

## Irina Lopko With Her Cousin Masia Levitina



This is me and my cousin Masia Levitina. This photo was made in Nezhin in 1932.

I was born in 1931. I was a white-skin baby with no eyelashes. I was very quiet. 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'. 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.

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 father was responsible for providing horses for the needs of the army and he often went on business trips. Every spring he went to military camps where he stayed through summer.

My grandfather and grandmother Mindel only spoke Yiddish. I visited them for a cup of tea after kindergarten every day and they spoke Yiddish in my presence and once my grandmother commented 'I think she understands' and I nodded my head 'Yes, yes, I understand'. Then my grandmother and grandfather began to speak Yiddish to me and I enjoyed talking with them in Yiddish. There we sat at the table having tea and jam, my grandfather on my right and my grandmother on my left quietly talking in Yiddish. My grandfather taught me everything Jewish I know: Jewish songs, traditions, dishes, Jewish warmth and Jewish soul. Matzah was made in his home and Jews got together to pray in his home when there were no synagogues left in the town after the Great Patriotic War as a result of titanic efforts of the Soviet regime.

My father's sister Sima, was lame from birth. She was amazingly smart and attractive. Yevsey Levin, Lisa husband Solomon's brother, a Jewish man, very handsome, had to compete with other

men to marry Sima, so beautiful and smart she was regardless of her handicap. They moved to Moscow where they both worked at a plant. They named their daughter Masia after my grandmother. After the Great Patriotic War Sima and her daughter stayed in Moscow. Masia was smart and educated. He was an economist. She moved to USA in the 1980s. She died in New York.