

Boris Pukshansky's Grandmother



This photograph taken in Liozno in 1939 shows my maternal grandmother. Here I'd like to tell you about my grandparents and my native town.

First I'll tell you about my father's parents. His father's name was David Pukshansky. They said that our surname came from Puksha village, where our ancestors lived. But my grandfather and his wife Hana lived in a small Belarus town Yanovichi. They had got 7 children (for those times it was not many): two sons (Afroim and Zuse) and five daughters (Frume, Sifra, Bela, Leye and Rokhl). All of them except Bela had got children.

My grandfather was born approximately in 1850, and died in 1930. My grandmother was a little bit younger. Both of them lived in Yanovichi all their life long, and were buried there. Grandfather died accidentally and tragically: he was crushed to death by suddenly opened gate. Grandmother outlived him by a short while. After their death my father's brother and his family lodged in their house.

My grandfather was one of shoppy people: some sort of chapman. He bought small items necessary in housekeeping and sold them in neighboring villages. Both my grandfather and grandmother were very religious people. I never saw grandfather without a hat. He had a big spade beard. Grandmother always wore a wig, she told me that her head was closely cropped. They observed strict kashrut, celebrated all religious holidays and Shabbath. They talked to each other only Yiddish, but thanks to their religiousness both also knew Hebrew well.

I know that my grandmother descended from a large family, though I do not remember exactly how many sisters and brothers she had got. And I can tell you nothing about my grandfather's family.

Now about my mother's parents: her father was Mates Levergant and her mother's name was Sore Isaakovna (I do not remember her maiden name). They were born in 1850s. They lived in Belarus small town Ostrovno. I do not remember his occupation, I only know that his profession was somehow concerned with wood. For a long time they had no children. But later (thanks God!) there were born my Mum and 3 more children: Berte, Gerzl and Isaak. The family of my mother's parents was very religious: they strictly observed all traditions. Grandmother and grandfather dressed as expected from religious Jews.

Yanovichi, a small town of my childhood was a real Jewish shtetl. About 80% of its population was Jewish. Even Russians in our small town spoke Yiddish well. Yanovichi was situated about 20 kilometers far from Vitebsk. There was no railroad. I do not remember any stone houses in Yanovichi, only wooden. And I do not remember that Jews in our small town had some special occupations. From my parents I got to know that in our town all doctors were Jewish (without exception), the most well-known was therapist Livshits, he was also the most respected person.

There were several synagogues (I do not know how many, but remember that not one). Grandfather was an honorary synagogue visitor. Certainly there were shochetim, all Jews asked for their assistance. Shochetim were always in popular demand.