

Agnessa Margolina And Her School Friend



This is me, on the left, with one of my school friends. The photo was taken in a park in Kiev in 1932. 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. 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. Neither my father nor stepmother had time to spend with me. My brother Boris was born in 1926. His Jewish name was Boruch. He was named after my grandfather, who was killed by bandits. My younger brother, Shaya, named after my father's younger brother, who was also killed, was born in 1928. Even after my brothers were born my stepmother still had to go to work. I became a baby-sitter for my brothers at the age of six. I was looking after them doing everything necessary. Both brothers called their mother 'Aunt Rasia' like I did. I'm used to calling them 'kids'

and even now it's hard for me to call them 'brothers'. They are my 'kids'. I can't say that I didn't get along with my stepmother, but my childhood was very hard. I felt lack of motherly love and care and Rasia either didn't want or couldn't give these to me. I went to the first grade at the age of eight. There was no Jewish school in Brovary and I went to a Ukrainian elementary school. I finished my first year at school in Brovary. In 1929 my father got a job as an accountant at the knitwear factory in Kiev and we moved there. I had to look after my brothers again since there was nobody else to do it. When I had to go to school my brothers went to kindergarten and elementary school. I went to the Ukrainian lower secondary school in the house next to ours. Almost half of my classmates were Jewish. There were also Jewish teachers. I had no opportunity to do homework at home. After classes I had work to do: take my brothers from elementary school and kindergarten, give them lunch and look after them. I also had to wash dishes and clean the apartment. There was hardly any time left to do homework. I liked literature at school. We didn't have books at home and I borrowed some from the school library. I also liked mathematics. I studied well at school. I was a sociable girl and had many friends. I didn't chose my friends according to their nationality, but somehow most of my friends happened to be Jewish.