

Chaim Gersh Gershenovich



This is a passport photograph of my father Chaim Gersh Gershenovich, taken in Kaunas in the 1930s.

My father was born in 1886. My father had very poor eye-sight since childhood. He was practically disabled. Nonetheless, he managed to finish cheder as Grandfather Yakob couldn't allow that his eldest son got no Jewish education. My father knew Yiddish, Hebrew and knew by heart several chapters of the Torah. There was no chance that Father could go on with his education – neither from the physical standpoint, his eye-sight, nor from the material one, as Father was the eldest out of the children and had to start working as soon as possible in order to help out his parents. When he turned twelve, Grandfather bought him a small, but strong horse and Father became a cabman. He transported production items of the concrete plant, the owner of which, a Jew called Tipograf paid rather skimpy money. The production items were rather heavy: stairs flights, concrete slabs, well discs, and Father couldn't cope with loading or unloading them by himself. The most important thing is that he could barely see the road and couldn't handle the horse. That is why Father hired an assistant, who traveled with him and with whom he shared his skimpy earnings. This way, Father earned his bread and butter in adolescence and when he was a married man with a wife and children.

In 1909 my father proposed to my mother. Of course, old Jewish match-makers played their role. My parents wouldn't have met each other without them. Their wedding took place in Zarasai. My parents were wed under a chuppah in a local synagogue. They moved to Kaunas after the wedding. Grandfather Berl Idl bought them a tiny house on Grushevaya Street in Zelyonaya Gora. He and

Hanna also moved there as it was hard for the two of them to take care of the farm without my mother. Since that time Berl Idl and Hanna lived with my parents. Grandfather died in 1919 and Hanna was buried in 1928.

In 1910 Mother gave birth to my elder sister Hanna and in 1913 Rochl was born. On 14th December 1914 I came into the world. I was called Toybe-Rivke. My parents dreamt of a son and fate sent them two. In 1917 Efraim was born in and in 1920 the youngest son was born and named after Grandfather Berl Idl, who had just passed away.

Apart from food, it was also necessary to save money to get fodder for the horse as it was our only source of income. Father, a very frugal man, made a small box, with the help of which he measured oats for the horse, so it wouldn't eat more than needed. We loved our sweet horse and stealthily gave it handful of oats. The horse knew us and always stretched towards us, touching us with her mouth and wet warm muzzle. That horse was the only entertainment and a toy for me ever since my earliest childhood.