

Isabella Karanchuk With Her Mother Raisa Lerman



I, Isabella Lerman, with my mother Raisa Lerman, Kharkov, 1931. I was born on 8 August 1928 in Kharkov. I was named Isabella and all I know about it is that I was named some aunt Beti. At first my parents wanted to name me Bertha, but then decided for Bella that developed into Isabella. My father went to work in a shoe shop. My mother was a housewife. My parents rented a room in a communal apartment where my parents slept behind a curtain. Soon my father received a small two-bedroom apartment in a one-storied house. I don't remember any details of our life in Kharkov. All I remember is a big yard with many children, whose names I don't remember, playing in it. I don't remember the famine in the early 1930s, probably because my parents tried to protect me from knowing it. My parents spoke Yiddish and my mother told me that I also knew few words in Yiddish, but forgot them in the course of time. In 1934 we moved to Kiev. In Kiev my father received a big room in a seven-bedroom communal apartment on the fourth (last) floor of a brick house located in the yard. This was a big apartment with high ceilings and two small rooms where servants stayed during the czarist times. Now there were seven families living in bigger rooms and two single women in the smaller rooms. There were 7 tables in the big kitchen. There was a tap and one toilet with a schedule for its use on the door. There was a bathtub in the apartment, but nobody wanted to use it. Our neighbors only did their laundry in it. Once a week we went to the public bathroom - this was a mandatory ritual with all Kievites. There was a doorbell on the front door to the apartment and the list of all tenants with indication of the number of rings - our visitors had to ring twice. Basically we were doing well. In 1938 we bought a wireless and a radio player - expensive acquisitions at that time. Three families of four in the apartment were Jewish. We got along well with our neighbors. I don't remember any arguments or conflicts, but we were not

friends either. My mother was a housewife and sometimes on Friday we visited my aunt Olga and grandmother Cherna. My grandmother put a nice old silver dinner set on the table and silver wine cups. My grandmother spoke Yiddish to my mother, though she picked Russian living in Kiev. My grandmother recited a prayer, lit candles and we sat down to dinner. Nobody mentioned to me that this was celebration of Sabbath. We never celebrated Jewish holidays at home - my father was a communist and had an official position. I liked Soviet holidays, when our relatives or my father's colleagues got together in our room. They usually got together after a parade, sang Soviet songs and danced to the record player. Some of my parents' friends were Jews. My mother made Jewish food on bigger holidays: gefilte fish, though this wasn't even a tribute to tradition, just delicious food.