

Sofia Svoiskaya



This is an amateur photo, taken by our relative in Leningrad in 1970. My mom is 77 years old here.

My mother, Sofia Iosifovna Svoiskaya, nee Gendeleva, was born in 1893 in Nevel. She was raised in a religious family that observed all Jewish traditions. She finished four grades of a Jewish school; her mother tongue was Yiddish. However, she spoke Russian with us children. When my brother Boris was born, he was circumcised. Then three daughters were born: Rosa, I, and Minna – everyone in the family called her Minya.

Most of the time my mother worked in day nurseries. Besides, she was a public activist and was elected delegate of the City Soviet, where she worked in the women department, responsible for solving women and children's problems. Public activists were prohibited from going to the synagogue, but Mother sometimes attended it secretly, so that no one would find out. She also took us with her, when we were small. We celebrated only Soviet holidays at home: 7th November, 1st May. We visited our grandma on Jewish holidays.

In the 1960s and 1970s, when religion was not persecuted, Mother prayed a lot. My husband and me took her to the synagogue and brought her back regularly every week. Mother died in 1976 of stomach cancer. She was 82 years old by then. The two last weeks of her life were very painful for me; I stayed at her side. Mother was buried at the Jewish cemetery.