

Synagogue In Kedainiai



This is a large synagogue in Kedainiai. It was called summer synagogue as it was not heated in winter time. Now there is an art school there. The picture was made in 1930s in Kedainiai.

I was born in Lithuanian town Kedainiai [about 100 km to the west from Vilnius]. In 1920s-1930s it was a small district town. The population was a little bit over three thousands, two thirds out of which were Jews. There were strong Jewish traditions in town.

It is hard to say how religious the our family was. My mother was so busy with her chores that she probably had no time for praying. At any rate, at home she did not cover her head. I do not remember her praying. Sabbath was mark obligatorily. Usually mother went to the synagogue on Friday, having put a dressy outfit on and laced head cover. Brother and I also went there. In the evening mother lit candles. I still remember how she leaned over them and put her palms on he eyes. We had a festive dinner on Saturday- chicken stew, pies, sometimes gefilte fish. Mother tried not to do anything on Saturday. Usually some Polish lady worked. She also helped with gardening. But still, there were times when mother had to work on Saturday- to milk cows, feed poultry. Thus, she had to break Sabbath rules.

Jewish charity was very developed in town. We also helped the poor for them to have the chance to mark Sabbath. I remember that we had a very poor blacksmith, who had very many children. His wife was butter fingers and managed things poor. Apart from money, Rivka sent them basket with food every Friday. Kashrut was observed at home. When I grew up, mother often sent me to shochet in synagogue. I liked watching him how he made a precision cut on the hen's throat and hang it on the hook with a special funnel, wherefrom the blood was trickling down.

We marked main Jewish holidays at home. I loved Rosh Hashanah, when the shofars were blown in the synagogues. At home we had a festive dinner.. On Yom Kippur we fasted obligatorily. I also fasted on that day, even when I was in the lines. I liked autumn holidays. Though we did not put sukkah in our yards, but I called on my Jewish friends and we had meals in the tabernacle. Simchat Torah was a joyful holiday. We ran to the synagogue to watch Jews dancing with the Torah scroll. I became rich on Chanukkah - mother and elder brothers gave money to me. I bought deserts with some of the money and shared them with my friends and nephews. On Chanukah we lit the candles on Chanukah- a silver candlestick. Each day we added a new candle. In accordance with the tradition, the chanukiah was placed on the windowsill and the whole city was shining with the lights. On that holiday children played with the spinning top and adults played cards. We ate tasty potato fritters. On Purim mother baked hamantashen and I took them to my school friends. They also brought presents- shelakhmones to me. On Pesach mother baked all kind of Jewish dishes- tsimes, sponge cake, chicken stew, gefilte fish. There was matzah at home. We ate no bread at that period of time. We got ready for the holiday beforehand making the house sparkling clean. I was given a task to whisk the eggs and sugar for the holiday cake. All siblings with their families came to us, but nobody carried out seder as neither father nor grandfather were a live, and brothers were modern people and they did not know how to do it and were not willing to. We did not disdain traditions. We loved our parents so we tried to please them and did what we were supposed to in accordance with the Jewish traditions. I do not know why I did not go through bar mitzvah.