

Beitler Leibl And His Employees



This is the meeting of the cooperative member, where my father was the chairman. My father, the fourth to the right in the top row. A lady in the middle row to the left, with white collar is our neighbour- Lithuanian Yordene. Her husband Yodris is to next to her. We were friends. When we were leaving for evacuation, they brought us bread and honey to be taken with us. The picture was made in Zagare in 1940.

My father Leibl Beitler was born in 1909. He was the most apt as grandmother used to say. He was tall, strong, meek and kind, the protector of the weak. Grandmother once told a story. When father was 19 he saw a gang of drunk Lithuanians teasing a Jew. He removed a shaft and had the gang leave the place. Father's family was very poor, so he finished only 4 classes of Jewish public school. Then he was apprenticed by a cobbler. Before he turned 22, he helped grandmother and went with her to buy fish. When he got married, she started working as a cobbler.

My parents were sociable, modern and advanced people. I remember how I took lunch to my father's work. He worked as a cobbler at the shop owned by a Jew, then by a Lithuanian. Cobblers were sitting on the stools covered with leather and having leather aprons on bare skin in sultry summer weather. Father was very strong and I remembered his sinews when he was working. Father's best friend Pina Zhukov was also working there. Pina and his came to us on Saturday at times, they were always present at seder. Pina had three sons, which were my age and I liked to communicate with those boys.

At that times Jews were politically classified into Zionists and communists. Usually, well-bred and rich people belonged to Zionists. My father and his friend Pina were underground communists. It is hard for me to say what exactly my dad did. One of the most important tasks of their organization was to make the social library for the workers. It was established by my father and it was located in our house. There were several shelves full of books in our large room. Every day a librarian Daniel Kravets came to us and handed the books to the workers. I do not know what literature it was as I was not interested in those things at that time. I think those were banned books written by proletarian writers.

In late July 1940 Red Army units came in Lithuania and the Soviets came to power. Jews, mostly poor, were happy for it, as they had a hope for a better life. Not only Jews welcomed Russians, but also poor Lithuanians. There were constant meetings with the soviets, their movies were on. My parents were happy to see the soviets at power. Mother kept working. Father was assigned the chairman of the cooperative society. I do not know what that company was involved in, but father stopped being a cobbler. We started having a better life. I even remember that we bought two pairs of new shoes. My parents could not afford that before.