

Iosif Gurevich With His Mother



This is a picture of my mother Elizaveta Gurevich [nee Simonovskaya] and me. The photo was taken in Konotop in 1929. My parents met when my mother studied at grammar school. There were often balls arranged at their school. My father, Samuel Gurevich, used to come to these parties in a horse-driven carriage. He was a handsome and well-dressed guy and managed to impress my mother, although they were different in many respects. There was a romantic story in my mother's life. During the Civil War, after the Revolution of 1917, Germans came to Ukraine. I guess this happened in 1919. A young German officer and my mother fell in love. He wanted to take her to Germany. When my mother's father heard about it he tied my mother to the table. The Germans left and my mother stayed in Konotop. Perhaps, my mother married my father to forget what had happened back then. My parents got married in 1923. I don't think they had a traditional Jewish wedding. I believe they had a civil wedding. Well, at least my religious grandfather Tevel never once came to the house. Grandmother Frida often came to see us, but my grandfather didn't. I guess, he must have had a good reason for that. My mother became a housewife after she got married. My father did badly paid manual work. My parents were poor. They rented a small 15-square-meter room in a one-storied house with two porches and entrance doors on the outskirts of town. There was a small river in this neighborhood where I liked to play when I was a child. I was born on 11th March 1924 and I was named Iosif. My father insisted that I was circumcised in accordance with the Jewish traditions. My maternal grandfather Arkadi liked me a lot and was happy that there was a man in the family since he only had daughters. My mother told me that my grandfather never let go of me. Somehow there were no notes made at my birth, so my grandfather registered me in April 1925. Therefore, all my documents, including my birth certificate, state that I was born on 5th April 1925. Perhaps, my grandfather saved my life unintentionally because I was only recruited to the army at the very end of the war. My aunt Bertha [Gurevich] submitted my documents to the Jewish school in 1931. Since I hadn't reached the age of

7, according to my birth certificate, I wasn't admitted. The following year my mother took me to the Russian school. This was the only Russian school in Konotop; the rest of the schools were Ukrainian. Boys and girls studied together. There were about ten Jewish children among my 30 classmates. I had many Jewish and Ukrainian friends. I didn't face any anti-Semitism, but I heard the word 'zhyd' [kike] from senior pupils. In my family we were raised to make no difference between nationalities.