

Boris Lerman's Father And Brothers Shimen And Leybe



This photograph was taken in Leningrad in 1939. This is my father and my brothers Shimen (to his right) and Leybe (to his left). Let me tell you about my brothers.

In 1927 my mother gave birth to her last (the 10th one) boy Leybe. Notwithstanding the fact that he was the last one in our family, he was very talented. At present people call such children prodigy. He studied very well. His classmates gave him a nickname: a mathematician. He was the best in chess (we made chess-men of spool of thread and drew chess-board on a cardboard). But during the war he was executed by shooting together with parents by fascists.

Father started his active life as a smith, and later (in the beginning of 1920s) he trained for a new profession of wagoner.

By 1922 my parents had already got 7 children: 2 daughters (Nekhama and Libe) and 5 sons (Berl, Haim, Shimen, Ele, Isaak).

The elder sister Nekhama left for Petrograd in 1923, parents remained with 6 children, but the same year Mikhael was born. And again father had to work hard to support 7 children. In 1925 Libe left for Leningrad [in 1924 after Lenin's death Petrograd was renamed Leningrad], but immediately after her departure I was born. And again our family remained with 7 children. In 1927 Berl left for Leningrad too, but after his departure Leybe was born.

And again our parents had 7 children, and father had to work hard to support a family of 9. How did he manage?! It is difficult to imagine.

He earned money mainly conveying passengers and luggage from Ushachi to Polotsk and back. Besides that he had to take care of the horse and the cow, to lay in a supply of fodder and to chop firewood for winter, etc. To tell the truth, by that time elder sons started helping father, but the hardest part of work still rested on his shoulders.

Till now the tune of his song haunts me (Michael Alexandrovich, a Soviet singer sang it and I still take care of his record). The song is named Bin ich mir a fuhrman. Here is its liberal translation:

My home is road,
My bed is a cart,
My work is to hurry.
The horse is running in full career.
In summer and in winter,
In hot and cold weather,
On the sands and in the marsh,
I sing this song.

And at the end of summer 1941 all Jews were ordered to move to the left bank of the river to houses around the small synagogue (those houses were cleared out). So that was the way ghetto in Ushachi was organized. Children and old men, sick and disabled people moved there: it was their last shelter.

It happened on January 12, 1942. People in ghetto were ordered to stand in line. Germans said that they would be sent to the east by train. Jews moved forward under escort of submachine gunners. They covered several hundreds of meters, and the column was turned to the right (to the left bank of the river). Everyone who was still able to think realized that it was their final journey.

Here I'll retell you the story of my acquaintance, whom I met in 1950: 'The day before the execution Germans forced 20 strong men to dig a hole near the road. The ground was deep-frozen, therefore the hole came out not deep. Germans stopped the column in front of the hole, selected parties of 20-25 persons and shot them using submachine guns. Injured people were pushed down in the hole alive.'

In July 1944 I got to know that my native place was liberated from fascist occupation. I was eager to find my relatives. Communist Party leader (assistant of battalion commander in political and educational work) of our battalion sent a letter of inquiry to a military registration and enlistment office of Ushachi. [Military registration and enlistment offices in the USSR and in Russia are special institutions that implement call-up plans.] Soon I received a terrible message: the Lermans (my father, mother, brothers, their wives and children - 14 persons) were executed by fascists (shot together with hundreds of other Jews in 1942). I could not make a move crying.