

Zinoviy Rukinglaz With His Family



This is a family photograph made in Kherson in 1937 on the occasion of my brother Mikhail's admission to the Nikolaev Shipbuilding College. The lower row from left to right: my father's niece Grunia Rukinglaz's daughter Sima Bor'ba, the adoptive of my parents raised in our house, Grunia's husband Yefim Bor'ba, my mother Esther Rukinglaz, Grunia's son Boris. The upper row from left to right: my father Isrul Rukinglaz, Katia Cherniak, my older brother Mikhail Rukinglaz, Grunia Rukinglaz, and I Zinoviy Rukinglaz.

In 1917, when the revolution began, my father joined the rebellions. He organized another riot of craftsmen and was arrested for keeping a revolutionary red banner. My father was released after the revolution when common people came to power. Those were hard years. His former clientele had moved abroad and the red commanders didn't care about fancy clothes.

In 1917, my parents' family grew bigger. There were six adoptive children in the family. Before WWI my father's cousin sister whose name I don't know, became a widow and came from Siberia to live with my parents. She had two children: Yakov, born in 1900, and Agrafena, born in 1907. My father's cousin fell severely ill and died in 1915. The children stayed in our house. When the revolution began, Yakov joined the Red army and then went to work in state security bodies. He rose to the rank of general in the course of his service. My father adopted Agrafena, Grunia, as she was affectionately called at home, and she bore his surname of Rukinglaz till she got married. After my mother's sister and her husband perished their three children came to live in our house: Yakov, born in 1916, Grigoriy, born in 1918, and Alexandr, born in 1920. My father didn't adopt them officially and they bore their father's surname of Shyshylovskiy. In 1921 two other children appeared in our family: Katia, born in 1914, and Marcus, born in 1916, Cherniak, the children of my father's distant relative who perished during a pogrom.

My father realized that he had to do other things to care about rather than revolutionary ideas. He had to support the family. Life was improving. The Soviet officials needed new suits and their wives wanted fancy clothes and coats. My father had his clients and began to earn well.

I was born on 28 December 1923 and named Zelik after my grandfather, but when it was time for me to obtain my passport, I chose the name of Zinoviy. I grew up in a loving family atmosphere. My parents did not distinguish between their own and adoptive children. I believed they were my brothers and sisters and got to know that they were adoptive children at rather mature age.

My father always wore a kippah and my mother always wore a kerchief. They wore clothes in the fashion of this period. My father made bright fancy dresses and blouses for my mother. My parents wore traditional Jewish clothes to the synagogue. Before starting work in the morning my father put on his tallit and tefillin and prayed.

In 1930 I went to a Russian school. I studied well. I became a pioneer and participated in minor pioneer activities. I had missed two years of school due to malaria that I had and I was older than my classmates. I was fond of geography and attended a geography club in the house of pioneers. Sometimes I accompanied my father to the club of craftsmen where my father attended a choir studio. I didn't have many friends. I was a homey boy and liked long family evenings, when my father was sewing and my mother was reading newspapers or magazines aloud. I went to parades with my school mates on 1 May and 7 November, and there were meetings at school on these days. We didn't celebrate these holidays at home. We couldn't afford such celebrations and besides, my father spent all his time working.

By the beginning of the Great Patriotic War I was the only child living with the family. Grunia and Katia had been married for a while and the older children left. Yakov studied in Moscow and Marcus entered a college in Odessa. My brother Mikhail also studied in Nikolaev Shipbuilding College.