

Rena Michalowska In Tashkent



This is me in Tashkent [today Uzbekistan] in 1942 or 1943. I needed a photo for my Komsomol membership card. When the German-Soviet war started in June 1941, my mom, me and my tiny baby sister, who was born in March 1940, left. My father stayed behind and then followed and tried to catch up with us. Wherever we could, we left notes where we're going, so my father found us. We ended up somewhere in Kazakhstan for about two or three months. My father decided that Tashkent would be a good place to take us. So we ended up in Tashkent, where the population multiplied fast, because everybody was escaping as deep into the Soviet Union as they could, at this point into Asia. I learned Russian pretty fast. Maybe because I had the Ukrainian base encoded somewhere from my childhood and the year at school when I studied in Ukrainian. So I didn't have problems adapting to a Russian school. My parents still spoke Yiddish to each other, and so did I, as far as I remember. But my father decided that I had to study Polish. So he found ? I have no idea where and how ? Arnold Slucki to give me lessons. After a few lessons ? for which my father paid him as he had no other means of support ? the lessons were stopped. My teacher decided it was a waste of money, as I said point-blank that I'd never go back to Poland, so why should I study Polish. I learned how to talk back by then. In Tashkent I was first a pioneer and then I joined the

Komsomol. Instead of going to summer camps we were sent to pick grapes one year and cotton the next. It was heavy and unpleasant work. It must have been after the 6th grade; I was 13 or 14.