

Tobiash Starozum With Employees



Smoke break at a penitentiary institution for teenagers. I am among its inmates. I wear uniform of soviet army is temporary WWII. Photo made in Zhygulyovsk in 1950s. A colleague of mine had just bought a "Senith" camera and was taking photographs just for fun.

In 1941 in Samarkand I got a job as stage worker at the Opera Theater. I met a Jewish man at the Theater. His name was Isaac Sirota. He was a political officer at the trade school. He helped me to get a job at the agricultural trade school. He recommended me to the director and this director gave me a probation task to make mattresses. I had this task completed in no time and got the position of logistics manager. I also received a room at this trade school. There were students from various regions at school. There were Jews from Minsk, Kiev and other towns among them. The students had meals at the canteen and it was my job to do quality inspection of food. My hungry period of time was over.

We tried to take good care of the children orphaned by the war and give them sufficient food and clothing. We made uniforms for them. There was no anti-Semitism.

I was well respected and valued and in 1944. I got a job offer to take a positions at work camps for children. I accepted this offer and worked at such institution as logistics manager until 1975. We read newspapers to be aware of the situation at the front. I read the "Tashkent Truth" newspaper and listened to the radio. I learned to read in Russian, but I also remembered my mother tongue. At the end of 1946 my parents and sister moved to Palestine. I felt very lonely after my family left the country and put all my effort into work. I understood that children in work camps needed help and care. Our management was very efficient and involved inmates of the camp into manufacture of roll-bearings, aluminum ladders and other things that were in demand.

In 1952 director of the camp where I was working (one of many labor camps, #365) was transferred to the town of Zhygulyovsk on the Volga (at present it is the town of Toliatti) to become director of a new work camp. He offered me to go with him and I agreed. I became logistics manager at that camp, too. Never I heard any curse words addressed to me. People didn't even tease me for my accent. I have always been nice to people. I never refused to help them.

I had a neighbor. Her name was Nadezhda Sidorenko. She came from Chornobyl (Editor's note: after disaster at the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant inhabitants of Chornobyl were evacuated to various regions in Ukraine). Nadezhda and her son's family moved to Lvov. She is Russian. She was born in 1927. She decided that she wanted to live the rest of her life with me. We have been together for 12 years. We get along well and have a good life.

I just told her then to leave her keys to the children and come to my apartment. She did so. She knows that Jews are reliable men and that I am.

In the recent years I noticed a change in the attitude towards the Jews. There is no anti-Semitism on the state level. The cultural life is becoming more active. Jewish theaters come on tours. Jewish folk groups come on tours and we can go to watch Jewish movies. And I have noticed that not only Jews attend these events. Besides, the Jewish Charity fund plays a big role in the development of the national self-consciousness. I go there sometimes to read Jewish newspapers or to listen to lectures. I am a member of the Sholem Alechem Association in Khesed. We celebrate holidays there. Nadezhda enjoys going with me. I am very interested in Jewish life. I am so glad that our people are so united. I enjoy attending events at the Khesed and happy for the people getting together.

I would give anything in the world to go to Israel. All I want is going to the graves of my parents. But I never managed to go there for different reasons, work or health condition. However, I have no regrets.