

Joseph Shapochnik With His Classmates



This is my father, Joseph Shapochnik, with his classmates from Realschule. He's lying in the front, the second to the right. Their teacher is the last to the right in the bottom row. I don't know the rest. On the back it says, 'Students of Kamratorsk Realschule. 15th February 1921, 14.00hrs. The seventh grade.'

My father was born in 1902. He was the only one of the brothers who had thirst for knowledge and striving to get educated. Upon finishing cheder my father entered the nearest Realschule in Leovo. Gagauz, Moldovans and Russians mostly studied there. Several Jewish boys made friends and decided to go on with their education. By that time Bessarabia had been annexed to Romania and my father dreamt of studying in one of the European universities. Grandfather Haim scraped up some money for him to get to university with a lot of difficulty. That was the only thing he could help his son with. My father and three or four of his friends, I don't remember their names, went to Prague, and entered the Prague Polytechnic Institute, electric and mechanic department. The friends shared an apartment and saved money that way. They had to work to get by.

My father worked as a stevedore, tutor, and sang in the choir of the Prague Opera. A lot of students from Russia studied at the university. There was a whole course, where the lectures were held in Russian. After graduation, the graduates found good jobs at the Prague power station. They were there on night duty. It was the time of revolutionary changes. The Bolsheviks had come to power in Russia, intending to spread communist ideas all over the world. Outstanding Bolshevik activists took the floor at the university, where my father was studying. They held lectures there and my father attended all of them. My father also joined some communist groups. He adhered to those views all his life though he never became a member of the Party. Usually students went home on summer vacations. Joint helped pay for the round trip ticket to the parents. My father went home every year. He felt tedious in the hick town Leovo and often went to Kishinev. Here, in the late 1920s he met my mother at a party. He was enchanted by her at once. It was love at first sight.