

Natalia Zilberman With Her Father Duvid Milimevker



My father Duvid Milimevker and I, Natalia Milimevker, on my 7th birthday. Photoshoot in Lipkovskaya Street in Nemirov, 1925.

I was born on 20 October 1918. My parents had 3 boy babies before me that all died at birth. My mother was 38 and my father was 40 when I was born. They were eager to have a baby and went to Orlov clinic in Odessa to make sure I was born safely. My mother was sure she was going to have a boy and she even had a name for him. She was planning to name him Vitaly after her mother Gitl - Gitalia that died in 1916. When I was born I was named Natalia after my grandmother. In 10 days my parents were on the train to Nemirov. There were no vacant births on the train and my father managed to find one for my mother and he was standing all the way holding me. We lived in a big brick house with a high porch of 8 stairs. There was a big living room (60 square meters).

There was oak furniture set upholstered with green plush. It consisted of a divan, two armchairs and two settees. There was a dinner table and a low tea table with a samovar on it. There was also a carved oak cupboard with crystal glass and a beautiful light brown grand piano. My father liked to play it and so did I later on. There were two fireplaces in the living room. The ceilings in the house were about 5 meters high. In my parents' bedroom there were two big beds, my mother's dressing table and a green plush padded stool. My room was smaller. There was a wooden bed in it covered with a nice woven bedspread, a colorful woolen carpet on the floor, a low table and two chairs. I had a beautiful doll that my mother brought me from Tarascha.

My mother's brother Joseph had two daughters: Mila was 13 and Lisa was 11 when I was born. It was their doll and doll's furniture that they gave me. The doll closed its eyes and said "mama". There was another room in the house that served as my mother's office. She received her patients

there. My father had a classroom where he conducted classes. His training course lasted two years. A standard dentist course lasted 3 years, but my father gave it to his students in two years and then they passed their exams to obtain an official certificate. My father's former students worked in Mexico, US, Kiev, Lugansk and Nemirov. My mother had housemaids in the house. She had patients and her working day began at 8 in the morning, so she didn't have time for any housework. My mother was very loyal with housemaids. Through my childhood we had two housemaids: they were both Ukrainian country girls.

The first one Vassilisa got married later and the next one after her was Marussia. They weren't rich, but these girls that came from a village looking for work charged very little for their services and were glad to have a job.

There was also a guest room in the house. My mother's favorite friend Esfir used to live there for years. Her husband Mark Golovchiner, a doctor, got typhoid from his patient and died. There were two other rooms that my parents leased to a young couple of teachers of the Jewish school: Fania Muger and Yasha Kachman. In 1929 their daughter Nadia was born. I just adored her.

There was a small outhouse in the garden where our gardener Philimon lived. We had beautiful garden with exotic dwarf trees and fruit trees. There were marvelous flowerbeds with roses, phlox flowers and narcissus. There was a small water pool with yellow lilies around it.

We spoke Russian in our family. My mother knew Yiddish a little, but in her family they also spoke Russian. My father spoke Yiddish and taught me a little. I learned to read at 4. My mother also began to teach me to write, but I didn't want to learn. We had our classes late at night and I always pretended that I was hungry or tired.

My parents only observed few Jewish traditions, but they were more atheistic than religious. However, they celebrated Pesach. They bought matsah and cleaned up the house the day before Pe-sach. Then they sterilized household utensils with heated copper balls that they dropped into water. We had beautiful dishes that were only used at Pesach. We also had special dark blue wine glasses and one special wine glass that was on the table but nobody drank from it. My father said the wine in this glass was for Elijah . I always waited for him to come, but never saw him. I also remember clear soup with kneidlech from matsah flour. Once I saw some boys carrying red apples outside. I asked my father what it was and he just said "It's a Jewish holiday and the boys are carrying apples". I believe it was Chanukah.

There was a synagogue in Malobazarnaya Street not far from our house where I used to run with children. My friend Clara Gorwitz and her grandparents lived near the synagogue. I often visited them and her grandmother treated me to sweet and sour stew. Then Clara and I went to the synagogue once a week or even more often. Men were praying there on the 1st floor and women - on the balcony. My mother had a book of prayers in Russian. She put on a fancy dress and a hat and went to the synagogue on holidays. The synagogue was painted red on the outside. The main synagogue built by Pototskiy in Podol was a huge two or three storied building with a white-&-blue facade, but I didn't go there - it was too far from our house.

Before school I took walks with a Frebel teacher - a young lady that finished Frebel school . She had a group of 5- 6 children. I remember how we walked in the park and she taught us French and

names of trees and flowers.

In 1925 I went to the Ukrainian secondary school. I didn't go to the Jewish school because I didn't know Yiddish. At school I became a pioneer, but I don't remember any activities or anything interesting in this regard. There were Polish, Ukrainian, Russian and Jewish children at school. We didn't care a bit about nationality. I had quite a few Russian friends. We are still friends with one of my Jewish friends - Syutka Finkel-shtein. I was a lazy pupil in junior classes. We had many books at home. They were my parents' professional books and classic books by Tolstoy, Kuprin, Chekhov. I don't remember any Jewish books at home.