

Lasar Blekhshtein's Parents



This is the only photo of my father. My Mom is young here. It was taken approximately in 1900s.

You can see that some small thing is attached to my father's vest. It is a small metal box with a magnifying lens. The lens magnified the photo hidden inside.

I do not know whom the photo shows (Mom also could not tell me). There is a group of 7 persons (men wear kippot, but not Jewish clothes). So the box is more than 150 years old (I keep it)!

I guess my father was born in Vilno [Vilnius at present, capital of Lithuania], and later his parents moved to Petersburg. Unfortunately I know very little about my father:

Mom did not tell us and we (my sisters, my brother, and me) did not ask. Maybe my sisters and brother knew more, but I was the youngest among them and my father died in the year of my birth (in 1911 when he was about 40 years old). It is easy to count that he was born in 1860s.

My father's name was Isidore (his second name was Isaac). My sisters and brother took Isaac for their patronymics (the same with me), though Isidore would have been more correct (in his birth-certificate Isaac was in brackets). Daddy was a shoemaker.

And unfortunately he got into trouble: he invested all money he had into the co-operative he worked at. But the co-operative went bankrupt and father was crushed down. Mom explained me that it resulted in his stroke. That was all.

My father was buried at the Preobrazhenskoe (Jewish) cemetery [the Jewish part of the Preobrazhenskoe cemetery was opened in 1875]. But Mom never told me about the details of the ceremony.

My Mom's name was Rebecca (Ginde Rive) Blekhshtein, her maiden name was Kaplun. She was born in 1870 (I counted it, because she died in 1942 at the age of 72).

She was religious: attended synagogue on holidays. I do not know whether Daddy did it (Mom told nothing about it). Mom belonged to Misnagdim (a Hebrew word meaning opponents).

[The term Misnagdim is loosely used by Hasidim to refer to European religious Orthodox Jews who are not Hasidic.

I know that my Mom also came from Vilno. Mom and Dad got acquainted there. But I have no idea about the circumstances of their acquaintance.

They arrived in St. Petersburg having already been married. I do not know why they appeared in St. Petersburg. Possibly there they expected to find a large labor-market for handicraftsmen.

In Vilno Mom worked as a senior shop assistant in the department of small wares. Probably that was why she could speak a little a lot of languages: German, French, Polish, Yiddish, and Russian. She had to accept the goods brought from different countries: France, Germany, Poland, etc.

Mom told me that her Lithuanian was poor, but Polish was rather good. At home when she wanted to keep something in secret, she spoke French to my sister. But her mother tongue was Yiddish, she often spoke Yiddish to me, and I gave her answers in Russian.

Father died, and mother remained a widow with 4 children. Her life before the revolution of 1917 was terrible (she told about it herself). Five of us lived in a small room together.

I remember the room though I was very little. I also remember the fire, and my mother pulling me out: I remember very long corridors of that communal apartment.

When Mom lost her husband, she immediately lost the right to live in St. Petersburg. Every week a police officer visited her to take a bribe. That was the way we lived before the revolution, but after it Soviet authorities gave us an apartment.

I also remember that during the revolution we often were hungry. A Jewish orphan asylum was opened at that time. Together with the orphans my brother, one of my sisters (middle) and I left Petersburg for Ufa (the Urals).

Many years later, being already an adult, I realized that there we had seen cossacks (people on horses). I guess we got there right during the fights of Chapaev brigade, but at that time I did not understand it.

Mom had no profession, therefore she worked at the market. She had a small stand there. For about 2 years she boiled soap (I remember it was white with dark blue strings), cooled it, cut it into pieces and sold at the market.

Later she started buying and selling different things: soap, blue dye, etc. She earned little money, but she earned it. My brother also was engaged in trading (instead of studying). But in 1920s NEP was abandoned by authorities.

In 1942 I left the besieged Leningrad for evacuation, but I could not take my relatives with me. I calmed them down: I told them about their forthcoming evacuation. And indeed, they left the city soon.

But unfortunately by that time my mother had died. It happened on March 8, 1942 (therefore March 8, the Women's Day is not a holiday for me, but a dark unforgettable time).