

Dimitri Kamyshan's Aunt Ludmila Zbar And Her Family



My father's sister, Ludmila Zbar [nee Zilberberg], her husband Arkadiy and her daughter Valentina.

My grandparents had six children. Ludmila and Valentina were twins; they were born in 1900. Valentina died of measles when she was 2 years old. Ludmila was my father's only sister that got married. Her husband was a Jew from Western Ukraine. They were engineers at a plant. Their daughter Valentina was born in 1937.

The Germans occupied Kharkov in October 1941. The ghetto was established at the end of November, and when we were on the way there we didn't know what our point of destination was. We were to move to the ghetto, but my grandmother was hoping that we would be able to ransom ourselves, so she took all her gold with her. All Jews of Kharkov were walking along the main street of the town. People were joining the march on the way. My mother was seeing us off walking on the pavement. She couldn't get me out of the crowd, because nobody dared to violate the order for all Jews and half-Jews to get on the way. She was Russian and was not supposed to be with us. Arkadiy was carrying little Valentina, and my mother begged him to leave the little girl with her. But he refused saying, 'She was born a Jew and she will die a Jew'. Valentina was crying. She was freezing.

We walked and walked leaving the houses behind and entering the industrial zone in Kharkov. We came to some barracks with no heating or any other comforts. The Germans were just beginning to work on the fencing and took no notice of our discomforts. My father and other younger men were taken away. We came inside a barrack with broken windows and doors, no stove, nothing. Ludmila, Arkadiy and Valentina went to the corner and Ida and Mara burst into tears. I said, 'Don't cry, it'll be fine'. After about an hour and a half a German soldier was passing by, and my grandmother said to him, 'These are people, you know, and it's impossible to live here'. Without saying a word he took out his gun and shot my grandmother. My aunt Ida said to me, 'Dimitri, this is death here. You need to escape from here in the dark'. I went to the fence and crawled underneath it.

I headed home to my mother. In the morning our neighbor Marfusha came to tell us that our neighbors wrote a report on us saying that my real name was Zilberberg and that my mother was a communist. We left for Zhuravlyovka in the suburbs of Kharkov, where Marfusha's relatives lived. A few days later Marfusha brought a note from Ida. Ida wrote, 'Olga, save Dimitri. We are dead. Valentina was shot'.