

Sima-Liba Nerubenko With Her Family



My family photographed in Kamenka in 1939 when we got together for the last time with all our family before the WWII. From left to right, sitting: my father Srul Rotzenmar, my mother Dora Rotzenmar, Sophia, my brother Oscar's wife holding their son Harry and my brother Oscar; standing: my brother Fima, aunt Tzylia (my mother's brother Israel's wife), I, Sima Nerubenko and my brother Michael.

My parents had eight children. Two of them died in infancy. My older brother Oscar was born in 1905. He was a very good brother. Oscar moved to Odessa in the 1930s and worked at a plant. He finished technical college and married Sophia, a nice Jewish girl. They had a son - Harry, before the war the family moved to Kiev. On the first days of the Great Patriotic War my brother went to the front and perished defending Kiev. Sophia and little Harry evacuated to the Ural. They returned to Kiev after the war. Sophia died in the 1970s. Harry lives in Israel now.

My brother Michael, born in 1911, was my parents' favorite. He finished a silicate college and became a glass specialist. He often visited us even when he lived in Leningrad (working at the glassware factory), far away from home. During the Great Patriotic War he worked at his "Svetlana" plant in Cheliabinsk. I corresponded with him. After he left his parents' home he didn't observe any traditions. Michael died in Leningrad in 1989.

My younger brother Fima, born in 1919, followed into his brother's steps and became a glass specialist, too. He graduated from an Institute in Leningrad. He worked with Michael in evacuation at a military plant in Cheliabinsk. After the war Fima worked at big industrial enterprises. Now he lives in Israel with his family.

I, Sima-Liba Rotzenmar, was born in 1908.

Between 1927- 1931 I was preparing to go to an institute. I studied additionally for entrance exams. After a year in 1928 I moved to Kamenets-Podolskiy from Rybnitsa. This was a bigger town in Western Ukraine in about 60 km from Kamenka with institutes, schools and training courses. I finished rabfak and then a preparatory course for applicants to an institute. I was fond of chemistry. When I had free time I went home to help my parents about the house. My mother grew older and couldn't manage the household. When young people left their parents' houses they spoke only Russian and didn't observe any traditions. This seemed old-fashioned to us, but when

we returned home we became Jewish children again returning to our roots. However, we always identified ourselves as Jews, but this didn't matter at that time.

I found out that there was a Technological Institute in Kharkov, a capital of Ukraine at that time in Eastern Ukraine in 900 km from Kaments-Podolskiy. It prepared specialists for glass industry. This was what I dreamed of doing. In 1931 entered this Institute without exams since graduates from rabfak were not required to take exams. I have the happiest memories about my life as a student in Kharkov. We lived in the hostel like a family helping and supporting each other.

I fell in love with Grigoriy Nerubanko, a Ukrainian young man when I was at the Institute. My parents were horrified to hear that I was meeting with a non-Jewish man. They said they would never accept him into the family. I graduated from the Institute in 1936 and got a job assignment of production engineer at a glass factory in the vicinity of Leningrad. In 1937 Grigoriy and I got married in Kharkov. We were happy. We didn't have a wedding party. We had a civil registration ceremony at a registry office. I informed my parents and brothers about this important event in my life. My brothers greeted me, but my parents wrote me that they were not going to recognize my husband and me with him. It was hard for me and I tried as hard as I could to come to find their understanding, but they were inexorable. For few years I communicated only with my brothers.

In 1938 my son Vladimir was born. I wished so much to take my son to my hometown. I decided to go there in 1939. I didn't notify anybody and went there in summer when all relatives were there for a summer vacation. Of course, my mother forgot all resentment and came out to meet me. We hugged and kissed. On that summer all children came on a visit and my mother's brother Israel and his wife came from Leningrad. We spoke Yiddish again and our mother cooked our favorite food. We were happy to be together and we didn't realize that it was for the last time. My father wished Grigoriy had come. He said "It's O'K that he is not a Jew as long as he is good man". My husband couldn't come with me. He was in the army and took part in the Finnish campaign. I was having the time of my life - my brothers and sisters were together and we lived the life that we were used to - we obeyed our parents, had kosher food and recalled our childhood.