

Elementary School In The Antonovka Village Of The Cherkassia Region



This is the elementary school in the Antonovka village of the Cherkassia region that all six of my grandmother Brana Peisekhovna Shavulskaya's children, including my mother, attended. The family was poor, and during the cold months of the year, the children attended school only by taking turns, because they had to share a single jacket. My grandfather, Shmul Josefovich Blinderman, sewed hats in the small Ukrainian town of Shpola; Grandmother did day labor as a field worker.

Neither Grandmother nor Grandfather obtained any sort of education; this was the position of Jews in a Ukrainian village at the turn of the century. Grandmother was more observant than Grandfather. She got together to pray with other inhabitants in Shpola. After the war, in Mariupol, she regularly attended the prayer house that took the place of a traditional synagogue in that city. My mother, Anna Blinderman, was a pharmacist. The 1950s were a frightening time. My mother was discriminated against simply because her nationality was the same as the nationality of those high-ranking doctors who were part of the 'Doctors' Affair.'

The suffering of my mother and all our family was intensified by the atmosphere of mistrust and unproven accusations against any doctor or pharmacist with Jewish traits as well as the slanderous verbal attacks that malicious residents directed toward them. Atheism was an intrinsic and unavoidable part of the ideology preached by the USSR. My mother was born in 1914 in the village of Buki, Cherkassia region, Ukraine. Not long before her death, she came to realize her belief in God, openly lamenting that it occurred so late in her life.

My father, Pavel Alekseevich Valuev, was born in Russia, in the village of Kashidra, Moscow region, in 1910. My father graduated from the Moscow Institute of Agricultural Electrification and worked his whole life at the Azovstal factory, first as an engineer and then as the assistant head power-engineering specialist and head of the central laboratory. During the war he was released from the draft because he was sent to Siberia, to the city of Stalinsk, to organize the defense industry there.

After finishing diplomatic school in Kiev before the war, my father refused a prestigious post in New Zealand, explaining that he 'couldn't stay for long without the guardianship of the many Jewish relatives of my wife.' Father was an atheist, which didn't stop him, a Russian, from respecting the religious passion of his mother-in-law. I was born on January 25, 1936, in Mariupol, Ukraine. I studied in Moscow at the Institute of Energy from 1953 to 1958. I was the head of a department of the Central Scientific Research Laboratory of black metallurgy when I retired. I was married to Anatoly Pavlovich Nikolau.

My son, Sergei Anatolievich Nikolau, was born on December 1, 1960. He is a neurologist and works at a hospital in St. Petersburg. Neither I nor my son received a religious upbringing. Rather, we lived amid a Soviet upbringing. Thanks to the harmonious relationships between the older generations of both the Jewish and Russian sides of our family, we had a unique opportunity to create our own family barrier against anti-Semitism, which had been growing in the Soviet Union over many decades.