

Dora Puchalskaya



This is me, Dora Puchalskaya (nee Gitman), photographed in the early 1950s before entering the Agricultural College in Vladimir Volynskiy.

After the war, in September 1944, our mother went to work as a primary school teacher and my brother and I went to the first form at school. He was seven and I was ten years old. I had to do many chores besides studying. In December 1944 our mother gave birth to a boy. She named him Grigori after our grandfather. She went back to work and I looked after the baby washing and feeding him. I loved him dearly.

Our life was very hard after the war. There was famine in 1946-47. Our mother's salary was hardly enough for us to live half a month. It was especially hard in summer when mother received her 3-month salary, but this money melted away promptly. We received bread per bread coupons. We also got a glass of milk at school, but not in summer when we were on vacation. Our mother bought flour and made pies and buns. She sent me to sell them at the market. She was probably concerned that she would be recognized and arrested for her activities since private entrepreneurship was forbidden. She traveled to Moscow to see her distant relatives several times. She bought women's underwear, stockings and fabric and I went to sell them in our town. We also grew potatoes and other vegetables in our small kitchen garden. Basically, we were trying hard to survive.

I finished school in 1951. A year later I entered the Agronomical Faculty of the Agricultural College in Verkhovka village, Obodov district, Vinnitsa region. I began to meet with a Ukrainian guy in College. His name was Victor Puchalski. He saw fascist atrocities against Jews and he came to respecting Jewish people. I told him that I was a Jew and that we were in occupation during the war. Victor and I fell in love and actually became a husband and wife during our last year in College. After finishing our College we came to my mother in Vladimir-Volynskiy. My mother didn't care about his nationality. She saw that we were in love and this was what mattered to her. I was pregnant. Victor and I got married in 1956. We didn't have a wedding party. My mother just made a small dinner for our family and Victor's father Andrei Puchalski who came to our wedding.