

Efim Shpielberg's Father Israel Shpielberg With His Fellow-Employees



My father Israel Shpielberg (second from right standing) with his fellow-employees. The photo was taken in Odessa in 1932.

My father was born in a village near Odessa in 1898. He probably studied in cheder. He spoke Yiddish at home and knew prayers in Hebrew. It's hard to say whether he finished a secondary school, but he could speak, read and write in Russian and Ukrainian. By the standards of our poor Jews district Moldavanka he was a man with education. My father came to Odessa when he was a young man already. He studied the profession of fabric cutter and did his work very well.

My father met my mother at a party. After they met he came to my grandmother Tsyvia and said 'If you don't give your consent to my marrying Maria I will commit a suicide. I shall go to the sea and drown'. This is what my grandmother told me about his introductions. My parents got married in 1928. My mother told me that the rabbi from our synagogue was invited to the wedding and there was a chuppah installed in the yard. My father wore a new suit that he made himself and a new cap.

My parents had three children. I was born in 1929. My sister Riva was born in 1932 and the youngest Tsylia was born in 1934. We lived in a single two-storied building in Sredniaya Street in a one-room apartment with a big verandah.

My father was a tall fair-haired, healthy and very handsome man. He was a communist. I think he joined the party in the late 1920s. He was very serious about his status as a communist and was always very honest. I don't remember my father going to the synagogue or praying at home, but he observed the Jewish holidays with the family and ate kosher food. But when necessary, my father worked on Saturday. There was famine in Ukraine in 1933 and my father went to work in the port for food coupons. The whole family could have meals in a diner at the port. My father was a senior man in a crew of loaders. There were shipments of raisins and olives delivered to the port. Loaders stole some olives or raisins putting bags with them in their bootlegs to take them home for their families. My mother asked my father to bring some for the children, but he replied: 'I shall not do anything like this. I am a decent Jew and communist'.

Later he went to work as chief fabric cutter in the garment shop of Odessa military regiment. He worked in the shop and at home. He made wonderful uniforms for officers and very skillfully 'straightened a chest' in overcoat. When officers had an urge to have their orders completed they used to come to our home for fittings. It was quite an event and we all went to look at an officer and his car. My father also cut trousers that my mother sewed together and sold. He was a very skilful tailor. Now, experts like my father, own fashion houses. In 1937 my father went to Middle Asia, to Tashkent, looking for an opportunity to earn more money. It didn't work there and my father returned home. In 1939 my father was recruited to the army and sent to the war with Finland. He returned half a year later and continued his work in the military unit fashion shop.

During Great Patriotic War my father served in a fighting battalion deployed in the town to fight landing troops of the enemy. Later my father went to the front. He served near Odessa and then their unit was retreating with Primorskaya army. My father perished near Rostov in 1943.