

Seraphima Gurevich With Her Husband, Isaac Tomengauzer And Her Parents And Grandmother



This photo of me and my family was taken in Chernovtsy in 1950 on my husband's my first wedding anniversary. In the first row left to right: my mother Elizabeth Gurevich, my mother's mother Sylka Zastavkis, and my father Naum Gurevich. Standing behind them: my husband, Isaac Tomengauzer, and me. I graduated from the Medical Institute in Chernovtsy in 1948. I got a job assignment in the village of Storozhenets. In 1949 I returned to Chernovtsy and got a job as a physician at a polyclinic. Our neighbors in Chernovtsy liked me a lot. Many of them did their best to introduce me to the young men they knew, their relatives and friends. Once I came home for a weekend and our neighbor came to see me. She was with a young man. It was Isaac Tomengauzer, my future husband. We got married in 1949. We had a civil ceremony and my mother prepared a dinner for our family and closest friends. After the war my grandmother lived with us, and it was she who introduced Jewish traditions into our family. We celebrated Soviet holidays as it was a tradition in our family, but we also began to celebrate Jewish holidays. At first we did this for the sake of my grandmother. It was difficult for her to go shopping or to cook, so my mother and I did these chores. We did the shopping and cooking under the supervision of my grandmother. We didn't have the opportunity to follow the rules of kashrut, but we didn't eat pork and tried to keep meat and dairy products separate. In 1948 the synagogue in Chernovtsy was closed. There was a bakery in town where they secretly made matzah before Pesach. We went there late in the evening bringing flour, and picked up the matzah the following morning. It was like in a detective story: we had to knock on the door in a certain way, say a password, and then the door was open. The Soviet authorities would have closed the bakery and arrested its owner if they had found out that they were baking matzah. There were also Jewish drivers who delivered matzah to homes. We usually ordered a lot of matzah to share with the poor and old people who couldn't go through this whole process themselves. My grandmother taught me to cook stuffed fish. It is probably one of the most complicated dishes of Jewish cuisine. I can also cook other traditional foods. We also celebrated the

Sabbath in our family. We put a white tablecloth on the table and my grandmother lit two candles. We often had family reunions at Pesach. My mother's brothers and sisters and their families came from other towns. My grandmother conducted the seder. She was the only one who remembered how to do it. My grandmother was very happy to see the family all together. After my grandmother died my mother continued to make sure that Jewish traditions were observed in our family. There was a very religious woman living in the same building where we lived. She used to come to my mother; they would put on their shawls, open my grandmother's prayer book and read prayers. My father developed a psychosis because of all he had lived through. He had become a party member at the front in 1919 during the Civil War. When his mental condition deteriorated, he thought that people were coming to take away his party membership card. It was the most valuable and sacred thing that he possessed. He couldn't sleep at night, and wouldn't allow us to open the door if somebody rang the doorbell. He was completely exhausted, and we had to put him in a mental hospital. He recovered and even worked as a public assessor in court. But later his condition grew worse again. He tried to commit suicide, and I had to take him to the mental hospital again. After he had a myocardial infarction there, he died in 1987.