

Raissa Makarevich And Her Husband Semyon Sokolianskiy



Me, Raissa Makarevich, and my husband Semyon Sokolianskiy. This picture was taken after our wedding in 1940.

My name is Raissa Grigorievna Makarevich. That's my maiden name, I didn't change it after I got married. I was born on 12 February 1922 in Kiev.

When I was six years old I started attending Jewish school. I was small and they didn't want to admit me. But I was bored at home, I was a smart girl, and so Mamma convinced them to let me go to school. At the Jewish school we studied the same subjects as in Russian or Ukrainian schools. The only difference was that the language of instruction was Yiddish. But we didn't have any special subjects related to the history of the Jewish people, their culture, or their religion. I studied at this school for five years and then went to the Russian school. Our entire class moved to the Russian school because the Jewish one closed. This was around 1932. Goldhar, the director of the Jewish school, was arrested in the early 1930s. He was charged with having ties to Zionists. I don't know what happened to him, but I never saw him again. I liked the Russian school. I liked math the most out of all my subjects. I was also part of the school's dancing and singing clubs.

I remember well the Ukrainian famine of 1933. Father got horse sausage somewhere. He and Mamma didn't eat it, they left it for us, children. I remember the starving people. Once, I came down our building's stairs and saw a stranger. He was lying on the ground, his legs were swollen and huge as barrels, he was breathing hard and died soon after. Sometime later, a wagon covered with black cloth came to pick up the dead man. At school they gave us some food and bread in exchange for special coupons. Our situation at home was a little better than it was for other families – at least our father worked in a store. Mamma taught us to share bread and food with those who were suffering more than us. And at school we always shared our breakfast with other

children.

I finished seven classes at school. I went to work at the Kiev-Petrovka railroad station as an assistant accountant and then became a full accountant. While working there, I took night classes and finished secondary school. At the same time, I became a member of the Komsomol League and the Komsomol Bureau.

I had many friends and we celebrated holidays together. In 1940, at a New Year's celebration, I met my future husband. He came with his girlfriends, but he liked me very much. The following day he found out my address and came to our home. He started courting me and we got married on 5 March, by which time I had turned 18.

My husband's name was Sokolanskiy Semyon Phippovich. He was much older than me. He was born in 1908 in Kiev, but his family came from Litin, in the Vinnitsa region. I didn't know my husband's parents. But I did know his brothers, Victor and Yuriy. They both held high, official positions and were Party members.

On 22 June 1941, as we were on the way to the beach, we heard that the war had begun. Molotov made an announcement at 12:00 over the radio. I had heard the sound of an air raid earlier, but I didn't know why. On that same day, my husband received his military call-up papers and left. I took my child and we went with him to the military office. I remember the crying women in the yard of the military office well. They were saying their farewells to their husbands, sons, and brothers.

We all left Kiev on the same truck on which my husband and colonel Vlasov had arrived: Larissa and I, my older sister Fenia, my younger sister Rosa, and my parents.

Strange as it may seem, I identify as Jewish more than I did when I was young. I feel drawn to Jewish history and to my ancestors. I read Jewish newspapers and watch the Jewish program "Yahad" on TV. But I don't know whether God exists, at least in this world. It seems to me that if he did exist he wouldn't have allowed the extermination of over six million Jews during the war, and he wouldn't have allowed my grandson to die. But maybe I am just not a believer. After perestroika, many religious and Jewish communities popped up all over Ukraine. But I cannot trust the sincerity of those who were communists yesterday and today are holding candles in the Orthodox churches or putting on a kippah. However, I do try to celebrate Jewish holidays. I buy matzah at Pesach and observe the fast at Yom Kippur. I do what I couldn't do during the Soviet years.