but did not stay there for long.