

Larisa Radomyselskaya



This is me, Larisa Lifshytz. I am 6 years old. The photo was taken in Kharkov in 1940.

I was born on 20 July 1934 in Kharkov. I was given the Russian name of Larisa. I didn't have a Jewish name. My parents were atheists and believed everything related to Jewish traditions, history or culture to be vestige of the past. From the time I remember I lived with my grandmother Maria, my mother's mother. My mother was always ill: she had a congenital heart disease. My mother couldn't take care of me and my grandmother was raising me. She lived in a small private house in the center of Kharkov with the family of my mother's younger sister Sarra. Sarra had two daughters and we were growing up together. When grandmother Maria went to work I stayed with Sarra. Neither my grandmother nor Sarra were religious and I didn't know anything about Jewish traditions or holidays.

I saw my mother rarely, only when my grandmother took me there visiting. My mother died in 1940. I saw my mother rarely, only when my grandmother took me there visiting. My mother died in 1940. After she died my life went on as before: I continued living with my grandmother and my mother's sister Sarra. My father lived alone. He was provably feeling lonely since he asked my grandmother to move in with him and take me with her. My grandmother kept working and my father's sister Sarra came from Siberia to take to my bringing up. She didn't have children and was happy to take care of me. Aunt Sarra worked as a journalist in a small publishing house and she could take her work home and then she could spend much time with me. She taught me to read and write and before going to school I could read in Russian very well. When my aunt was working I used to sit beside her with a book and I could spend hours reading children's books by Russian and Soviet authors. We spoke only Russian in our family. I didn't hear one Jewish word, I didn't know

any Jewish traditions and I didn't know who Jews were.

In September 1941 I was to go to school. I looked forward to this day. Nobody could imagine that a war would shatter our peaceful and quiet life. On Sunday 22 June 1941 my aunt Sarra promised to take me to a children's movie in the cinema and buy me ice cream. It was a hot summer day. We were at home and I was hurrying my aunt when our neighbor ran in. She said that the radio was broadcasting a speech by Molotov and that fascists attacked the Soviet Union [and so began the Great Patriotic War]. They turned on the radio and I heard Molotov saying that we would win the victory. Then Stalin spoke with an appeal to the people. The adults were very anxious, but I, of course, did not understand how serious this was. If Stalin and Molotov said that we would win then it will be so, I thought. I can still remember how angry I was with my aunt who said that we would go to the cinema after the war since we had some more important things to do.

We evacuated from Kharkov by the last train in September 1941. There were three of us leaving: my father's sister Sarra, I and my grandmother. We arrived in Sverdlovsk region [approximately 1,000 km from Moscow]. The train stopped at a small station. There was a woman who said that she could accommodate one family in her house. We accommodated in the house of this woman. Her husband was at the front and she lived with her old mother and two daughters. They welcomed us and supported with whatever they could. They were poor, but they shared their clothing and food with us. I remember that I had a dream when in evacuation to have a whole crispy fresh loaf of bread just for myself. I went to the first form of a local Russian school. I studied well and had no problems at school. In the first form I became a Young Octobrist. I became a leader of a 'little star': an Octobrist unit of 5 children. I remember that 'little star' group went to help one old lady whose only son was at the front. We fetched water from a well and washed the floors in her house.

In 1944 we have returned to Kharkov.