

Raissa Makarevich's Father Gersh Makarevich With His Grandchildren



My father, Gersh Makarevich, with his grandchildren. In the foreground is my daughter, Nelia Sokolianskaya. On either side of my father are the children of my older sister Fenia, Lena and Phelix. This picture was taken in Kiev in 1948.

We celebrated all the Jewish holidays at home. During Pesach, Father went to the synagogue and brought back a basket of matzah. We cleaned up the house and put our beautiful kosher dishes on the table. Mamma called them "Easter dishes." Father sat at the head of the table and guided the first seder. He said all the traditional prayers and words in Yiddish. All the traditional items were laid out on the table at Pesach: matzah, bitter greens, eggs, chicken. And Mamma cooked a lot of other delicious things. There was no bread in the house during Easter.

I felt awfully sorry for the children during evacuation. They never got enough food and they were always sick. My daughter Larissa died in Ulianovsk in 1944. She had diphtheria. My mother was in hospital with her, as I couldn't leave my job. The doctors couldn't help Larissa – they didn't have the necessary medication. My husband was on a business trip in Ulan-Ude. By the time he returned, Larissa had died. We mourned our daughter deeply. Only work could distract us a little. At the end of 1944, my daughter Nelia was born.

My girls Nelia and Sveta finished school. They did very well. This was during the eruption of anti-Semitism. Nelia and Sveta chose to be officially recognized as Ukrainian rather than Jewish. By having Ukrainian written on their passports they were able to enter educational institutes. Their friends were mainly Russian and Ukrainian.

At home we didn't observe any Jewish traditions or celebrate any Jewish holidays. I was a Party member and I was afraid.

My parents moved into our old apartment in Podol when they returned home from evacuation. After the war, my father worked in a store for a while. Then he retired. My mother didn't work. My father died in 1972 and my mother died in 1977. My parents continued to observe Jewish traditions and celebrate all the holidays. They regularly went to the synagogue in Podol. All our relatives got together at their place during Pesach. My children and I also went. I believe my girls identified as Jews, even though they were officially listed as Ukrainian. They always asked my father about Jewish holidays, traditions, and the history of our people.