

Haim Yasinover



This is a photo of my grandfather, Haim Yasinover, that was taken in Harbin, China. My family is from Ananyev, near Odessa. Because of pogroms and intensifying anti-Semitism, my grandfather decided to leave Russia. In 1910, he went by rail to Harbin, China. At that time, Harbin could be considered a Russian town; Russian was the most widely spoken language. The Jewish community in Harbin was quite large. My mother, Anna Yasinover, was born in 1893 in Ananyev. She only had an elementary education. She married Israel Liberman in Harbin. My father was born in 1898 in Bialystok, Poland, in an Orthodox Jewish family. In 1920, Father decided to go from Poland to America - not in the most common way, but via Russia and China. He ended up in Harbin because he had no money to continue. I was born in Harbin in 1923, and I was an only child. I lived there until 1938 and went to the English school. My parents spoke Yiddish among themselves and Russian and Yiddish with me. We had a very cozy, comfortable four-room flat. We read newspapers

in Russian, English, and my father read in Yiddish. In 1938, we moved to Shanghai after fascist organizations appeared in Harbin. My father opened a print shop, and he had orders from the Polish Embassy in China to print an advertising catalogue, because Poland wanted to recover trade with Japan and China. Father was in Poland preparing the catalogues on September 1, 1939. We never saw him again. We had been waiting for permission to go to the USA and we got it at the end of 1939. My mother believed Father return from Poland and that he would not find us if we left for the USA, so we stayed in Shanghai. I met my future husband, Paul Zauer, in 1942. My relatives did not like it that he was Russian, and his relatives did not like it that I was Jewish. To us, it did not matter. We were going out for almost two years, and our parents accepted it in the end. My husband and I were married for 44 years. The national question was never a cause of quarrel or difference of opinions between us. In Harbin, I had been a member of the Zionist youth organization Betar. Paul and I were active members of the Soviet club in Shanghai. It was a very interesting and merry place. After the victory in Germany, later in Japan, the prestige of the Soviet Union grew, especially among the Russian-speaking population of China. In 1948, the Soviet Government said all interested Russian-speaking people could depart for the USSR. We decided to go to this remarkable country, which defeated fascism, where all people had equal rights and all people were heroes. We were not afraid of the difficulties. Instead of Vladivostok, our ship arrived in the port Nakhodka. We were told: 'Choose! Siberia or the Urals.' We were afraid of Siberia and we decided to go to the Urals. We lived through this period thanks to my mother. She went shopping, stood in lines, bought food, sold our things - our clothes, porcelain - prepared meals, looked after my child, and encouraged us with Jewish humor. Our neighbors in the Urals had been deported from Estonia. They helped our family assimilate to the new conditions of our everyday life. After the amnesty in 1953, our Estonian friends went back to Estonia. They said we should go live there. From 1953, we too could move wherever we liked, except the capital cities. So we found ourselves in Estonia, in the town Kohtla-Järve, where I have been living since 1953. We would probably be fully assimilated by now, if it were not for my mother. She lived with us until her death in 1962. She kept the house, and helped us bring up our son. She didn't let us forget that we were Jews. She told our son about her family, Jewish traditions and holidays; she cooked Jewish dishes. Thanks to my mother, my son and his children realized that they are Jews.