

Leonid Krais With His Family And Friends At His Son Aron Krais' Bar Mitzvah



This is the bar mitzvah of my older son Aron at our home in Chernovtsy in 1970. From left to right: my younger son Michael, my wife Clara Krais, I, my Aron, and our guests. We invited friends and my wife prepared a regale. We were merry and all danced. Our sons were raised Jewish. My wife and I spoke Yiddish more often than Russian at home. My sons' mother tongue is Yiddish, although they studied in Russian schools and spoke Russian with their companions. My mother used to read from the Torah to my sons before they went to bed. Both our sons knew about Jewish history and religion. They had bar mitzvah in the synagogue when they turned 13. They've always identified themselves as Jews. I never set an example to them. Once, when a stranger in the street called me 'zhyd' [kike], I replied loudly, 'Yes, I am a Jew, and who are you?' The man was taken aback and said, 'I'm Russian'. And then I said to him, 'Do you know that Jesus Christ was a Jew, a 'zhyd' as you call me?' For me all nations are equal: Ukrainian, Russian and others. I survived the war, the ghetto, the cold and starvation. I remember how Ukrainian and Russian people supported and helped us. My wife and I have always remembered our Jewish identity. We observed all Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays at home. I always bought matzah at Pesach. There were private underground bakeries where we bought matzah. My wife and mother made traditional Jewish food. My mother taught Clara how to make gefilte fish, stuffed chicken neck and strudels. We fasted strictly on Yom Kippur. On Jewish holidays the three of us went to the synagogue. Soviet holidays were days off, and it was a good occasion to get together with friends. I had many Ukrainian, Romanian and Russian friends. They were my colleagues. There were few Jews among my friends. There was no anti-Semitism. I've always respected people and their faith, and they responded with the same respect when it came to my faith.