

Tamara Koblik And Buma Gandelman



This is me and Buma Gandelman, my aunt Sonia husband's nephew. This photo was taken in Bukhara in 1944. We had this photograph taken for the memory before we went back to Moldavia from the evacuation.

In summer 1941 the war began. Papa, mama, Sheiva and I evacuated. We arrived at Krasnodar. From there we were taken to the kolkhoz 'Verniy put' [The right way] in Kropotkin district by truck. Few months later Germans approached the Krasnodar Kray [Russian administrative division]. Chairman of the kolkhoz told us: 'You've got to leave. Germans are close, and you are Jews'. They gave us wagons and we rode to Krasnodar. From there we took a freight train to Makhachkala. We were to cross the Caspian Sea to Krasnovodsk. There were crowds of people. We were accommodated in a hostel where we met mama's sister Sonia Gandelman and her daughter Haya. One night militia came to check our documents. They took papa with them. Later mama got to know that he was charged of deserting: he was supposed to obtain a necessary military permit in Krasnodar. Papa was sentenced to eight years, but I don't know whether he had to serve his sentence in jail or in a camp. He was sent to Nizhniy Tagil. This was the last time we saw papa. Sheiva got pneumonia. She was 12 years old and she died. We finally took a boat to Krasnovodsk. From there we moved to Bukhara where Sonia husband's brother Moisha Gandelman, his wife Fania and their son Buma had evacuated.

In Bukhara we settled down near the Gandelmans. Moisha was a tinsmith, Fania was a housewife. My mama went to work at the knitwear factory. We lived in a small room that we rented from an Uzbek family. There was a bed on bricks, there was a box full of dried apricots and a little table on shaky legs. There was a niche in the wall where we kept our clothes. Mama didn't send me to school: I was to watch our belongings, but I think mama was reluctant to let me out of the house after the loss of her husband and daughter. I was her only treasure. I occasionally visited the Gandelmans. Fania was giving Buma bread a butter persuading him: 'Have another bite for papa, one more for mama'. Once somebody called Fania, I grabbed one slice, and ate it later. I was very

young, it was hard for me to stay alone and I asked mama to bring me some color pieces of cloth to play with them. She decided to bring me a cuff from a sweater. She had it on her wrist - workers wore long gauze sleeves to protect their arms from the heat. Mama was halted at the check point. They told her to come and see her boss next morning. Mama came home in tears. She and aunt Sonia began to sort out my clothes. Mama was afraid that she might be arrested and wanted to have everything prepared for me to stay with aunt Sonia. She didn't hope she would keep her freedom. However, next day she returned home. She wasn't arrested, but she lost her job. She went to work in a tailor's shop. I don't remember any Jewish traditions in Bukhara. Not once did I see matzah there. Cannot say whether mama fasted on Yom Kippur. We starved all the time there.

I was left alone in the room. I entertained myself moving the 'furniture': I put the box with dried apricots where the 'table' was, and moved the table to the center of the room. Our neighbors were Jewish families from Minsk, there was one Jew from the former territory of Poland, there were many Jews. Hey came to see me: 'How have you shuffled the furniture this time?' Aunt Sonia moved to her husband in the Ural. We didn't hear from papa. Mama had a yellowed paper where the word Nizhniy Tagil: this was the only document associated with my father. Mama worked in the shop few years. I was 9 years old (12 according to my new birth certificate), and I asked my mother to let me go to school. In September 1944 I went to the first form of a Russian school for girls. I could speak Uzbek by that time, and I didn't have any problems with picking Russian. I studied well. I remember my first teacher Valentina Sergeevna: she was plumpish, very kind and nice. Though I was already nine years old, I was very tiny and mama even thought I might be a Lilliputian.

In spring 1944 Soviet troops began to liberate Bessarabia. When mama heard that Kishinev was liberated, she said: 'Our relatives have sent us the permit'. This was true - we received it from Rezina two weeks later. During this time Jews from Bessarabia - most of them were doctors, arranged for two railcars to take us back home. Mama managed to make arrangements for us to go with the rest of them, though she had to pay that person, who could organize for us to take this train. These were freight railcars that on our way were attached to various locomotives moving to the west.