

Anna Gliena With Her Nanny Anna Grigorenko



My nanny Anna Grigorenko is holding me. The yard near our house, Kharkov, summer 1918.

I was born in 1917 in Kharkov. My mother was very weak and sickly and had migraines. She hired a nanny to look after me. My nanny's name was Anna Grigorenko. She was a Ukrainian woman. She spoke beautiful Ukrainian and sang Ukrainian songs. My mother and father spoke Yiddish. I picked up Yiddish and Ukrainian. Since Russian is spoken much in Kharkov I picked up Russian, too.

My father worked in a shoe shop. The owner of the shop was a Jew. He closed his shop on Saturday and Jewish holidays. My mother was a housewife. They observed Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays. My mother followed kashrut when cooking, but I wouldn't call my family deeply religious. My father didn't wear a kippah and shave his beard, but he had a moustache. My mother only covered her hair when going to the synagogue on Pesach and Yom Kippur. However, mother lit candles every Friday before Sabbath. She put on a kerchief and prayed over candles. Each time she mentioned that this was how her mother used to do it and that beautiful silver candlesticks were the only thing she got from her parents. These candlesticks disappeared during the Great Patriotic War.

I remember that at Pesach my father recited prayers. I was small and fell asleep early. They woke me up at midnight when it was time for seder. I don't remember celebration of other religious holidays at home. My parents went to synagogue 2-3 times a year, but they didn't take me with them. We had Russian classics at home: Pushkin, Lermontov and many others and I read a lot when I went to school and learned to read.

I have dim memories about the period of Revolution or Civil War - I was too young. I know that life was very hard and at times we had no food at home. I remember sitting on the porch waiting for my mother and father coming back from the market. I was very happy when they brought something for me. Once they brought me a little dress and I was so happy.