

Tsylvia Shapiro With Her Brother Leonid Potievskiy



My brother Leonid and I, Tsylvia Potievskaya. This photo was taken in Malin on my birthday 1935.

When my older brother Leonid was born in 1922 my mother didn't even have milk to breastfeed him because she was starving. She dipped some bread in water, wrapped it in a piece of cloth and gave it to the baby to suck. The boy was very sickly: scrofulous and his body was covered with abscesses and boils.

When I was born on 11th July 1924 life was different. My father worked at the factory and my mother was a housewife. My father worked hard to make some money, but what we had was sufficient. We got new furniture in the house: a wooden wardrobe, cupboard and a sofa. My mother said I had a babysitter: Maria – she was a German woman that came from a German colony in the South.

My brother and I spent summers with my grandmother Khaya and grandfather Avrum in the village. My grandmother was constantly busy – working in the garden or feeding her livestock. They didn't keep an inn any longer, of course, but when somebody came to the village they came to grandfather Avrum and grandmother Khaika. My grandmother was a kind woman and people liked her.

I often went for walks with other girls in the village. They invited me to their homes where we had dumplings stuffed with potatoes or buckwheat and fried pork fat. My grandmother told me off for eating forbidden pork and pork fat, but I liked this food so much that I continued to keep my visits a secret from my grandmother.

In 1931 I went to a Jewish school. There were four schools in the town: three Ukrainian and one Jewish one. There were many children in the Jewish school while the Ukrainian schools were not so full. We studied mathematic, Ukrainian language, history, geography. The only difference from Ukrainian schools was that we studied in Yiddish. There were nice children in our school: children of Jewish workers and craftsmen, as well as of Jewish secretaries of the district and town party committees.