Raisa Shulyakovskaya

This photo of me, Raisa Shulyakovskaya, was taken in Leningrad in 1935.

I was born in Slutsk in 1912. I finished eight grades in Slutsk, there was no ninth grade. I passed the ninth grade exams without attending lectures in a small district town. When my elder brother left to work as a teacher, my second brother, my sister and myself rented a room, while he worked and paid for our room. Then our second brother left and my sister and I remained. In summer we lived in the village and came to the town for studies. When my sister left, I remained alone and in 1931 I left for Leningrad to enter university. There were no exams to enter university, if one had a certificate of nine grades of school and an appropriate social status. I wanted to enter the Chemical

Technological Institute, but they didn’t provide a dormitory and I applied for an institute with a dormitory. Thus I entered the Textile Institute.

I remember how the coercive collectivization was carried out. We, the Komsomol members from our town, were ordered to carry out propaganda for kolkhozes. In 1932 town citizens were issued passports and the village citizens didn’t get any, so that they wouldn’t escape from kolkhozes.

Our parents didn’t tell me, my sister or my brothers much about Jewish culture. They didn’t really observe the traditions, only for appearance’s sake. Mom cooked gefilte fish, tsimes and matzah. There were separate utensils for meat and dairy products; also separate Pesach utensils. We celebrated the holidays though, especially Pesach. There was matzah and no bread products. The Pesach seder was held. It was all very solemn and beautiful. Everything was tidied up and it was a very festive occasion. We weren’t taught to pray, at least my sister and I weren’t. My parents went to the synagogue and I also went there several times. All Jewish holidays were celebrated in our family until my elder brother joined the Komsomol. He turned everything upside down with that. From then on Jewish holidays and ceremonies were not celebrated in our family.