

Rahmil Shmushkevich's Family



My family. From left to right, upper row: my wife's brother Grigory Bronevoy and my wife Seva Bronevaya; lower row: my sister Rachel holding her son, my father Yudko Shmushkevich and my mother Freida Shmushkevich photographed in my two-room apartment in Yamskaya Street in Kiev in March 1941 on the occasion of the visit of my wife's brother. We are meet to communicate and eat in household circle in my.

My father and mother had 7 children. I am the oldest of my brothers and sisters Four of them died in babyhood or childhood.

I and my family were living in a shabby hut with thatched roof. In this same hut my father made sweets and my mother helped him. Making sweets was a very complicated process, especially of caramel candy. My father made stuffing in a big bowl, then boiled candy from sugar and had the candy wrapped in paper supplied from Kiev. Rzhyshev was a very poor town and my father didn't do very well, but people were still buying some sweets. Tinsmiths used to make pans for marmalade and chocolate bars that my father made. There was always a sweet smell in our house and we didn't eat candy. My parents worked from morning till night. Women came to my father to take candy for sale at the market.

In 1931 I was appointed director of this children's home. Some of my pupils were of the same age with me. At that time the home was no more Jewish, we had many children of other nationalities. There was no anti-Semitism at that time. Anti-Semitism was considered a crime against the state and was suppressed, if necessary. To be director of the children's home was a risky job.

I worked a lot during the day and studied by correspondence at the Philology Faculty of Kiev University. Our family were sleeping in our single room and I studied in our small kitchen at night. I wanted our newspaper "Yuny Lenineti" to be very popular among young people, I was its editor. I tried to publish interviews with the prominent people of our time. I met writers, actors, producers, pilots and state officials and wrote about them in the newspaper. In 1930s it became risky to meet with such people. You interviewed a commandant like Fakir Iona (a Jew) one day and on the following day he was declared an enemy of the people and one could pay with one's freedom or even life for knowing him. But God was merciful. I was a member of Kiev Town Komsomol Committee, but I didn't become a Party member until 1940.

Many Komsomol officials spent their vacations in Crimean recreation centers. I went into a recreation center of the Central Committee in 1934 and met a nurse - Seva Bronevaya. She was 19 years old. We liked each other. Seva was born in Yalta in 1915. Her father was a sailor and then was appointed as director of Yalta film studio and her mother was a nurse. We met in autumn 1934 and in March 1935 she joined me in Kiev and we have marry. We corresponded all this time. By the time she arrived my parents and I had a two-room apartment in Yamskaya Street. My parents liked Seva, but my aunt and my mother's sister didn't like her. My aunt Fira called her "goika" (meaning "non Jewish girl"). But Seva was very nice and kind and my aunt came to liking her. Seva was a nurse and studied at the. In 1939 our son was born. We named him Valery after a Soviet pilot Valery Chkalov . We were still living in our apartment. My mother was a housewife and looked after our son and Seva and I could work and study.

On 22 June 1941 I was in Moscow. I took a 3 months training course for Party officials at the Lenin Academy. I stayed with my friend, a very popular Soviet poet Evgeniy Dolmatovskiy . He worked at the "Komsomolskaya Pravda" newspaper. He received a phone call early in the morning about the beginning of the war. I ran to the Academy and all who came there flew to the Kiev Military division. I was on the front on the 2nd day of the war. My wife and son were visiting Seva's parents in Yalta at that time. Seva and Valery were killed by the Germans in 1942.

My sister Rachel and our mother lived together in Kiev. Rachel finished an accounting course and worked as an accountant at the confectioner before the war. She married David Dubinsky, a worker and a Jew. He was on the front during the war, was wounded and returned home almost blind. Rachel was in evacuation in Sverdlovsk region in the Ural. She worked at the military plant. She gave birth to a boy - Alik - in 1942. After the war she continued working as an accountant. Now my sister and her son live in Israel. Her husband David Dubinskiy died in 1965. They were a traditional Jewish family. They spoke Yiddish in the family and observed Jewish traditions even after the war.