

Minna Birman's Father Mordko Birman



This is my father Mordko Birman, in the tuberculosis recreation center. This photo was taken in Gagry in 1936.

In the early 1930s my father and other communists were sent to a district town to organize collectivization. My father was reluctant to be involved in this and didn't accept any forced measures toward farmers. This became known and my father was called back for a discussion in the town Party committee. At this time he had hemoptysis again and my mother didn't allow him to

go there. She sent my father to a tuberculosis recreation center in Gagry. When he returned home this incident was forgotten.

My father was arrested in 1938. He was accused of wishing to assist Hitler and Japan to attack the Soviet Union. What else could they accuse him of? Shortly before arrest our janitor Gidulian told my father that he knew very well who was the next to be arrested. Before arresting a person NKVD officers visit a janitor under pretense that they intend to check a housing roster, but actually they ask questions about the tenant that interests them. The janitor respected my father and advised him to leave home, but my father ignored it: 'Where can I go? We don't have money to travel!' By that time he was fired from work. However, we moved to the dacha where he was arrested on 8 June 1938. Young NKVD officers came to arrest him. My mother and father slept on the terrace and my brother and I slept in the room. They made a careless search and my mother managed to put some Party documents into my pocket. They didn't search us and we kept these documents.

My mother wrote a letter to Stalin. She told my brother and me that Stalin's office would send this letter back to Odessa and my father would stay in town until they clarified all circumstances. My father stayed in prison for about two years and returned home. He was very lucky to have been arrested on 8 June 1938 and Yezhov [Editor's note: N.I. Yezhov (1895-1940) - people's commissar of home affairs in the USSR in 1936-1937] had been replaced with Beriia. During the Yezhov rule prisoners were beaten and put on conveyor like they did in the past. Beriia issued an order to stop beating and tortures.