

Ronia Finkelshtein With Her Cousin Sister Vera Finkelshtein



My cousin sister Vera and I. I turned 16 and Vera was 6. The picture was taken in the photo shop at 20, Oktaiabrskaya Street in Poltava in 1936. My grandfather died in 1932. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery. I wasn't allowed to go to the funeral, but my mother told me that there was a rabbi there. After my grandfather died our family celebrated fewer Jewish holidays until we stopped celebrating them completely. The Soviet power struggled against religion. When the older generation was still alive their families celebrated Jewish holidays, but later I didn't see any family that observed any traditions. In our family only my grandparents were religious, and the following generations lost their commitment to the Jewish way of life. Of course, they all followed the covenants and carried God in their hearts, but there was no outward demonstration of their faith. They didn't go to the synagogue or follow the kashrut. However, my mother tried to keep some traditions. We celebrated Pesach and had matzah at home. My mother fasted on Yom Kippur. She fasted until I strictly forbade her to when she grew older. She had diabetes. I gave her injections and told her that it was said that if a person was ill this person was released from strict obedience to religious rules. I became a Komsomol member in 1936, when I was in the 9th grade. It was a natural flow of events - from pioneers to Komsomol members. I never took part in public events, but it didn't ever occur to me that I might skip Komsomol. When I was in the 10th grade we were allowed to put up a Christmas tree at school, it was so lovely! Some traditions have ancient roots, and the tradition to decorate a Christmas tree dated back to the times of Tsar Peter [Peter the Great]. It was hard to eliminate old traditions from people's lives and many people kept having a tree. Christmas Trees were forbidden before with the excuse that it was a waste of trees. [Editor's note: Actually, Christmas trees were forbidden by the Soviet power as vestige of the bourgeois past.]