

Boris Pukshansky's Sister



My sister Sofye had this picture taken in Vitebsk in 1940. She studied there and sent the photo home from Liozno. A year later (in summer of 1941) she came home for vacation. There she was caught by the war, taken to ghetto and brought to an early grave.

Immediately after the beginning of the war it became clear that Germans will soon be in Liozno and it was necessary to evacuate. We kept in mind stories of refugees from Poland about barbarities of Germans, therefore we did not hesitate. First we decided to ship off only children, but Mum thought it over and said that it was not clever to separate during hard times and we should leave all together. Daddy objected (he could not leave his work), but Mum insisted. We started preparing for departure, packed up some things, and registered for departure by train leaving on July 5.

We worried about Mikhail, but hoped that in Leningrad he would be safer, than we were. On July 3 Stalin addressed people on the radio. It was his first speech after beginning of the war. He said that actions took place only on borders and they would not last long. He asked people not to give way to panic. Party authorities trusted Stalin more, than their own eyes, therefore they cancelled dispatching the train. So I consider Stalin to be personally guilty of death of my family members. On July 9 we saw a red glare over the burning Vitebsk. Later we got to know that Germans occupied Vitebsk on July 11. At that moment we understood that it was impossible to wait any more. Father found a horse somewhere, he managed to harness it and we started our way. My parents, grandmother, my sister, younger brother and I went on the cart along country roads, knowing nothing about the way, heading for the east. On the way we met other refugees, mainly Jews. Almost all Belarus Jews suspected what fate awaited them if they stayed to wait for Germans.

We saw our army retreating, saw commanders tearing off their insignia (they were afraid to be taken prisoners).

Once we nearly came across a column of Germans, it was necessary to come back. A week passed since the time of our departure. Most Jews who had left Liozno, returned also. During that week the city was destroyed seriously. Our house remained safe, but we lived in it not for long: all Jews were moved to ghetto. Germans arranged ghetto in the city district where there were the poorest houses, sheds, some strange constructions. There appeared gallows: fascists executed Soviet prisoners. Order in the city was supported mainly by polizei soldiers (Russians and Byelorussians). [During the Great Patriotic War people in occupied territories called a local resident serving in fascist police a polizei.]. A German Lampert was appointed a burgomaster. [Burgomaster was the Head of the city administration appointed by German headquarters on the occupied territory]. He was a German who lived all his life long in Yanovichi and had no concern to German army.

In September during Rosh Hashanah in ghetto there happened short circuit, and the entire district remained without electricity supply. Germans considered it to be a diversion (probably it was indeed) and threatened to shoot 10 people if they did not find saboteurs. Germans came to us and chose my father, my brother and me for execution. They were already going to take us away, but at that moment my sister entered the room. The German soldier looked at her in a strange manner and left without a word. Later we got to know that Sofye and his sister were very much alike. Here you see what a moth could sometimes turn the balance.