

Irina Doroshkova



I, Irina Mazor, on my 4th birthday photographed in Berdichev in 1934. I was born in October 1930. I got my name Irina just because my mother and father liked this Russian name - Irina, they wouldn't have named me after one of deceased relatives that was a custom with Jewish families. I was born in Kiev. My mother had a poor heart and had to be watched by good doctors during delivery of the baby and it was believed that the best doctors were in Kiev. She went to a maternity home in Kiev and then returned to Berdichev with me. My mother went on working a lot and entered the pedagogical Institute to get a higher education. Of course, she had no time to do housework. We had a housemaid - Marusya, a Ukrainian girl from a village. She was my first nanny. I remember well the famine of 1932-34. Now historians call this period 'forced famine'. I remember lying in my

bed and crying of hunger. A piece of sticky brown bread dipped in some water and sprinkled with a little sugar was a favorite delicacy in my childhood. My mother tried to do her best to feed me, but she didn't always manage. I wasn't raised religious. Now I realize that there were mostly Jews in my surrounding, but my parents never discussed this subject or focused on it. I had no idea about being Jewish or non-Jewish. All people had the same nationality, as I imagined. We spoke Russian in the family and with my parents' friends and acquaintances. This was a state language in the Soviet Union. We lived in a two-storied house and there were two other 2-storied buildings next to ours. We had many Jewish neighbors. I remember some of last names: Yasha and Sarah Getlerner, brother and sister, we played together. I also remember Lilia - a Russian girl. My mother had her principles of raising a girl and the basic factor was to be shy and no different from other children so that nobody could say that - God Forbid! - that the daughter of a party activist has something better than other children. I had few toys and a doll among them. It was a simple doll. Some girls had dolls that closed their eyes or bicycles. I never had those and I never asked my parents about buying me toys or clothing. I was a shy girl and made use of what I had. I didn't go to kindergarten. I spent my early years with my nanny Marusya. I liked this slim girl with dark eyes a lot. Marusya told me about famine in her village and taught me to cherish bread and food. Even now I wouldn't throw away even a breadcrumb. About once a month I was taken to my grandparents, but my parents never left me to stay overnight with them to protect me from hearing Yiddish or getting interested in Jewish traditions. My grandmother was always happy to see me. She usually asked me what I felt like eating and I said 'Lotkes' - potato pancakes. I liked them, but nobody made them at home. I also remember buckwheat with milk.