

Leonid Aptekar



This is me upon demobilization from the army. This photo was taken in Kiev in May 1950.

I demobilized in April 1950. I headed to Skvira after my army service was over. I was eager to see my acquaintances and hear details about my dear ones. Our house was disassembled for wood. A woman built her own house in its place. I went to the place where my dear ones, friends, neighbors, the people, whom I had known and loved, were buried and then I went to Kiev to visit my mother's brothers Teviye and Gersh. I was going to go back to Skvira then, but my uncles insisted that I stayed in Kiev. It was very difficult to obtain a residence permit to stay to live in Kiev. My uncle Teviye, who was a roof maker in the Council of Ministers, managed to obtain a permit for me to reside in his place. I wanted to rent a room, but my uncle insisted that I stayed with him. I went to work at the 'Kist' company ['hand' in Russian] as a founder. The state anti-Semitism was quite visible already, but there were still many Jews in the shop. There were good earnings and bonuses in the shop. Shops also contributed money to the restoration of Kiev. During the Khrushchev rule our shop was converted into a small plant. A short while later I went to work at the photo goods factory where I worked 42 years. I started working with plastic and in due time I became a caster.

My acquaintances introduced me to my future wife. My wife Enna, nee Beilis, a Jew, was born in Kiev in 1921. Enna and I got married in 1951. Enna's family was poor and we had to borrow money for the wedding. We had a common wedding. We had a ceremony at the registry office and in the evening we invited our close ones to the wedding dinner. I received an apartment from my plant. Our only daughter Svetlana was born in December 1952.

I worked decently. My colleagues treated me with respect. At this time one could not go to the synagogue or celebrate Jewish holidays openly, but my wife and I celebrated holidays to the extent we could afford. It was difficult to get matzah for Pesach and we just had sufficient to keep it as a symbol of the holiday. We also had traditional Jewish food: sweet and sour stew, chicken broth, gefilte fish. It was a tradition, but also, the memory of my mama and grandma for me. It's hard to find words to describe how much I loved them and how I cherished my memories about the time, when they were with me... I went to Skvira on all anniversaries of their death. I suffered so thinking that mama and grandma did not live long for me to make their life easier and take care of them. It causes me pain, but it also gives me right memories about the time we were together. Skvira is different from what it was like in the years of my childhood. They had destroyed the old town, but what they built instead is nothing special making it one of many small towns. The war destroyed everything I loved.