

Boris Shteinas



This is I during my army service in Kovel in 1953.

In 1952 I was drafted in the army. During my work at the plant, there were people who offered recruitment at KGB. I dreamt of the military jacket and found military service very romantic, but father was flatly against my working in state security and had me give my word that I would never join militia or KGB. When I was in the army I was enrolled in sergeant school in Minsk, and after that I was assigned in aviation in aerodrome maintenance. I worked with radars. Then I was transferred to Kovel. I had business trips to other towns, for instance in Saratov. I got along with my colleagues. I even thought of extended army service. Though, it was in the doctors' plot. The anti-Semitic campaign was in full swing in the country. Every paper published the articles about doctors- poisoners. Those articles were read during political classes. My moral state was very difficult. I remember, once I was sitting at the table in canteen, and deputy political officer came up to me and said: "Shteinas, what is easier for you to pronounce corn or millet?". He picked the words with letter to hear my burr. I swallowed my first insult. There was another case. Before I was assigned on duty in the kitchen- one soldier came up to me- he was a member of national minority from Middle Asia and said: "Boris, let's go in the kitchen, I will make you the cutlets, which kikes cooked for government ". I could not stop myself and beat him. I should say that Lithuanian guys who were in my unit, stood up for me. The insult that I had to see in the army, changed my attitude to military service and to life in general. When Stalin died in March 1953, I was to be in the sentry by the leader's portrait. I was not mourning, just thinking how cold I got. I understood that he was a tyrant and thousands of people perished through his fault.

I was constantly writing home. Life was hard on my parents. Father worked very hard. In 1953 he was getting weaker and weaker. Mother sewed a lot and got kopecks for that. Father's uncles-

Kushiel and Pina helped our family. At that time we had problems. The landlord wanted to exchange his apartment, where I was living with my parents before army service, and evicted my parents. They had nowhere to go. There were litigations, but still the court made the ruling to evict my parents. Father wrote me a letter that they had no place to live. Then I went to the commander of military unit and asked for permission to write a letter to the minister of defense Bulganin. I wrote a letter. Deputy political officer checked it and sent it in Moscow. In a week or two I came in the barrack from the sentry and saw soldiers clustered by my bunk. There was a letter from the Ministry of Defense lying on my pillow. The guys started crying out that I was to be demobilized. The letter was not about demobilization. The letter was sent to me with the copies to the military unit commander, chairman of Siauliai municipal authorities. The letter said that the secretary of defense of Lithuanian republic was instructed to provide permanent lodging for the family of military officer Boris Shteinas. Soon father said that the chairman of ispolkom came to them in person and offered a small apartment. He said it was temporary lodging and promised to provide a better apartment later. Parents were happy with that they got- a large room with the stove. It was their own now.

In 1954 I got the telegram from home. Mother said that father was afflicted with cancer and was dying. I was permitted to go home immediately. I saw my father alive, and he died in my hands. There were people in the community, who took care of Jewish funerals. Father was buried according to the Jewish rite- he was carried across the town and buried in shroud without a coffin. Jews prayed at home and at the cemetery. Shivah was observed. I was in the army, so my underwear shirt was cut not to spoil my military jacket.

In 1956 I was demobilized. I was offered to stay in the army, but I was looking forward to go home. I had to help mother, whose life was difficult. When I came home in late fall, my brother Avigdor wore slippers, as he did not have any other footwear.