

Jacob Nitsberg With His Fiancee



This is my uncle Jacob Nitsberg, my mother's elder brother with his fiancée, I do not remember her name. The picture was made before Jacob left to the front during World War I. It is written overleaf: "My last minutes in Chernigov before being sent for military service. As a keepsake for our friendship. 27.02.1915". The picture was made in Chernigov.

My mother's family lived in Chernigov [180 km from Kiev], a beautiful ancient city in the north-western Ukraine. Grandfather Abram Nitsberg worked in as sort of work association. He sold fish. I do not know what his job was like, all I know that he did not own the business. Grandmother was a housewife. Grandparents had a cow, they had a kitchen garden and planted vegetables there to feed the family. They lived well and did not starve. Grandmother contrived to feed many children of hers. I knew all my mother's brothers and sisters, but two. I know when my mother and her eldest brother were born. The difference in years between brothers and sisters was not big - approximately 2 years. My mother's eldest brother Noy Nitsberg was born in 1879. I do not know the second's brother name. The third brother's name was Jacob. Then Solomon and Naum were born. In 1899 my mother Maria (Jewish Mariam) was born. Then Mikhail and Revekka followed. The youngest one Revekka was born in 1906, when grandmother was about 50. Grandmother was ashamed of her belated motherhood, and sometimes used to say that Revekka was her granddaughter, one of her son's daughters. Her sons were married at that time and had their own children.

I do not know for sure, but I think my maternal grandparents must have been religious. It could not have been otherwise at that time. Grandfather paid a lot of attention to the secular education of his children. My mother finished a full course at Chernigov lyceum, and I think she was not the only one who got educated in the lyceum. All children knew Yiddish (it was their mother tongue), they also were proficient in Russian and spoke foreign languages. Children did not get primary Jewish education.

I have never seen my mother's third brother, Jacob either. I was named after him, and know about him from my mother. Jacob was very gifted in anything he tried to do. Adolescent Jacob was drafted in the army during World War I. He was captured by Austrians. Probably his captivity was not so bad since he even managed to send his picture from there. When he came back from captivity, Jacob became a revolutionary. He took part in revolution, then in Civil War. Before being drafted Jacob was in love with a girl from Chernigov. Jacob exerted his every effort for revolution. In 1918 soviet regime assigned Jacob Nitsberg the fist party secretary in Chernigov. He perished accidentally in 1919. It was found out that White Guards were brewing to blast the bridge across Dnepr. Jacob was to divulge that plot. One of the plotters -Jacob's lyceum comrade, the White Guard - shot in Jacob and killed him. When he was arrested he said 'I could not have acted otherwise. Even if I had not killed Jacob, I would have been killed as a White Guard'. One of Chernigov streets was named after Jacob Nitsberg. In 1950 it was renamed, it seems it is named after Kirov, but I do not know the present name of this street. Probably the municipal authorities thought it to be indecent for the streets to be given Jewish names. When I grew up, I decided to find Jacob's grave no matter what. When my daughter left school, we went to Chernigov and found out from the old residents where Jacob was buried. We walked along the Jewish cemetery and found his grave and the tomb. It should have remained until now.