

Berta Mazo



This photograph was taken in Vitebsk in 1919. It shows me. At that time I was 3 years old.

I was born in 1916 in Krucha shtetl of Vitebsk region [now Belarus]. My parents were Yevsey Yakovlevich Mazo and Maria Efremovna Merport.

I was under 3 when we left Krucha, therefore I remember nothing about the place. But I remember that on our way through Minsk [the capital of Belarus] we went out from the train. We saw people in German uniform on the platform. Probably Mom explained me that they were German, because I remember well myself shouting 'Nemtsy, nemtsy! (Germans, Germans!)' Probably I pronounced those words assonant with German 'Nimm, Nimm! (take, take!)', because those soldiers laughed and ran after me. Mom told me that story. We arrived in Malaya Vishera and lived there till 1928. I lived with my parents separately from my paternal grandmother and grandfather.

My father's name was Yevsey Yakovlevich Mazo, and my mother's name was Maria Efremovna Merport. Daddy was born in 1883, and Mom in 1893 (she was 10 years younger). They both came from Krucha shtetl. They got acquainted in Krucha and then got married. I remember I read one of old letters that '...Yevsey is going to marry Maria...' Most probably they had their wedding ceremony as was customary (no chuppah).

My Mom was a very beautiful woman and a good housewife. Among her traditional dishes there were tsimes, stewed carrots, and cholnt [meat with potatoes]. And she baked tasty pies.

In Malaya Vishera we lived not richly, but we had got a cow - our real mother. We called her Burenka. Parents stored up fodder for her, let her out to fields, met her back, and milked. I was

brought up milk-fed. In my childhood I was a plump child with rosy cheeks, and my aunt, Liya Yakovlevna called me a bun. We lived in one big room. Grandfather had got a small shop (he sold different small items there), but the shop had different entrance. We also had got a kitchen, but no bath-room (we used to wash in the river). There was a hayloft, where we kept hay for our cow. Our furniture was ordinary. There was no water supply and we heated the house by means of stove. Certainly, we had got no assistants: everything was made by ourselves. My parents had neither an orchard, nor a vegetable garden.

At home we had got a lot of different books, including fiction, science, and religion. My Mom was an educated person (but I do not know in what sphere). She worked in a library, therefore our family members read much: she made us free of her library. I read much, especially fiction. Till now I remember by heart several fragments from Eugeny Onegin [the best known poem by Alexander Pushkin]. My parents also read newspapers regularly, but I do not remember which ones. For the most part my parents spoke Russian, but they knew Yiddish and spoke it to each other when it was necessary to keep something from me. Nevertheless they celebrated all Jewish holidays, including Sabbath. Kashrut was not strictly observed, Daddy visited synagogue not often (the same with Mom). Parents were not active members of the Jewish community, they were ordinary persons of narrow interests.