

Avraham Shukhman And His Family



This is a family photo of Avraham Shukhman - my maternal grandfather. His daughters are around him: Zinaida is to his left sitting, Bassya stands to his left, Rosa and Sonya (his grand daughter) stand to his right.

The photo was taken in 1930-1931 in Kamyen (Belarus).

My mother's father Avraham Shukhman was born in 1871, and on September 17, 1941 in Kamyen shtetle [Vitebsk region, Lepel district] fascists shot all Jewish population including my grandfather.

Now on this place there is a monument in honour of 177 Jews shot by Germans. They said that my grandfather had a large house, he was a partisans' messenger and they used his house as a safe one.

Germans arrested him and tortured terribly. They said, Germans torn out hair from his long beard and then shot him. He did not leave the village before occupation - probably he was too old by that time.

Before the WWII my grandfather was an excellent shoemaker. I know that he worked in co-operative and he was doing well. He had many [seven] children. They kept hens, four cows and geese too. Every child had his own responsibility: one took care of cows, the other took care of geese and turkeys. There were no assistants except for the children.

Elder children helped to bring up the small ones. Avraham's wife died during intervention, during invasion of Poles [in April 1920 Poland entered the war against Soviet Russia. In 1921 according to peace negotiations in Riga, Poland received a significant part of Ukraine and Belarus.

Final event of the war was a defeat of the interventionists]. I do not know the year of her birth, and neither do my sisters. She died in 1919 from typhus. My mum told that she cried a lot, but nobody could help her. They were hiding from Poles and from intervention.

At that time Germans and Poles came there changing each other. All of them plundered their place, and nobody could help. My grandmother died, when my mum was 9 years old, and her younger brother was 6. My mum was the next to last child in my grandfather's family.

My grandparents spoke only Yiddish. Grandmother (I do not remember her name) was the last person in our family who spoke only Yiddish, all the rest knew Russian.

Grandfather did not get married for the second time: he loved his children very much and devoted his life to them.

My grandfather Avraham Shukhman was very religious. I remember June 21 in 1941 (it was my birthday - I was born in 1935, hence in 1941 I was going to be 6 years old) - it was Saturday. And all our relatives gathered at our place to celebrate my birthday on Sunday, the 22nd of June 1941 - the day when the war burst out.

All our relatives came. At that time we lived in Ossinovaya Roscha [suburb of St. Petersburg], my daddy served there in a military camp. Two my grandfathers came too. One of them - Avraham underwent surgery a short time previously; I remember very distinctly that his hand and shoulder were bandaged. I remember him eating.

My mum prepared kosher food especially for him: staying in hospital, he did not eat hospital meals, his daughters brought it to him especially. Mum told that in Belarus (Kamyen shtetle) there was Synagogue near his house, and my grandfather used to be a synagogue warden.

On holidays he invited everybody to visit his place - it means that they were rather well-to-do, because he had a lot of children and everyone in his family worked. My grandfather was a very hardworking person.