

Rahmil Shmushkevich With His Grandfather Avrum Gurevich



My grandfather Avrum Gurevich and I, Rahmil Shmushkevich, on my 5th birthday in 1917 in Rzyhshev.

I have very sweet memories about my mother's father Abraham. My grandfather Abraham Gurevich was born in Rzyhshev in 1860s. Rzyhshev was a small town on the right bank of the Dnepr. It stood on the Lelech River and Dnepr was in about 500 meters. The Jewish population constituted about 95%. There were few synagogues and a cheder in the town. My grandfather was a balagula He had red hair and a curly beard, a hooked nose and kind laughing eyes. He only spoke Yiddish, but he understood Ukrainian. He always joked and used to say that he loved Seryozha (his horse) and me more than anybody else in the world. My grandfather was a very religious man. He even prayed when he was on the road when the first star of Saturday (Friday evening) rose. On Saturday he always went to the synagogue. He was a poor man and went to the synagogue for the poor. It was a shabby building and there were no decorations in it. People respected my grandfather and often turned to him for a piece of advice. My grandfather lived in a small house with thatched roof. The windows were on the ground level and there were ground floors in it. There was a shed in the yard where he kept his horse Seryozha.

When I was a boy I liked to visit my grandfather. He used to say that I would become a hazan (cantor) - I sang nicely when I was a child. I loved my grandfather Abraham even more than my parents. We were very good friends. In the early 1919 my grandfather Abraham was murdered by bandits in Rzhyshev. I can still remember it as if it happened yesterday. I pressed my finger to the window glass to melt the ice and looked whether my grandfather was coming home. He went out to give some food to the horse.

Many Jews were hiding in our house in 1920s. The situation was very hard: the power switched from the white , to the red or Petlura units. All of a sudden a poor old woman came to our house screaming "Come there - they are killing your father!" I was 6 years old and was crying and begging that somebody went to my grandfather's rescue. But everybody was afraid. The bandits murdered my grandfather with planks from the fence. He happened to help an injured man the day before on his way back from Kagarlyk. That man was a Jew and a Bolshevik. When we all ran to see what happened my grandfather was lying on the snow with no clothes on and there was blood all around him. He was covered with frost. All his neighbors and relatives were looking around in fear of bandits. My grandfather had a piece of cloth on his chest where the bandits wrote a message to bury him after 3 days passed. My grandfather was laying near his house for 3 day before he was buried. I saw my grandfather in my dreams for a long time after he died.