

Larisa Shyhman



This is me, Larisa Trachtenberg. This photo was made in Kiev (maybe in the kindergarten) in 1928-29.

I was born in Kiev in 1925. Before the war we lived with grandmother Rosa, my father's mother. We had a huge family: my uncles and their wives and my aunt with her husband... We lived in Pechersk in the very center of Kiev. Our apartment looked like a communal apartment: huge, just gorgeous. There was everything there, and what a kitchen... Everything was big, there was stucco molding, a fireplace and radiators... There were family gatherings in the kitchen on Sundays. There were long dinners, there was alcohol on the table and there were conversations. An interesting family, close. My parents and we lived in a big room. All different people, but we went along with all neighbors. I remember my birthday when I was a small girl, my mother didn't have money to arrange a party, and she said we couldn't celebrate, but then our neighbors came with their food and there was a party. I went to kindergarten and everybody liked me. What a nice girl, they said. And I was funny. There were two sisters working as tutors in our kindergarten. Their last name was Volkonskiy. They were educated and cultured, those two sisters. They were older ladies and didn't have any relatives. They liked me a lot.

On holidays we visited my mother's father. I learned about Jewish traditions there, but I wasn't interested, though I remember holidays. Of course, Chanukkah was children's favorite holidays. We were given money... I also remember him giving us nuts. Grandfather also wore something strange... We, children, what could we know? We laughed.

I liked reading very much. My aunt Yelizaveta had a wonderful collection of books. My aunt and her husband had a small apartment on the third floor and we lived on the second floor... She left her keys with us and I used to go there to read books. I went to Russian school #86 in Pechersk that used to be a grammar school before the revolution. There were naughty children in our class and so was I... We were friends. We used to fight with children from other streets, we used to do many things together. There was no national segregation. We were all friends. Nobody thought 'Is he a Jew? Is he not? I think it started after the Great Patriotic War...

There was also a children's club nearby. During its construction we used to call it a 'chocolate house'. It's still called so. It's of chocolate color. They invited famous people like Petrovskiy [editor`s note: Petrovskiy, Grigoriy Ivanovich (1878-1958) - Soviet Party and state official. From 1919 - chairman of VCIK Ukraine. 1937-38 deputy chairman of the supreme Soviet of the USSR. From 1940 - deputy director of the Museum of Revolution of the USSR], he lived across the street from our home. He came to tell children about the Soviet regime and our army... There were many activities in the club and children could choose what they liked to do. Children were involved in many activities, they didn't go loose like they do now. We also played outside, we played football and I was a goalkeeper. Well, it was different... I used to do modeling, drawing and embroidery. I hated circus and there were no interesting children's programs.