

Lazar Gurfinkel With His Father Michael Gurfinkel



This is a picture of me and my father, Michael Gurfinkel. I turned 4 years old and my father took me to the photographer in Khotin. I was born in 1924. I was named Leizer after my grandfather on my father's side who died in 1913. In Hebrew my name is Eliezer, which means 'God is help'. We had a Ukrainian nanny. She was kind to me, and I was attached to her. I learned Ukrainian from her and Russian from my parents. I actually spoke a mixture of these two languages. I learned Yiddish when I was about 5 years old from the children I was playing with. We lived in a Jewish neighborhood,

and all our neighbors were Jewish. I couldn't read or write in Yiddish, but I spoke it fluently. My nanny died when I was about 6 years old. We also had a housemaid and a cook. They were Ukrainian. The housemaid was responsible for cleaning the rooms. She had to clean seven rooms every day. In winter she had to stoke the stove and clean it. The cook did the shopping and cooking every day because there were no fridges to store food. There was a built-in boiler in the stove for heating water. My mother didn't work - she had housekeeping responsibilities. My parents didn't follow the kashrut. We ate all kinds of products, including traditional Jewish food. When my brother was a student in Bucharest he had meals at a restaurant, and when he came home on vacation he always demanded pork chop, the food he was used to. The cook made pork chops for him, and we took advantage of the chance to have pork, too. We didn't observe Sabbath, but we celebrated the major Jewish holidays: Pesach, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Chanukkah, Purim and Sukkot. My parents weren't deeply religious people, but they paid a tribute to religion. My father went to the synagogue on all big Jewish holidays and on the death anniversaries [Jahrzeit] of his parents to say prayers for them. He took me with him after I turned 7. While my brother was still in Khotin we went there together. My father had a seat at the synagogue. This synagogue had a special meaning to our family. My father's grandfather on his mother's side had funded its construction, and it was called after my great-grandfather, Avrum Shai Yoffe. My father also made contributions to charity and the maintenance of the synagogue. He had a seat of honor in the eastern part of the synagogue as the grandson of the man who had constructed the synagogue. The Holy Ark, where the Torah scrolls are kept, and the place where the cantor sings or says prayers are traditionally located in the eastern part of a synagogue. All believers must face the East during praying because our religious capital Jerusalem is in the East. There were benches along the eastern wall of the synagogue for the citizens who had contributed their lives to the Jewish community and the synagogue. On Saturdays, when my father wasn't at the synagogue, somebody else took his seat, but it was his on Jewish holidays when he attended the synagogue. I usually sat beside him.