

Asta Pekker's Father, Grigoriy Illich Pekker



My father, Grigoriy Illich Pekker. The picture was taken in Novosibirsk, 1965.

My grandfather, my mother's father, Pyotr Borisovich Shwartzman, was director of a Soviet-German oil company from 1927 to 1933. He worked in Berlin on behalf of the Soviet government. My grandfather's life story was very interesting. He was born in Warsaw, some time in early 80-ies of the 19th century. His family must have been quite well off to give the boy Jewish and secular education. He finished high school and two departments at the Warsaw University. In 1905 he was expelled from University for participation in students' disorders. He spent in prison in Warsaw for some time. According to the family legend he was staying there with a man, quite young at the time, he didn't know his name, but he knew his nickname. He was called Long. Later on it turned out that this was Felix Dzerzhinskiy, who further on became my grandfather's guarantor for all Soviet positions that he held. In 1907 or 1908 my grandfather Pyotr Borisovich Shwartzman left Warsaw for Petersburg taking with him or kidnapping, according to the family legend, Yelizaveta Lanee, his fiancée, future wife and my grandmother. In Petersburg he graduated from legal and engineering departments at University. At 32 he knew nine languages being an outstanding specialist in the sphere of jurisprudence and oil industry. The newly weds Pekkers lived in Moscow, Petersburg and then Odessa. My grandfather was working at the Russian affiliate of the Nobel Company. During the Soviet period he, who by the way had never been a communist, was on high official posts. In 1925 or 26 he became director of a Russian-German oil company in Berlin.

He even toured Japan. He was the first Soviet performer of music there. It is interesting that when the question of departure turned up, he received employment proposal from various musical communities. He even got such invitations from Australia.

It happened so that early thirties became a peak of my Papa's foreign artistic carrier. My father Grigoriy Pekker was born in 1905 in the town of Yekaterinoslav, Dnepropetrovsk at present. He was the thirteenth child in the family. His parents' - Illia Pekker and Daria Pekker - children became musicians. They were musicians themselves. They organized a real and maybe the first family orchestra in the vicinity of Dnepropetrovsk (Yekaterinoslav) some time around the fifties or sixties. Not only the children, but also their Mama and Papa (i.e. my grandfather and grandmother) played the violin. And the children were taught to play the instruments, that were needed in the orchestra. After this musical family moved from their town to Dnepropetrovsk they even played professionally in the local movie theater.

My Papa could come back to Moscow, Russia, from abroad only by 1953. That was the end of his carrier abroad. Since then he worked as professor in various conservatories in the Soviet Union.

Since 1960 my parents were living in Novosibirsk, my father was Professor in the Conservatory and gave concerts. And anti-Semitism was much softer in the eastern and northern parts of the Soviet Union than in its central regions and particularly in Ukraine. Papa was working until the last days of his life. He died there, in Novosibirsk, in 1983, and my Mama died in 1986.