

Agnessa Margolina



This is me, four years old. The photo was taken in Kiev in 1924. I was born in Sumy on 17th November 1920. At birth I was named Gnesia and this is the name written in my documents. When I went to school everybody began to call me Agnessa, a Russian name [common name]. My family spoke Yiddish at home, I said my first words in Yiddish as well. I can vaguely remember my mother. When I was a bit over three years old she died at childbirth. This happened on 6th April 1924. The baby was stillborn. They were both buried in the Jewish cemetery in Sumy. My father's older sister

Sima came to Sumy to take us to Kiev. I was taken to Cherna, my father's mother. I lived with my grandmother for a whole year without seeing my father. Nobody told me that my mother had died and I kept crying asking them to take me to my mother. A year passed and then my father's sister Nenia took me to my father, who lived in Brovary, in the suburbs of Kiev. Nenia told me that I would have a new mother. That way I found out that my father had remarried. His second wife's name was Rasia. I don't remember her maiden name. Rasia was much younger than my father. We lived from hand-to-mouth. My father was an accountant at the district consumer union, but he probably earned very little there. My stepmother had to go to work. She worked for a shop making gloves. She took work home. She had a sewing machine and she made these gloves working from morning till night. It was hard work and she rubbed her hands sore with that rough cloth. Neither my father nor stepmother had time to spend with me. I remember Grandfather Avraam, Rasia's father, very well. He was very old and very kind. Adults didn't treat me like somebody important and always commented, 'She is just a child', while my grandfather understood that I was lonely and sad. He always had time and a kind word for me. I always tried to be where he was and he was very pleased that I could speak Yiddish. In the family of my stepmother only her parents spoke Yiddish.