

Shahne Berznitskiy And His Family



This is our family in front of our house in Veisiejai. The picture was taken in 1936 on the occasion of my army leave. In the bottom row are the sons of my aunt Rohl Ruth, Meishe and Yankel. In the second row from left to right standing: Rohl's daughter Bella in leather coat, my sister Esther Aronovich is behind her, then my grandmother Mihle Fleisher, my mother Perl Berznitskaya and my brother Isroel in military uniform. In the top row from left to right: I, dressed in military uniform, next to me is Esther's husband Alter Aronovich, then my elder brother Yankel Berznitskiy, my sister Sheina, and behind her is my younger brother Isif Berznitskiy with a cap on his head.

Since my adolescence I was a member of the Zionist organization Maccabi. I decided to get ready for repatriation in Palestine. Back in that time many young Jewish people left for Palestine to build the Israeli state. My brother Isroel shared my beliefs. He and I joined Hashomer Hatzair, which prepared young people for repatriation. My brother and I went to a small town called Ionava. A Jewish kibbutz was founded there. We stayed there for a year and a half. We learnt how to till the land and grow different grains, work on the farm and other practical work. I liked the way of life in the kibbutz. It was a commune. We received no money, but we lived together and had similar clothes and felt like a stalwart team. In 1936 my training was over and I was ready to repatriate to Palestine. I didn't manage to leave, as I was drafted into the Lithuanian army that year.

I went to Veisiejai to say goodbye to my mother and sisters before leaving for Marijampole. I served there for a year and a half. At that time my mother lived by herself. My elder brother Yankel left for Kaunas. He was invited there by Isroel, who continued working in the Realschule. There was an opening for a teacher specializing in blacksmith's work and Yankel left for Kaunas, leasing his smithy to the neighbor. In a while Yankel got married. His fiancée Golda, a Jewish girl from Marijampole, moved to Kaunas. In a year Yankel and Golda had a daughter, Liza. That year, 1936,

Ester got married as well. Her husband, Alter Aronovich, was a butcher in Veisiejai. Ester and her husband moved into the house of Grandmother Mihle. She gave birth to a daughter. Sheina was married to a guy from an adjacent small town. I don't remember her husband's name. Sheina and her husband also settled in Veisiejai. They had two children - a boy and a girl. I don't remember their names. In the late 1930s Isroel also got married. I liked his wife, a Jewish girl named Charna, very much. Isroel lived in Kaunas with Charna. In 1941 Charna gave birth to a boy, Aaron.

My younger brother Iosif and I were still single. My service in the army was rather quiet. Anti-Semitism didn't reign in the army at that time, though it was gradually emerging under the influence of fascist organizations in Lithuania. In the army I joined an underground communist organization. Like many people I was attracted by the ideas of all-in-all equality, brotherhood, liberty and welfare, preached by the communists. We were involved in propaganda, told about life in the USSR, building socialism, wherein all nations were equal. At that time I knew nothing of repressions, arrests and politics in the Soviet Union.