

Lina Mukhamedjanova



This is a picture of me, photographed in Chernigov in 1934, when I turned one. I was born on 16th October 1933. My communist parents named me Engelina, after one of the leaders of the world proletariat, Engels. They called me Lina at home. When I was to obtain my passport after the war I had the name of Lina written into it. I was born in a very hard year [during the famine in Ukraine]. My mother said she was afraid that I might not be born because she never had enough food when she was pregnant with me. However, I was born a small, but healthy girl. We lived with Grandmother Pesia Ostrovskaya, nee Fridkina, in a small house in Frunze Street. There were two

rooms and a kitchen with a Russian stove. There was a chicken house and a shed where the family kept a piglet. It goes without saying that there was no observance of any kosher rules in the family. On Pesach my grandmother cooked food from matzah that she bought at the synagogue. She only went to the synagogue to buy matzah once a year. There was no seder on Pesach, just a family gathering for dinner. There were no kosher dishes and my grandmother always recalled her beautiful kosher crockery that she had before the Civil War. There was horseradish, radish, chicken broth with 'galka' dumplings made from matzah flour. The house was thoroughly cleaned before Pesach. Clean curtains were hung up and the table was covered with a starched tablecloth. My grandmother said that one had to prepare for Pesach as one would for 1st May, but nobody told me what Pesach was really about. As for the other Jewish holidays, I didn't even hear about them. My parents had many friends that visited us on 1st May and on October Revolution Day. They brought food and my grandmother did all the cooking. My parents also bought wine and lemonade that I liked tremendously. The adults partied and sang songs: Russian, Ukrainian and Jewish, and danced to songs on the radio. My grandmother mainly spoke Yiddish, but she also knew Ukrainian. My parents spoke Russian, but switched to Yiddish when they didn't want me to understand the subject of their discussion. However, my father often responded in Russian since he had forgotten much of his Yiddish. By that time he communicated in Russian for the most part. He read in Russian a lot and spoke Russian with his colleagues. Russian was the common language of communication. I went to kindergarten at the age of five. I didn't like kindergarten, especially because my grandmother was at home and I wanted to be with her. However, my mother insisted that I grew up with other children. Once I left the kindergarten and got lost. A militiaman stopped me and I told him my address and said that my last name was Oborvan [Russian for ragamuffin]. I was jokingly called so at home and must have associated this name with our last name, Braverman. The militiaman brought me home. My parents told me off and sent me to kindergarten again on the next day.