

Jacob Mikhailov



This is me, Jacob Mikhailov. I turned 6 months. The picture was made in Kharkov in 1925.

My mother's family lived in Chernigov [180 km from Kiev], a beautiful ancient city in the north-western of Ukraine.

My mother finished lyceum and left for Kharkov, where he entered the Medical Institute.

My Father studied at the institute of the state economy, he graduated it in 1924. My parents met in Kharkov.

I do not know the exact details how they met. They got married in 1921. Of course, it was not a traditional Jewish wedding

as they were convinced communists. I think they did not have any wedding, just a mere

registration.

My mother was in her second year, when I was born. My mother went to her parents in Chernigov before delivery

and spent there couple of months after parturition. I was born in Chernigov on 19 June, 1925.

My mother had to drop studies after she came back to Kharkov.

Even though our family stayed in Kharkov only until 1930, I remember our house very well.

It was a U-shaped 5-storied brick house with a front yard .It seemed huge to me at that time.

The house is still there. There was Kharkov Opera Theater next to our house.

We could hear the opera performances as if we were in the hall.

We lived on the fifth floor of the communal apartment.

There was common kitchen, toilet and bathroom.

There was centralized gas, sewage and running water. We had two rooms.

There were five more families in our apartment. I do not remember all of them.

I recall a woman, who lived next to us. Her name was Marusya, she was Russian.

Her daughter was my coeval. There was also a Jew, Hanna, who worked in NKVD.

Parents spoke only Russian at home. If they wanted to conceal something from me, they would exchange couple of Yiddish phrases at times. I was not well up in Yiddish.

Father also spoke good Polish. Our neighbor was a Pole

and my father was always happy to communicate with her in her mother tongue.

I spent the whole summer in Chernigov with my grandmother. All grandchildren were brought together.

Mother's sister Revekka also used to come there with her husband and daughter to spend summer.

There were happy times. Grandmother cooked. Pavel and Revekka played with children.

We went for strolls to the forest, on the beach, made puppet shows. The elder read fairy-tales to the younger ones.

Sometimes uncle took all boys angling. We left at dawn, and came back for breakfast.

All grown-ups spoke Russian with children. The house was spacious, having enough room for everybody.

It was a 2-storied brick house with a basement. Mother's brother Solomon was the host.

His family was on the first floor, grandmother took the second floor. The basement was taken by the renters.

There was a fountain in the yard in front of the house. It was probably the only fountain in Chernigov at that time.

There was a beautiful orchard behind the house. There was a variety of fruits there.

There are certain scraps of my childhood in my memory.

I remember my grandmother to cook cherry jam in a huge copper basin.

I reached to pick up a cherry and scalded my arm heavily.

I was taken to doctor and I remember how he praised me for not making a sound during management of the wound and bandaging.

I remember how grandfather used to send me to the bakery for challah

[bread especially rich in eggs, eaten on all Jewish holidays except Pesach]

and I removed the crunchy crust and ate it on the way home.

Maybe grandfather got so mad because challah was meant for the Sabbath.
I do not remember my grandparents to celebrate Sabbath at home,
frankly speaking I preferred to spend time with my cousins rather than with the adults.

In 1929 father was transferred to the ministry of chemical industry in Moscow. First my father left by himself.

My mother and I followed him after he had been given the apartment in Moscow.
The apartment was located on Krasnoprudnaya street. We had a two-room apartment with all modern conveniences.

It was a separate apartment, which was a rare thing back in those times.

My pre-war childhood and adolescence were the best period of my life.

I was closer to my mother than to my father.

She was an open-hearted and benevolent person. I always felt her love.