

Jacob Mikhailov With His Cousins



This is me (third from left) with my cousins, the daughters of my mother's elder brother Solomon Nitsberg. The eldest, Busya, is the second from left, the younger Tamara is the first from right. I do not remember the name of my third cousin. The picture was taken during my last visit to my grandparents in Chernigov. I was six. The picture was taken in 1931. I was born on 19th June 1925. Our family lived in Kharkov, but I spent the whole summer in Chernigov with my grandmother. All grandchildren were brought together. Mother's sister Revekka also used to come there with her husband and daughter to spend the summer. They were happy times. Grandmother cooked. Pavel and Revekka played with the children. We went for strolls to the forest, the beach, and performed puppet shows. The elder read fairy-tales to the younger ones. Sometimes my uncle took all boys angling. We left at dawn, and came back for breakfast. All grown-ups spoke Russian with the children. The house was spacious and there was enough room for everybody. It was a two-storied brick house with a basement. Mother's brother Solomon was the host. His family was on the first floor, grandmother took the second floor. The basement was taken by tenants. There was a fountain in the yard in front of the house. It was probably the only fountain in Chernigov at that time. There was a beautiful orchard behind the house. There was a variety of fruits there. There are certain scraps of my childhood in my memory. I remember my grandmother to cook cherry jam in a huge copper basin. I reached to pick a cherry and scalded my arm heavily. I was taken to the doctor and I remember how he praised me for not making a sound during the treatment of the wound and bandaging. I remember how Grandfather used to send me to the bakery for challah, and I removed the crunchy crust and ate it on the way home. Maybe grandfather got so mad because the challah was meant for Sabbath. I don't remember my grandparents to celebrate Sabbath at home; frankly speaking, I preferred to spend time with my cousins rather than with the adults. Once, my grandfather gave me a pocket watch. I was keen to know why the hands were moving, so I dismantled the watch into tiny pieces. Grandfather scolded me, but my grandmother stood up for me. She picked up all the parts and took them to the watchmaker, and they were put together again. Grandmother forgave her grandchildren entirely no matter what we did. We were very rarely punished. I remember how I lolled out my tongue in front of my grandmother. Late at night, after Uncle Solomon came back from work, he flogged me for lolling out my tongue. Such

little incidents were not in the way for my love for my relatives. I always kept in touch, called and sometimes came for a visit.