

## Vera Dreezo's Cousin Victor Berezin



My cousin Victor Berezin, my mother's sister's, Lyolia's son, photographed for his passport. Kiev, 1947.

My mother's younger sister Lyolia Berezina was born in 1909, finished elementary course of grammar school before 1917 and then studied in a Russian secondary school in Kiev. Her husband Pyotr Berezin was Russian. I don't know what he did for a living. Their son Victor was born in 1931. However, Lyolia's husband turned out to be a drunkard and they divorced. She was ill with spandelite. She often stayed in hospital and there was a common idea in the family that Lyolia was ill and always needed help. She worked at a factory in Kiev. I don't know what she did there. When the Great Patriotic War began Lyolia evacuated with my mother, my sister Zoya and me. My father was responsible for the evacuation of families of employees of refrigeration factory. Besides my mother, Zoya and me he was allowed to arrange for evacuation of one additional person. I can

remember well that mother was begging of my father to have Lyolia and her son going with us. This was 21 July 1941. Father was a very honest man. He replied 'If I allow for two more people to evacuate other people will talk that I am making arrangements for my relatives pointing their fingers at me. I just cannot allow it to happen. Lyolia and Vitia will go by next train in two weeks'. What Lyolia did - she left Vitia [short for Victor] with his Russian grandmother and joined us. I couldn't forgive her that she had left her own child. Vitia was 10 years old. It took him a long time to adjust to the thought that his mother had left him behind. It was a big shock for him. His grandmother lived with her second son and his family in Solomenka. First somebody reported that there was a 'zhydyonok' [offensive term for a Jewish child] hiding and Gestapo soldiers came for him. He was beaten and taken away and stayed a whole night in a cellar with rats. Next morning this grandmother and her Russian or Ukrainian neighbor ran to the police office where they both screamed him out of his captivity. About ten days later Vitia overheard his uncle's wife saying 'I will report on this zhydyonok anyway!' At that time there were posters ordering Jews to go to the Babi Yar all over the town. He left home and through all years of the war he was wandering all over Ukraine, from one house to another. Lyolia recalled him in evacuation. As soon as Kiev was liberated she wrote her mother-in-law asking 'Where is Vitia?' She replied 'I don't know whether he is alive.' Vitia returned to his grandmother after Kiev was liberated in November 1944. We were in Orenburg [Russia, over 2000 km to the east from Kiev], when we received a letter saying that he was alive. We demanded that he came to Orenburg and then we all returned to Kiev. Victor worked as a tram driver and was married three times. Now he is a pensioner. I went to the Hesed where I got to know that he wasn't on the list of prisoners since he was on the occupied territory. I went to the archives with him and we obtained all necessary documents to confirm that he has a status of a former prisoner. He receives a German pension.