

Shlema And Ella Kuyavskiys



These are my parents Shlema and Ella Kuyavskiys. The picture was taken not far from our house in Lodz in 1938. I do not remember what street it was.

My father Shlema Kuyavskiy was born in Lodz in 1884. He went to cheder in his childhood as it was customary for the families of righteous Jews. He did not go on with his education. He learnt the rudiments of reading and writing, which was enough to run his business. Father made all calculations in pencil at the door jamb. Every Friday we witnessed one and the same scene. Mother wiped out father's notes from the door while cleaning the house before Sabbath and father indignantly would cry out, "Oh my God, what have you done. I will go bust", reproaching her that he would not know who owned him. Mother calmly replied that he could start his calculations next week. Father cooled down until next Friday. Then the story started all over again.

Father had a rather stable business. There was a workshop at home, where six women worked under father's supervision. Mother was in charge of them. They sewed quilts for sale. The quilts were given to the store, which paid us money when they were sold. It was a rather stable income, though it was not very big. It was the so-called family business, ran by parents.

My mother Ella Rozenblum was born in 1886 in Lodz. She finished elementary Jewish school and couple of classes of lyceum. Judging by the fact that my elder brother was born in 1914, my parents were married in 1913. I do not know how they met: whether it was arranged by shadhans or they met in the company of some Jewish people. Parents did not have their own house. They rented an apartment, where we were born and spent our childhood and adolescence. Mother was

considered literate for those times. She could read and write in Yiddish and Polish. Moreover, she was multitalented. She was actually in charge of quilt making workshop. She was the one who created the patterns, she controlled the quality. She was a pretty good administrator. Father was responsible for purchase of necessary raw materials, equipment and for the sale of the end product as he had the contacts, who owned the stores, where the quilts, produced by our family, were sold.

Work did not interfere with her main purpose - she gave birth and raised four sons. The first-born Moishe was born in 1914 on the eve of the first world war, during which our family and close relatives stayed in Lodz as well as many other Jews, considering Germans to be quite positive. They thought that Germans had a good attitude to Jews, bought different goods and products from them. Of course some people were killed in action, but practically nothing changed for peaceful citizen, including Jewish population. Another evidence for that is that my brother Isaac was born in 1917, when the World War One was in the full swing. The twins were born on 16 January 1925. I, Meer, was the older one. My brother Benjamin came into world 15 minutes later. Even now I am still wondering how mother managed to cope with everything- to run the workshop, sew, cook, feed a large family, make clothes for us and do laundry.

My mother was raised in a religious family and strictly observed Jewish traditions. She always wore wig and only in postwar times she took it off keeping abreast with the times. We only had kosher food. Meat and poultry was bought only in kosher meat stores. Live poultry, purchased on the market, was taken in synagogue to shochet by some of the elders. I remember such a case from my childhood. Mother was sick and was put in the hospital. Father asked one of the ladies who worked with us to buy meat for us and gave her money for that. When she brought the meat, father was surprised that there was so much of it. It turned out that the lady bought us non-kosher meat as she did not stick to the traditions despite being a Jew. Father decided to conceal that blatant fact from mother, but some of the workers told her about it later on. Mother said to my father: "Well. Shleime have you saved a lot of money? - Now buy me new dishes". She threw away all the dishes, including spoons and father had to buy new one. In general, we were typical Jews.