

Boris Girshov's Father With His Sisters



This photograph taken in Usvyaty in 1900s, shows my father and his sisters.

My father David Yosefovich Girshov was born in 1888 in Usvyaty.

He was 13 years older than Mum. He was a decent, strict, and hardworking person, not very religious, though my parents tried to observe Jewish traditions at home, especially on holidays.

When a young man, Daddy was physically strong. His comrade Petr Vladimirovich Belkin (uncle Pinya) whom I met in Petersburg, told me that Daddy showed his strength not only in fights against his coevals, but also lifting in his teeth a table with boiling samovar, bending horseshoes, etc.

Every young man in Usvyaty both Russian and Jewish knew him very well as a local Hercules.

My father participated in the World War I. He was wounded in the leg. We had a photo showing him and a few injured people sitting together and expressively pointing fingers at his wounded leg.

His character was quick-tempered and impulsive. That was the reason of his frequent quarrels with Mum. He used to punish me for my faults with a belt or lash. It was very painful and I keep it in mind all my life. Mum tried to protect me from it.

During the period of NEP my parents were owners of a little store and sold small items. After abolition of NEP, Daddy worked in the regional consumers union. [The regional consumers union was a special structure for purchasing agricultural products from peasants.]

At first he worked as a storekeeper, and later he was engaged in acceptance of grain which peasants handed over to the Government according to Food Tax. [In the Soviet Union Food Tax was raised from peasants in 1921-1923.]

Father was uneducated, therefore I had to help him in drawing up reports, making calculations, etc.

Father was an indisputable authority for me. First of all he wanted me to become a great guy. In conditions of our town he taught me everything, including riding a horse. He spurred me to go in for sports: I became a first-grade gymnast.

Father didn't pinch pennies on my studies the violin: I took lessons at professional teacher. Father showed me to professional musicians who came to our small town for vacation.

Daddy loved classical music very much, he played the violin himself, and was happy that I learned to play the violin, too.

My brother Arkady also had musical abilities and father was very pleased to know that Arkady (when a little boy) got a prize at the amateur art contest.

Father sent me to the Jewish school. In addition to it I studied at cheder to acquire knowledge of Judaism, to be able to pray. Father was a real Jew and tried to accustom me to Jewish Tradition.

He always observed Tradition at home. Daddy dreamed that my brother would become a violinist, and his dream came true. Jewish melodies always moved him to tears. I remember him to be very pleased when I learnt to play some Jewish melodies.

Father used to invite his friends, send for me (I was always playing football somewhere in the street) and ask me to play melodies chosen by him.