

Semyon Ghendler's Father Zachari Ghendler And Mother Yelizaveta Ghendler



My father Zachari Ghendler and my mother Yelizaveta Ghendler (nee Oks, Jewish name Leya) photographed in the late 1930s in Zhitomir on their wedding jubilee.

My father Zachari Ghendler was born in Ovruch in 1904. He received traditional Jewish education: he finished cheder and four years of Jewish elementary school. He knew Yiddish well and he also knew the Torah, but during the Soviet regime he was an atheist. In 1917, during the revolution, my father joined the Red army like many Jewish young people escaping from pogroms and poverty in their towns hoping for a different life. My father served in cavalry. After the Civil War my father was a laborer at different jobs. In 1925, when he met my mother, he was a laborer at the leather factory: he handled skin leather.

My mother came from Zhitomir. She was born in Zhitomir in 1905. At home she was called Lyonia for some reason. Though her parents were religious they decided to give their daughter secular education. My mother finished a Russian grammar school in 1918. I don't know whether my mother worked before the early 1920s, when she met my father. They met in 1925 and fell in love with one another. My father was a strong handsome man. My mother was young and fair-haired. They made a beautiful match, but they couldn't get married right away. My grandparents Oks were against their marriage. They believed my mother could find a better match with education equal to her own, but my mother wouldn't even consider another man. In 1926 my mother's parents gave up and my parents got married. I don't know any details about their wedding. All I know is that it was a traditional Jewish wedding. The young couple was so happy to have their parents' consent that they didn't argue about having a chuppah, and rabbi and a marriage contract, though by this time they had given up religion. They had a traditional wedding in Zhitomir where they invited relatives from Ovruch and Korosten and then my parents had a civil ceremony in a registry office.

My parents settled down with distant relatives on my mother's side. I guess, my mother's parents didn't quite approve of their daughter's misalliance, as they thought of it. My parents lived their first years together in a small room in a long building. I was born on 8 November 1927. I was named Shlyoma, but later I changed this name to the Russian name of Semyon for convenience.

We didn't observe Jewish traditions in our family, though my mother or father never joined Komsomol or the party, but they were atheists. In the early 1930s we lived in Olevska of Zhitomir region, 70 km from Zhitomir. My father was offered to work in a store and the family moved to this town. We lived with some relatives in a wooden house with a garret. I have dim memories of famine in 1932-33, when my father brought some packages from his work. This was dried bread that we dipped in water before eating them. I remember a constant feeling of hunger, but nobody died in our family, though there were dead people in the streets every morning and special trucks picked them. We stayed in Olevska less than a year. My father proved to be good in trading business. Although he didn't have any special education he was offered to become director of a fish store and in 1935 he got an offer to become director of a big food store in Zhitomir. We returned to Zhitomir. We got an apartment in Zhitomir. My father had an average income sufficient to make a decent living. My mother didn't work before the Great Patriotic War.