

Yevgenia Kozak With Her Mother Bluma Shafer, Sons Mikhail Kozak And Alexey Kozak And Friends



This is me on the right, holding my younger son Mikhail, from the left is my mother Bluma Shafer. Sitting are our neighbor and the wife of mama's brother Haim Raya Mitzel. Alexey is standing beside mama. This photo was taken in the late 1950s in Bershad near our house. Our neighbor, who bought the first camera in Bershad, was only but happy to photograph us. Once in 1952 mama's old acquaintance offered to introduce me to her distant relative Meyer Kozak. I liked Meyer. We got married in 1953. Life was getting better and I even thought that my fortune smiled at me, but it happened to be an illusion. On 11 February 1954 my son was born. We named him Alexey. Shortly afterward I got pregnant again. As for Meyer, he fell severely ill. When I was pregnant 5 months, Meyer died from tuberculosis in hospital in Odessa. I was struck with grief. Mama and I went to the funeral. On our way back my son got severely injured - his hand was squeezed by the door. He burst into tears and I finally started crying. Now I knew I alone had to raise our children. My second child was born in late 1955. I named him Mikhail after his father Meyer. My parents helped me to raise the children. In 1958 I went to the town committee to ask them to help me with employment. My boys were with me. They gave me a job of a janitor and then I became a worker in the dyeing shop where I worked till I retired. My older son to go to a kindergarten. Mama looked after my younger son. My work was very hard: there was no heating and it was freezing in winter. There were also hazardous vapors from paints, but I was glad to have this job. In the morning taking a slice of bread - my lunch - I ran to work and returned home late in the evening. I worked overtime to earn more. In the evening I did the laundry and fed my kids trying to give them whatever little bit of motherly care. However hard life was, we continued to observe Jewish traditions. My parents went to an old synagogue (the new one had been removed) but that one was all right. On Saturday father didn't work and mama tried to cook something special: latkes, kugel, even there was nothing else, but flour that she had. Father always brought matzah from the synagogue on holidays, or sometimes we made it in the Russian stove. We fasted on Yom Kippur and I still keep fasting nowadays. On Chanukkah mama made buckwheat pancakes.

My children also know this holiday - they always got a few coins for sweets on this day. My older son Alexey had all excellent marks at school. His teachers praised him at parents' meetings at school and thanked me for raising them well and I listened proudly. After finishing the 8th form with all excellent marks - and I was sitting in the presidium, when he obtained his certificate, my son finished the Radio Electronics College in Lvov and served in the army. Then he met Yelena, a Jewish girl from Leningrad, married her and moved to Leningrad where her family lived. My younger son Mikhail became a shoemaker after finishing school. He married Bronia, a Jewish girl from Bershad and lived with her and their son Boris in Bershad. In 1968 my mother fell ill. When dying she begged my pardon for her leaving me with my kids alone. My father fell ill with cancer then and was bedridden for five years. Several months before he died he had duodenal obstruction. I was alone to cope with all this. My parents and sister were buried in the Jewish cemetery following all Jewish traditions.