

Asia Matveyuk With Her Family



In this photograph from left to right is Braina, my stepsister on my father's side, my stepmother Freida Leikind (nee Grinker), (Girshel after her first husband), my father Shoilik Leikind and on the right is Samuel Girshel, Freida's son, and I, Asia Matveyuk - first from right. This photo was taken in the middle 1930s in Nikolaev. My father kept this photograph. This is the only photo of my younger sister Braina - my father and Freida's daughter, brutally tormented to death by fascists.

My mother died in 1924. A year later my father married my grandmother's niece Freida. Her father Ruvim Grinker was grandmother Zisel's stepbrother. Freida's first husband Abram Girshel' died. She had a son named Samuel. He was the same age with me. My father and Freida registered their marriage in 1925. They didn't have a Jewish wedding. We moved in with Freida with our father. Freida's father Ruvim was a tailor and earned well. Freida's mother Mindel was a very kind and nice woman. Freida had two brothers: Boris and his wife Ida and Mendel and his wife Khasia. I only saw them once, when we went to be photographed in Nikolaev. The brothers perished during the Great Patriotic War. I have no more information about their wives.

In 1927 Freida gave birth to a girl named Braina after Freida's deceased mother. Freida was a kind and nice woman and never distinguished between her own children and her stepchildren and I began to call her 'mama'. My father like many other representatives of poor Jewish families he got fond of revolutionary ideas and dreams about a better life and construction of a communist society. I cannot say what particularly had this effect on my father: it might have been the communist propaganda. My father stopped going to the synagogue, joined Komsomol, and became the leader of the village poor. Freida was raised in a religious family, but my father forbade her to observe Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays. He became particularly strict about it after he became a communist in 1927.

In the early 1930s collectivization took place in our village under my father's supervision. There was a Jewish kolkhoz established. It was named '120' after 120 Jews who perished during the Civil War. My father became chairman of the village council. People liked my father and called him with the Russian name of Sasha converted from his Jewish name of Shoilik. My father was a charming, handsome and very strong man.