

Seder



This photo was taken in my apartment in 2000. Here you can see me conducting Seder. Here I'd like to tell you about my childhood, about my Jewish roots.

My native city Petrikov was a small town (its population was about 5,000). There lived quite a lot Jews: 1 Jewish school among 5 ones in total. I studied at that school during 7 years. The school was not just a traditional Jewish one, but Soviet-Jewish: they taught us in Yiddish, but never discussed religious topics. In our town there were woodworking plant and brickworks, therefore sidewalks were made of planks and roadways were made of bricks. I do not remember any consolidated Jewish community in our town. There were 2 synagogues: for men and for women. My father visited the synagogue regularly till 1937. There were no special Jewish residential areas in our town: people of different nationalities lived where they liked. Most Jews of our town were handicraftsmen, but I also remember many Jews in the government's employ.

Our family observed kashrut. Several Jewish women used to buy a ram by clubbing together and take it to shochet. They did the same with hens. They used to send children for easier purchases. Before Pesach women made matzah by turns in every Jewish house. It turned out that Russian stove just touched the spot for making matzah.

Mother tongue of my parents was Yiddish. We all spoke only Yiddish at home. Naturally I considered Yiddish to be my mother tongue, too. When I entered College, I had to fill in a questionnaire, there I wrote Yiddish regarding my mother tongue. The Head of the 1st department sent for me and said 'You'd better change it for something better.' [In the USSR 1st departments were responsible for keeping vigilant watch over loyalty of employees. The 1st department of each institution was closely connected with NKVD and KGB.]

My father visited synagogue regularly. Mum went there very seldom and children never did it. Moreover, at our Jewish school there was a group named Light Horse. To my shame I was its member. We had to go along the streets and look into windows to find people celebrating Pesach or Shabbath. We were obliged to explain them their mistakes.

At home we celebrated all Jewish holidays and every Shabbath. You know, as is customary at Jewish house, you can be hungry all the week long, but on Saturday you will have chicken, gefilte fish, etc. on your table. As for me, most of all I liked Pesach. I liked both meal and action with asking questions, searching afikoman, etc. All boys of our family were circumcised, but parents did not arrange bar mitzvah for us: there came a time when it was dangerous.