

Leizer Gurvich



This is my father Leizer Gurvich, the picture was made in Kaunas in the 1920s.

My name is Eta Gurvich. In Lithuanian my last name sounds Gurvichuyte and this name is written in my passport. It is my maiden name. In my relatives' words, my paternal great grandfather was a chimney sweep. I do not know his first name, just surname -Gurvich. Great grandfather was from Lithuanian town Rumsiskes [80 km from Vilnius]. At that time, prior to Lithuanian independence from Russian empire, great grandfather, a simple chimney-sweep, dreamt of getting rich. His dream came true. It was like a fairy-tale. A poor chimney-sweep, who bought all kinds of lotteries, won an all-Russian lottery prize. I do not know exactly how much money he got, but at that time it was a real fortune. My great grandfather bought a large house in Kaunas. He lived with his family there and raised his children. I have no idea how many children great grandfather had. One of them was my grandfather Jacob Gurvich, a rabbi of one of the many Kaunas synagogues. I did not know grandfather. He died in 1911.

Jacob had five children - two daughters and three sons. All grown-up children with their families lived in a large house, demised by a great grandfather. That two-storied square-shaped house had a yard and adjacent premises as well as twenty apartments. There were enough apartments for all children. The remainder was leased. The house pertained to grandmother Ester. After her death in accordance with the Jewish law the property was devolved by the eldest son, i.e. my father. Father, in his turn, divided the property among his relatives.

My father Leizer Gurvich was born in 1879. I cannot say exactly where he studied. I think he graduated from lyceum and went on with his education. Father was a modern educated man. When he was young he worked for his relatives at match production factory. Then he acquired a printing house jointly with his brothers. It was a large enterprise, where newspapers and magazines were printed in Lithuanian as well as in Yiddish. Father stuck to Bund views. I do not know if father was a member of any Jewish organization. There were a lot of them at that time in Lithuania. Father had no time for social life. He was not a religious Jew. He went to the synagogue on the holidays, mostly when mother asked him.

Father got married in 1909 at the age of thirty. They say, he met my mother with the help of Jewish match-makers- shadhans. They were in love with each other in spite of the fact that their marriage was prearranged by shadhans. The wedding took place in Taurage in accordance with the Jewish rites in the synagogue, where grandfather was a gabai. The newly-weds went to Kaunas, where they settled in the house of grandfather Jacob. In 1910 my elder sister Anna was born and in 1913 - brother Jacob, named after grandfather Jacob Gurvich. I, the youngest, was born on the 20th of April 1920. I was named Eta.

In spring 1927 our mother died. After mother's death father did his best to maintain things at home the way they were. He was yearning, though he never showed it. Then father became more reserved. He hardly had any free time. Usually I saw him only at breakfast or late in the evening with the paper in his hands as if trying to shelter from us and from life.