

Irina Lopko With Her Cousin Sister Lena Alpershtein



This is me and my cousin sister Lena Alpershtein. This photo was made in Nezhin in 1932.

I was born in 1931. I was their second child. Their first girl died of some disease at the age of three and a half years. I was a white-skin baby with no eyelashes. I was very quiet. Before I was born my parents rented apartments in various parts of the town, but when I was born they bought a house in the center. It was a big house that belonged to a landlord in the past. As I understand now they bought it almost for nothing. This house was bought for three families: my grandfather Mindel, our family and my father sister Sima's family. Sima and her family moved to Moscow some time later and our family lived in this house until my father died. I was brought to this house from the maternity hospital where I was born. I was named Sarra after my maternal grandfather Isroel. These two names sound similar. My grandfather Mindel insisted on giving me this name. He respected my mother's father who had died by then very much. He saw that I wasn't a pretty baby and to console my mother he said: 'The girl looks very intelligent'.

My mother often recalled the period of hunger in the early 1930s, there was nothing to eat and they ate potato peels and other junk food, but my mother had a lot of breast milk and she breastfed me until the age of two. I was very fat in my childhood and everybody thought I was swollen from hunger. My mother always said: 'I survived the periods of hunger in 1931-1932 and during the war and I don't want to be hungry ever again'. When the period of famine was over my father took a cow into the house and it stayed with us until the end of his life. It was a deity of the family.

We always had housemaids before the war. My mother worked a lot as deputy chief accountant of the municipal trade department. This was a very important position. In late 1930 my father also changed his job. I liked the horse smell in our house, but my mother rebelled against his profession. However, my father adored horses and went to work as horse dealer at a military registry office.

My mother's sister Olga after school she moved to Moscow where she went to work as a draftswoman at a plant. She married Ziyama Alpershtein, a nice Jewish guy, a worker. They received a room in a communal apartment where their daughter Lena was born in 1931. Lena worked at a post office. She passed away in Moscow in 1998.

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