

Tsylia Liatun's Father Mendel-Leib Kats



This is my father Mendel-Leib Kats. This photo was taken in Riga in 1921, shortly before my parents' wedding.

My father was born in 1889 in Ionishkis, Lithuania [then part of Russia], he was the oldest child in the family. When grandfather died my father was 12. He realized there was nobody but himself to rely on. In 1901 he left Lithuania for Riga where he became a courier in a haberdashery store. Father was honest and hardworking and soon became a trade agent. He traveled in the country executing trade deals. He finished Russian grammar school - he passed exams without attending classes. He was eager to start his own business, but he could only dream about it since he had no money. Father met my mother in 1912. They started seeing each other, when in 1914 World War I began and my father was recruited to the army. My father didn't like to talk about his seven years of service in the army that lasted [Because of World War I, October Revolution and Civil War]. He returned home in 1921. My parents had a traditional wedding with a chuppah in 1921. My father was 32 and my mother was 34 when they got married.

My father was thinking about starting his own business. His landlord helped him. He suggested that my father rent a facility for a store on the ground floor and gave my father some money without having any guarantee to get it back. My father began selling bagels and was a success. Gradually he began to purchase haberdashery, fabrics and underwear in Germany. He finished a commercial school and learned English after the wedding. He also knew French, German and Latish. My father often traveled. He attended famous World exhibitions in Paris and London and knew the market for his goods very well. Later he rented the 2nd floor for a haberdashery store. He was awarded the title of merchant of Guild 1. He had many business contacts with many people of different origin. They often came to us, even to dinner to our home, but they were not friends. My parents only had Jewish friends. On big holidays my father put on his tallit and went to pray at the synagogue.