

Simon Grinshpoon With His Mother And Sister, Leiba And Polia Grinshpoon



My mother Leiba Grinshpoon, my sister Polia and I. The photo was taken in Yaruga in 1924 before I started school. When I was 4 years old, I went to cheder along with other boys of my age. We studied the basics of religion, Yiddish, arithmetic and other subjects. We studied at somebody's home, kids and teachers together, taking turns: one month we were at my home and the next month at somebody else's. We had vacations at Pesach and Rosh Hashanah. We observed all Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays at home. Although my mother wasn't fanatically religious she strictly followed the kashrut. Once my sister Polia fell ill with mumps. The doctor suggested to apply pork fat to her neck. My mother was terrified at the thought of bringing pork fat into a Jewish house. She ran to uncle Moisey, who was reading Jewish books all his life and knew all Jewish laws, to ask his advice. Moisey thought about it, looked into his books and told my mother that it was all right to violate the rules for the sake of a sick child. In 1924 I went to the Jewish school in Yaruga. There were two schools in our town: a Ukrainian lower secondary school and a Jewish primary school. Since I could read and write, I finished primary school in a year. The Ukrainian school was also turned into a four-year school, and so I went to the Ukrainian lower secondary school in Subbotovka [3 km from Yaruga]. Every day I went to school on foot. In the season when roads were bad my father rented a room for me in Subbotovka. However, I went home every Friday to spend the holiday at home. My father didn't want me to return home when the weather was nasty, but I couldn't imagine to spend Sabbath at any place but home. My mother was always happy to have me back home. We spent Sabbath together, and the following day I returned to Subbotovka. My mother wanted me to have the bar mitzvah ritual, which is performed when Jewish boys come of age, turning 13 and one day. From this day on a boy can pray with adults and can even get married. It sometimes happened that after turning 13, a young fiancé was taken to the family of his future wife. This family gave him professional education and provided for him until the young people got married - which often happened only a few years later. I wished to avoid bar mitzvah. I

was afraid that if they found out at school, they wouldn't allow me to become a pioneer. But my parents insisted. I had a teacher that came to our home to teach me how to put on the tefillin. He taught me prayers and traditions, and we read the Torah and the Talmud. We had the bar mitzvah party on the Saturday following my 13th birthday. My mother was cooking the food and preparing for the party. That Saturday my relatives took me to the synagogue, where the rabbi said prayers and put the tefillin on my forehead. We had many guests, and my mother was very happy. By the way, I never became a pioneer. It wasn't mandatory at that time, and I wasn't really eager to become one.