

Beila Gabis's Husband Motia Gabis With His Comrade



This is my husband Motia Gabis on the right. This photo was taken at the front in 1944 and sent to me in Yedintsy. Soldiers wear Soviet uniforms and have PPSH guns (submachine gun designed by Shpagin). Soviet troops had these weapons before the war.

[Beila met her future husband in the ghetto.] In July 1941 we were taken to the ghetto of Bershad: few streets were fenced with barbed wire. We stayed in our house. Life behind bars was terrible. In few weeks Romanian troops took command in the ghetto: our ghetto became a part of Transnistria.

Once Eva who lived in our house came home with an acquaintance of hers, a young man from Yedintsy town [today Moldova] where the girl also came from. His name was Motia Gabis. He told us his story. He was born in Yedintsy in 1921. His father owned a buttery and his mother was a teacher of the Russian language. His father Ouri and Motia also finished a grammar school. In 1940 the Soviet regime was established and Motia had to go to a secondary school to obtain a certificate to be able to enter a college. When the Great Patriotic War began the Gabis family failed to evacuate. When fascists came to Yedintsy Dmitri Bogutsak, Moldavian neighbor of the Gabis family, came to shoot Motia's family. Eva hiding in her house saw this happening. Motia's father and mother fell and then fell Motia, wounded, and then Ouri fell. Eva decided they were all dead. She was astounded to meet Motia in the ghetto in Gershad. Motia and my brother were lucky since their wounds were not lethal. Bullets only tore their clothes and made some scratches on them. They stayed quiet until night when they came to their friends' house where they got first aid. After they recovered they had to stay in hiding. Motia and his brother got to Ukraine concealing their identity. Fascists captured them and sent to the 'Dead Loop' death camp. Motia and Ouri escaped from there, too. They kept hiding in Ukrainian villages. From what Motia told us I understood that our relatives Menachem's wife and their children gave shelter to them. They stayed with my aunt until they got stronger. Later I joked that my uncle's wife heated up a husband for me! Motia and his brother Ouri were taken to the construction of a bridge in Nikolaev. Their work conditions were very hard. They slept in pits they excavated themselves. Almost all of them died at this construction.

I didn't like Motia at first sight. He was wearing torn trousers and a ragged jacket. My mother and I were undoing old carpets for yarn and knitting woolen socks for sale. Motia started helping me. My mother liked Motia at once. She wanted to take Motia to live with us, but was afraid of rumors: he was a young man and I was a young woman... Then Eva said 'Why doesn't Beila marry Motia?' I didn't quite accept this idea. Motia visited us every evening. Once he said that if I married him I would never regret it, that he would care about me and we would have a good life. I agreed: not because I loved him, but because I felt sorry for him. He was very happy and kept telling everybody about the forthcoming wedding. There was a rabbi in the group of Moldavian Jews. He conducted the ceremony of engagement in accordance with Jewish traditions. This happened in late 1942.

In 1943 fascists were retreating. We were happy about the victorious advance of the Soviet army, but our situation in the ghetto was getting worse with each coming day. Fascists replaced Romanians in the ghetto and started preparation to liquidation of the ghetto, fascists decided to flood us. They were going to blast bridges and then the wave would flood our town. Partisans informed us on German plans and we were awaiting death. On 11 March 1944 fascists broke into our house and took my husband and me away. My mother thought it was their next shooting action, but we joined a group of about 20 younger people and were taken to a quarry with dead corpses. A day before beautiful white snow covered the ground and the sight of dead bodies was horrifying. We were ordered to pull these bodies with boat hooks and place in piles: wood and bodies. I was 5 months pregnant and it was hard for me to pull the corpses, not to mention the horror I felt, but it was impossible to leave the place. They were policemen with dogs guarding us.

They prepared canisters with gasoline. When we completed the piles fascists set them on fire that produced horrifying black smoke. The snow became black. I was scared to death. Germans were in a hurry since they could hear the roar of the frontline approaching. When we returned home I kept crying and couldn't tell my mother where we had been. At night of 13 to 14 March we were at home. The ghetto was wide-awake. People were saying 'good bye' to one another awaiting death. At 5 am we heard shooting and then we heard 'Folks, come out. You are safe!' It was a whirlpool. People were jumping out of the windows. Those were partisans. I saw a woman die of infarction from joy when she ran to hug a partisan. Soviet troops came in about an hour. We were happy and couldn't believe we survived.

In few days after we were released mobilization to the front began. My husband decided to go to the front hoping to find that bandit who killed his parents. He told me to wait for his brother Ouri to come back from Nikolaev and then come to Yedintsy, his hometown. When my husband came to Romania he got to know that Mitia Bogutsak who had killed his parents ran away to Romania. Motia decided to volunteer to the front. He knew Romanian and French languages and was recruited as interpreter in headquarters of 24th frontier regiment. He wanted to demobilize, but only students and teachers were the first to demobilize. I obtained a request for demobilization for my husband. He studied two years at the Pedagogical College for two years and could be determined as a student. Once, in 1945 I returned home late: I took salary to workers on the border. I saw a uniform hanging on the back of a chair. Motia was back. I was so happy.