

Shahne Berznitskiy And His Family



This is my family. I am on the left, my sister Sheina Berznitskaya is standing behind me, my elder sister Ester and my brother Yankel are next to her. From left to right sitting: my mother Perl Berznitskaya, my younger brother Isif, my father Itshok Berznitskiy and my favorite younger brother Isroel. The photograph was taken in Veisiejai in 1925.

After the wedding, my parents settled in the house of Grandfather Aaron. Father was a smith. He and Misl were taught this craft by Aaron. Grandfather Aaron had an occupational smith's disease. His lungs were filled with metal dust. He understood that he wouldn't be able to live a long life and opened the secret of his skills to my father. Grandfather Aaron died in the 1900s. Father became the owner of the smithy.

In 1901 my mother gave birth to a daughter and named her after my father's sister Ester. In 1903 Yankel was born and in 1906 Sheina followed. In 1910 mother gave birth to a son, Isroel. I was born in 1913. The youngest child of the family, my brother Isif, was born in 1918, when my mother was forty.

I remember our old house. It was a large log house. The logs grew dark with time. There were three or four rooms in the house. Our family was large, so three or four children slept in one room. The solid wooden furniture went with the style of the house. My father inherited it from Grandfather Aaron. Our house burnt down during the fire. It happened in the late 1920s during the time when the synagogue burnt down as well. Father built the house on the same place. It was smaller than the previous one, but it was made from brick.

At the age of six or seven I started helping my father with work: hold the horse's leg or some bigger metal part. I enjoyed looking at the funny sparks, flying from the anvil. Father seemed to me like a warrior from a fairy-tale. My elder brother Yankel was father's apprentice.

Our family was traditionally Jewish. When Father was alive, all Jewish traditions were observed at home. Father was very religious. He prayed daily, though he didn't have an opportunity to go to the synagogue every day. On Friday and Saturday he and Mother always dressed up and went to the synagogue.