

Vladimir Slopak's And His Aunt Fira Shneider



My aunt Fira Portnaya and I on my fifth birthday in 1937 in Odessa.

My mother's sister Fira was born in 1914. She studied several years in a Russian secondary school. She could read and write in Russian, but she spoke Yiddish with her father. Fira was a very kind and gentle woman. She worked as an usher in Voroshylov cinema when she turned 18. When she was in evacuation Fira married Michael Shneider, a Jewish man, in Taldy-Kurgan (Kazakhstan), in 1942. On 14 March 1944 my cousin Lyusia was born. Lyusia never saw her father. He perished at the front in 1944. After the war Fira continued working in the cinema. In 1982 she died in a car accident. Fira and her sisters, Anna and Sopha were buried in the Jewish cemetery. It was their will to be buried near one another to be together for good.

I was born on 3 September 1932. My single aunts were very happy about my appearance in this world. I got three mothers at once: Anna, Fira and Sopha. My aunts told me that my first year of life was the most difficult. There was a big famine in Ukraine in 1933. My mother worked at the baker's store and she managed to bring a small piece of bread quite often. This saved us from starving to death. I never felt hungry in my childhood, as I was the only child in the family. I was much loved and spoiled. I went to the kindergarten near our house. In 1939 I went to a Ukrainian school and to the first form of music school to learn to play the violin. I was a success with my studies and the whole family was very happy for me.