

Malea Veselnitskaya's Parents Dina And Isaac Ostrovskiye And Their Brothers And Sisters



These are my parents Dina and Isaac Ostrovskiye and their brothers and sisters. Sitting from left to right: my mother Dina Ostrovskaya, my father's brother Abram Ostrovski, my mother's brother Yuda Ostrovski. Standing from left to right: my father Isaac Ostrovski, his sister Babl Pertsova, my mother's sister Chaya Ioshpa. This photo was taken in Kremenchug in 1919, on my parents' wedding day.

My parents got married in 1919 in Kremenchug. I don't know any details of their wedding. They moved to Alexandria, Kirovograd region. In 1920 my older brother Semyon and in 1924 my brother Ruvim were born. I was born in Alexandria in 1926. That year my parents went to visit their relatives in Tashkent: Abram, Chaya and Babl. They actually intended to stay to live there, but my mother told me that blooming cotton was hurting her eyes and Ruvim had boils on his skin. Doctors said they had to change the climate and they returned to Romny, Sumy region in Ukraine. We lived in two rooms there. We had beds and a wardrobe in one room and a table, chairs and a stove in another. Mother cooked on the stove in winter and on a primus stove in summer. Father worked in a shop manufacturing shoe polish. Mother was a housewife. In the late 1920s, when NEP was over, my father's shop closed and he lost his job.

In 1931 my parents heard about the Jewish Republic that Stalin was establishing in Far East and decided to go there. We sold our furniture and moved to Birobidzhan. Actually, there was no town built yet and we were accommodated in a wooden barrack in the taiga. My father became a cashier. He went to the bank to receive salary for all employees on a tractor with a tractor driver. My mother was very concerned that he might be killed for money. There were many convicts in the area. My mother worked as a milkmaid. Life was very hard. The hardships were beyond our parents' expectations. Our father's acquaintance from Alexandria helped father to move to Khabarovsk in the early 1932s. We were accommodated in a barrack there. There was no hallway and the door of the room opened into the yard. Our beds were right across from the doorway.

Mother hang bed sheets to protect us from the cold, but it didn't help much. Some neighbors were drunkards and spoke in curse language. We had very poor food and never had apples.

Few months later we went to mother's sister Chaya in Tashkent. Neither father nor mother could find a job and our father decided that we had to go back to Romny. He went there alone to find a lodging and a job and later we joined him. We moved to Romny in 1933, but our situation did not improve. There was terrible famine in Ukraine. We gathered potato peels in dump pits, fried and ate them. There came agents from a neighboring sovkhos offering work in the field and payment with bread. My brothers, being 13 and 9 years old went to work there. At the end of their first week Semyon and Ruvim received one eighth of a loaf of brown bread with addition of straw. My mother's brother Aron sent Yuda few dollars from America. Mother bought me a brown sateen dress, cotton pants for brothers, a shirt for father and something for herself in Torgsin stores. Our father had a job where his salary was 360 rubles per month, but it wasn't paid in timely manner. There were lines to buy bread and at times we had to stand all night through to get bread. 20 loaves were supplied to a store for the whole district and sometimes we had to stand in lines few days to get some bread.