

Maria Rolnikaite's Father



This photograph shows my father. Here I'll tell you about him.

Grandmother and grandfather sent my father to cheder, when he became 12 years old. It was situated in the neighboring small town. But Daddy quickly got disappointed in it and came home afoot. Later he finished a secondary school and went to Riga to study in gymnasium. Parents were able to buy him a black suit and a tie and that was all. He went to Riga having no money. Therefore Daddy worked as a porter and as a loader. When his trousers became full of holes, he made patches from his tie. He managed to finish that gymnasium in Riga (for some reason it appeared to be a Russian gymnasium). Daddy decided to become a lawyer and study at a university in Germany. He sent 12 applications to 12 universities and received 12 refusals. Nevertheless he left for Berlin and managed to press for an audience with one of rectors.

It is funny that a postage stamp played the decisive role in the way he became a student. Daddy came to that rector, said that he was from Lithuania and wanted to enter the University. The rector asked 'Are you from Lithuania? Recently we had differences with my colleague regarding Lithuania and Latvia. Is it the same state?' Daddy answered that it was not true, that he had a letter from his parents with a stamp of Lithuania. After that the rector allowed Daddy to become an external student. Later he passed through examinations and became an internal student. He studied in Berlin and Leipzig. He graduated from the faculty of law and later from the College of German Language and Literature which prepared teachers of German language and literature for foreigners. I asked him 'Daddy, what for?' And he answered 'It was very interesting for me.' But the knowledge of German language appeared to be very useful, because later we got a nanny from

Germany and she spoke German with us.

Daddy kept an order everywhere. Mom's chief concern was to feed us. And Daddy used to say 'We have got bread, butter, tomatoes, and salt.' He also told us that we (girls) had to get prepared for future life, to learn to cook from Mom. Daddy worked alone, therefore his financial situation was not very good: he had got 4 children, his family also had a housemaid. When somebody asked Daddy why he had so many children, he always answered he was waiting for a son.

Daddy trusted us. In Plunge there was only one car with a driver, and a lot of cab drivers. Our grammar school was situated far from our house (almost in suburb), near the cemetery. It was frightful to come back home in the evening, and Daddy gave us money to hire a cab. He only asked us to come back together.

Daddy was very sorry that we lived in a small town Plunge, a country town. He wanted us to get good education of European level. Therefore I had a program in my mind: to go to Paris together with my sister and enter a University there. I had to work hard at school, but sometimes I stayed on a skating rink too long or spent too much time with my friend. In that case Daddy used to say 'When you come to Sorbonne, they will ask you questions. What will you answer? I guess you will tell them only what your Tsyпка knows.' For some reason he called my friend Tsyпка! But he never punished me or moralized. When we were going to be late home from different parties, we never told lies. And Daddy never ordered us to come back at a certain time, he only waited for us. I guess he did not sleep and waited till the door opened.

During the war only Daddy (he was at the front line), my elder sister Miriam and I survived.

When I returned to Vilnius after all ordeals of the war time, I met Daddy in the street by chance. He already knew that Miriam remained alive. Unfortunately after the end of the war Daddy lost hope that his wife and children Raya and Ruvel remained alive. All that hastened his death. I guess he was unhappy. Half a year before his death he left his work, because a doctor said 'If you go on working you will fall down dead!'