

Kopel-Duvid , Tsivye, Tanya And Shmil Sukhenko



These are my parents, Kopel-Duvid and Tsivye, with me and my sister Tanya. This was taken in Grigoriopol, a very small town on the Dnester River in Moldova. Four nationalities lived in the town - Armenians, Russians, Jews and Moldavians. The population was about 1,000. The Jewish population - about 100 families - worked in commerce and crafts. The Sukhenko family differed from the rest of the Jews in the town because our family toiled the land and did not live among the Jews. My father was the youngest of four brothers. He was born in 1870. We lived among the Armenians. My father was a farmer. We grew tobacco. In 1902, my father had gone to Argentina for five years to help develop agriculture there. My mother was born in Chisinau; her father was a house-painter. My mother was illiterate, but she had talent. She used to mold glue into animal figures; they were very expressive. Of course, in that uneducated environment, nobody appreciated it properly. She bore 10 children; four died when they were very young. Before 1917, my parents lived a very good life. We rented a house with five rooms. My two grandmothers lived with us. We had two cows, goats and a large yard. We always had some poor guest at the Shabbat table. When he left, my mother would give him a chicken and a loaf of bread that my grandmother had baked. Every morning my father would put on a tallit, white clothes and pray. He regularly went to a synagogue. I was born in 1908 and started my education at the age of 4. My grandmother took me to cheder, and I studied there until I was 8. The instruction was in Yiddish. At home, we spoke only Yiddish. When I was 8, my father decided that I needed to know Russian, and he sent me to the parish school. I was the only Jew in that school. I was placed in the second grade because I could read. I had a very clear articulation, and I read from the Gospel. And it was the Gospel that led me to atheism.