

Mikhail Gauzner With His Parents



This is me with my father Yakov Gauzner and my mother Riva Gauzner, nee Vainshtein. The photo was taken in 1939 in Odessa, in our apartment, by one of my father's acquaintances. I am playing children's lotto with my parents on this picture and beside the table sits my beloved toy: my teddy-bear. My father was born in Mogilyov-Podolsk in 1907. He wrote in his biography that he had completed a secondary school; this must have been when he was still in Mogilyov-Podolsk. Then my father graduated from Odessa Machine-Building Technical School and started working as an engineer at some plant. Very soon he was recognized as an organizer, him being a born leader. While working at the plant he graduated from the evening department of Odessa Industrial Institute [today's Polytechnic Institute] as a mechanical engineer. Before the Great Patriotic War he worked as a mechanical shop superintendent at Odessa's well-known Kinap Plant [cinema equipment producing plant]. My father got acquainted with my mother around 1930, at some friend's party. My parents were special for having no national prejudices when it came to choosing friends, and didn't have the habit of our people to create purely Jewish families. My father's milieu in Odessa, to use his words, was 'absolutely international'. I was born on 3rd June 1936 in Odessa, in the maternity hospital in Kulikovo Pole [city square near the railway station]. We lived on the third floor of a house in Lanzheronovskaya Street in the city center. It was a rather dark, dull apartment, but a large one. There were four rooms, a kitchen, and a restroom. Two rooms had windows; the other two were dark. Both my grandparents' bedroom and our room - I stayed with my parents - had windows with a look out over Lanzheronovskaya Street. The rooms were furnished with old furniture. I remember a huge dining table. There was also a cute little table on bentwood legs, with a marble table-top, on which I often hit myself. I went to the kindergarten in Vorontsov Lane, not far from our home. My mother always worked very hard and couldn't stay with me all the time. She worked as a bookkeeper at the house-managing office. But in the hours she could spare for me, she was my dearest one. We never ever had pets in our house. My father suffered from a rare phobia: he was afraid of birds, of their wings clapping. He would suddenly become unreasonably terror-stricken. Wishing to play a trick on him once, some of his friends

brought in a sea-gull. My father's eyes went white; he jumped onto the windowsill of an open window and said, 'If you don't take it away at once, I'll jump out of the window.' Our pre-war life was rather modest; I don't remember any noisy dinner parties, although my parents' relatives and friends visited us often.