

## Yakov Bunke



This is I in Israel, by my mother's grave. Tel-Aviv, 1996.

My private life turned out to be pretty good. I often went to ispolkom on various matters and I met the secretary there - a young Lithuanian lady - Dalya Baitkute. Dalya was divorced and raised a son born in 1947. In 1949 we met and fell in love with each other and in 1950 I married Dalya. I adopted Dalya's son Virgilius and he treats me like his own father, though he knows that I am not his natural father. In 1952 our elder son Evgeniy was born. Then in 1953 - Leonid. We had a modest living. We had neither dacha nor car.

In 1983 I retired. I devoted myself to the art since then. In 1956 there were 130 Jews in Plunge. Now, I am the only one. I understand that I am the last Jew in this small town with an old Jewish history. The reason why I have not left for Israel is to tell the local inhabitants about the history of their town and perpetuate the memory of my tribesmen here. I am thankful to people for tolerance and understanding. People treat me very well. I am also dealing with Lithuanian history. I do some works in Lithuanian theme as per request of the authorities. I am a judge at children's' art exhibition. I help in decoration of all events. This year their nominated me for title -the honorable citizen of Plunge.

I got the permit to create memorials of Holocaust victims, the biggest one is in Plunge. I made all sculptures myself. There are several wooden sculptures, one of them is dedicated to perished children, the other one is dedicated to my grandparents. I told the Lithuanian school about Jewish tragedy, and now Lithuanian kids regularly take care of the memorial, and keep it clean. I also installed memorable insignia in other execution places. I worked mostly on Jewish theme, made characteristic images of Jewish craftsmen, workers, characters of Shalom Aleichem.

Another matter of my life is creation of the museum of Jewish history in Plunge. I obtained the right to found the museum, got the premises. We did it with the help of my wife Dalya, my sons and friends. All kinds of people sent me exhibits of Jewish utensils. I looked for historic pictures. Now the museum is acting. Though, in postwar times we did not stick to Jewish traditions, my children grew up Jewish, even Lithuanian Vergilius.

In 1996 Dalya was invited in Israel. There was my personal exhibition there. We had stayed there for 3 months. Unfortunately, mother and Dina were no longer alive. Mom died in 1989 and Dina one year before we came. We were on the cemetery, attended the graves. Sisters Channa and Genya gave us a warm welcome and I felt the warmth of our large family, which lasted a long time.

I have a fully fledged life. My works are in Plunge museum and in other organizations. Now we are the members of Klaipeda Jewish community. Dalya and I go there on Jewish holidays. Recently we marked pesach. Soon there will be Victory day. In spite of the fact that it is not customary to mark this holiday in independent Lithuania, I take this holiday as one of the most important in my life. On that day, we the veterans (and there are a few of us left) put our awards on and go to cemetery. There - we Russians, Lithuanians, Jews understanding those who fought with us and died. We remember the years of war. Fortunately, there are no fascist parties in our small town , and both middle age people and the youth treat us with respect. My true friend and wife Dalya is everywhere with me.