

Rachel Persitz With Her Sister Genia Persitz



My sister Genia Persitz and I. The photo was taken on my birthday in Kiev in the middle of the 1960s. The first years after the war were extremely difficult. It was as difficult as in evacuation. I didn't even have clothes for work. Kievenergo, the company where my sister was working, received humanitarian aid from the USA, and I got a coat. Life was slowly improving. We didn't earn much, but we managed somehow. In 1948 Genia received a room in a communal apartment. In the middle of the 1950s she managed to obtain the certificate that said that her husband had perished at the front, and we received a small apartment. Genia was a very active communist and secretary of the party organization. She dedicated her life to meetings, parades and so on. It didn't even occur to her that life might be different, that we were young and one could get married and have a family. Genia and I never got married again. We often went to the cinema and theater. Sometimes we went to sanatoriums and recreation homes. We celebrated Soviet holidays and went to parades. We have always been atheists. But, in the memory of our parents, we tried to remember Jewish holidays. I recall how, after the war, we stood in line to buy matzah at some private bakery. We kept observing Jewish traditions whenever we had the opportunity. We did it secretly. If somebody from Genia's party unit or my school had found out, we would have been fired or arrested. We couldn't celebrate Sabbath, because it was a working day at school. We've always fasted on Yom Kippur, remembering our relatives. I remember very well the vacuum accumulated around Jews during the Six-Day-War war in Israel. There were six Jewish teachers in our school, and we discussed the situation in Israel silently behind closed doors and with phone receivers removed from the phones for security reasons. One of our colleagues had a sister in Israel that had lived there since the 1920s. She told us that emigration to Israel was allowed. I tried to convince my sister to move to Israel, but she was a party member and a convinced communist. She was against emigration and believed that there could be nothing better than our communist motherland.