

Workers In A Forced Labor Camp



This is a photo of one of the forced labor camps, where my father Samuil Arditi was sent to. The photo was taken in Shiroka Poliana in 1942, but my papa isn't on the photo.

During the war, dad was sent to a forced labor camp and my mother was cleaning the casks of some Jews, who intended to sell them. As a matter of fact, my father was sent to four Jewish forced labor camps. The first was in the village of Izvorche, Lovech region, the second in Shiroka Poliana, Batak region, the third in Dupnitsa, and I don't know where the fourth was. The last time my father came back from a forced labor camp his back was all in violet straps from beating. He never told us why he was beaten. I know he arrived by train at 3am, but he didn't call us until 6am. He stayed at the front door stairs in order not to wake us up. He was afraid he was infested with lice. Then mum undressed him in the yard, kindled a big fire and boiled all his clothes in a cauldron. After that she wrapped him in a bed sheet; it was snowing outside! Then she cleaned him from lice in the house.

My mother's encounter with the commissioner Belev of the so-called Committee on Jewish Affairs in 1943 was interesting. The Committee was formed after the arrival of the Germans in Bulgaria, that is after the Law for the Protection of the Nation was passed. Mum herself insisted to meet him at the time when they intended to expel us from our house. Her meeting was organized by a friend of a friend of Julia de la Gnese, who was in turn my father's friend. She was a very decent woman; she taught me French for free. She fell in love with some German and we used her contact. Although pointless, this encounter was remembered. I accompanied my mother - Belev appeared to me tall and sinister, with a yellowy-white face, pale as a dead man. My mother entered and came out again immediately. And said: 'Impossible'. That meant, we had to leave our house; we weren't allowed to stay there. But I remember well the cleaning woman at the Committee, who was sweeping and in front of her some young Germans in uniforms were sitting and smoking. She cursed them in the face: 'Got smite them', she shouted, 'and me, to sweep their shits here! Who brought them here?' And so on. A man heard her and said, 'What the hell are you talking! They will

hear you!' 'You don't say! They don't speak Bulgarian let alone Shopski dialect.'