

Isaac Serman



This is me. There was a large photo exhibition in the Jewish Community of Estonia, organized on the occasion of the Victory Day on 9th May 2005. I was photographed as veteran of the Estonian corps. My awards: to the left is the front-line soldier insignia, then two orders of the Great Patriotic War of the 2nd and 1st class. The order of the Great Patriotic War of the 2nd class was given for battles in Kurland, the 1st class orders were given to war veterans when the war was over. Then there's an Order For the Defense of Leningrad and for the victory over Germany. To the right are jubilee medals. The picture was taken in Tallinn in 2005.

In 1950 I got a job in Tallinn as editor on the radio. There were 3 chief editors and each of us was on duty for a week. When I was on duty, I was through with work at around one a.m., when first pieces of news were being made up and the issue was being. By the middle of the 1960s I was offered to a position of a deputy chairman in cinematography committee, i.e. deputy minister. At that time that committee was being formed. My comrades, who were subordinated to me in the army, also were offered a job there. That offer showed how they treated Jews in Estonia. Frankly speaking I was not willing to accept that offer. We had a wonderful team on the radio. I was a journalist, and liked what I was doing. Finally I was called by the first secretary of the communist party of Estonia, a very pleasant and interesting person. If somebody told me before 1940 that I Jew would be offered a position like that I would not believe it. I said that I did not want to leave my job. In reply he said that I had the right to refuse, but I would never be offered anything. I had to agree. Did I have any other way out? I had worked in cinematography committee for 17 years and retired in 1982.

The Jewish community of Estonia was founded before perestroika. When Estonia became independent it became the center, uniting all Jews of our country. The community means a lot for all of us. It has become a part of our life. The community was given the building of the former Jewish lyceum. I often go there. There is the Council of War Veterans in our community. We get together two or three times per month. There is a good library in community. I take books there to read. I am a passionate reader.

I take part in all holidays, celebrated at the community - Holocaust Day, Day of Israel, Day of the Perished etc. We always celebrate Victory Day. This year, when the 60th anniversary of the victory was celebrated, we had a feast. If the USSR had not won that horrible war, there would have been no Jews left in Europe. In spite of hard life in evacuation and starvation, Jews survived and escaped concentration camps. I am grateful to the Soviet Union for that. Actors, children made performances for us, veterans. There was a great table laid for us. Those, who were in the lines, were given flowers and presents. It was very ceremonious and touching.

Of course, I take part in Jewish holidays. On Pesach I like to hear children ask the traditional four questions, I used to ask my father. I still remember them. Other holidays are celebrated in our community in an interesting way as well. At home we have celebrations as well. It has always been like that. We have monthly birthday celebrations of those, who were born in that month. It is a real pleasure that someone remembers you and takes care.

The community takes a lot of actions on collecting data on Holocaust victims in Estonia. I think in the 1960s there were two trials of those who were involved in the extermination of Jews during the war. Actually, those issues were more raised after Estonia gained independence. There was even an acting commission of the government of Estonia. In accordance with the data of that commission, headed by a Finnish Jew, journalist Max Jacobson, 10,000 Jews perished on the territory of Estonia. There were 20,000 in accordance with the data of our community. The matter is not in the number, the problem was that they were murdered for merely being Jews. Estonia was the first to tell Hitler that its territory was free of the Jewish population. All of us should do our best for it not to happen ever again.

Our community built monuments in five places of mass execution of Jews. Annually I hold a speech at school on Victory Day. If not for the German army, where Estonians served, six millions of European Jews would have stayed alive. If not for the Soviet Army, where Estonians served too, there would be no Jews left in Europe at all. We should remember that.