

Solomon Epstein's Father Boris Epstein



This is a photo of my father.

It was taken during the World War II. He served as a tailor. Unfortunately I have no information about the place where the photo was taken.

Now I understand that our parents brought us up very well, but according to the rules of that time. We were brought up as persons of excellent qualities: ideal people, absolutely unpractical.

Our parents believed that a person should have heavenly thoughts and be honest-minded. I have been a romanticist since my childhood. But I guess that our parents practiced the only proper method of upbringing. I believe that otherwise all people have to go on their hands and knees and grow dog-teeth.

In our apartment there lived another Jewish family of Rosenfelds. They had got 2 boys, our coevals. During our first years in Leningrad, a rabbi from yeshivah came to teach us Yiddish. But the time came when it was necessary to finish our studies and rabbi disappeared.

I do not know Yiddish at all. Parents spoke Yiddish only when they wanted to keep something from us. We never celebrated Jewish holidays and never attended the synagogue.

Mom and Dad were born in 1890s. Mom finished a gymnasium, and Daddy studied several years in cheder. Mom frequently said as a joke that she had married an uneducated person. In Leningrad Mom entered the College of Foreign Languages, graduated from it and taught German language at school.

At home we had collected works of Schiller in German. [Johann von Schiller (1759-1805) was a German poet and philosopher.] As for me, I read Schiller's works translated by Zhukovsky. [Vassiliy Zhukovsky (1783-1852) was a Russian poet and translator.]

I do not remember any political events discussed by our parents. As far as we were concerned, we were pioneers and Komsomol members and we took it with great enthusiasm. On the whole, our childhood was very happy.

The Palace of Pioneers protected us from the nightmare around us (as I understand it now): in fact it was the time of Great Terror. And we were fine (like inside a cocoon).

Parents had got many friends. I was surprised when I noticed that one of them had suddenly stopped visiting us. Parents used to explain: he had left.

Later I understood that those people were arrested. One day I was playing in the street near our house, when my father told me passing by 'Solomon, Kirov was killed.' I guess I remember it because father looked very excited: he understood that a great wave of reprisals would follow.

Father earned money by sewing. But when authorities started persecutions of private craftsmen, he had to find job of a worker at the Aluminium factory.

There he worked perfectly well, too. He was awarded a copper teapot for his work. Later he found job of a cutter at a workmen's cooperative association, but there it was necessary to fulfill the plan. Father could not stand it and got back to his work at home.