

Boris Girshov's Father's Sisters



This photograph taken in Usvyaty in 1920s shows my father's sisters.

All my relatives came from Usvyaty shtetl. As Usvyaty is located between the rivers Dneper, Zapadnaya Dvina and Lovat connecting it with Riga, people there used to be engaged in rafting since old times.

My uncle Ieronim (my father's brother) told me that my ancestors were engaged in rafting, too. In Usvyaty they used to form a team, collect wood, raft it and go down the river to Riga.

Father was in touch not only with Jews, and mother communicated mainly with Jewesses. In Usvyaty people lived alternately, but the Jews lived close to each other.

All Jews were handicraftsmen. The Russians did not have such masters; they all went to Jews for repair. At school I had both Russian and Jewish friends, but my best friends were among my relatives.

I never spent vacations in pioneer camps. I spent it at home, sometimes visited relatives in Leningrad. In summer I used to gather mushrooms and berries in the wood.

My relatives were also handicraftsmen. For instance, in Leningrad our relative Zalman was a tailor. He was a real master: Leningrad actors and representatives of rank and fashion ordered suites at him.

One of his suits was shown at the exhibition that took place in Paris. He was awarded some prize for it. That was the level of skill!

We met relatives on holidays or other local events, sometimes visited each other to have a talk. Mother used to be in touch with our neighbor who had a cow. We bought milk from her.

My relative uncle Ieronim lived in Leningrad. He helped me very much. Together with him we visited different military educational institutions, but everywhere they admitted only servicemen.

By chance we got to know that the Naval Medical Academy was opened for everyone. We went there and handed in documents. There was a large entry: 20 persons per 1 place.

It was necessary to pass through 13 examinations. I managed to do it and received good average mark. I also managed to get a pass examination in health (50% of entrants were eliminated by the medical board). It was enough for me to enter the Academy.