

Arkadi Milgrom With Cousin Boris Shilman



My first photograph. I am on the right, my aunt Golda's son Boris is beside me. This photo was taken in Krasilov in 1929 on the porch of our house. My aunt Golda, her daughter Tania and son Boris also moved to Baku in the middle of the 1930s. Boris perished during the Great Patriotic War. I almost do not remember him

On 20 July 1924 I was born. I was named Avraam after my grandfather, but in 1972, at the height of the state anti-Semitism I changed it to Arkadi, that sounded alike to make the life of my son and me easier.

All Jewish holidays were celebrated in our house. Pesach was the main holiday. Fancy kosher crockery was taken down from the attic. Before Pesach the family whitewashed the walls and stove, polished the floors rubbing them with kerosene, replaced curtains and prepared starched tablecloths. My grandmother joked that we had to prepare for Pesach as thoroughly as for 1 May. My grandfather conducted seder, of course. He reclined on a beautiful velvet cushion and asked questions and I replied being the youngest in the family. Later I passed this honorable mission to uncle Berl's son Nukhim. My favorite holidays were Sukkoth and Simchat Torah. There was a tent used for wagon parking on ordinary days, but on Sukkoth we removed the roof tiles and replaced them with reed and straw and installed three missing walls. This made our sukkah. We had meals there a whole week and grandfather told me and his younger grandchildren about the holiday. On Simchat Torah I danced around the synagogue with other children. We had an apple on a stick and a burning candle on top of it in our hands.

We were rather poor. What my father was earning was not enough and my mother had to go to work. She sewed at night drawing curtains tight on the windows fearing financial inspectors [state officer responsible for identification of illegal businesses].

There were five schools in Krasilov: one Jewish primary school, three 7-year schools: one Jewish, one Polish and one Ukrainian and a Ukrainian 10-year school. My friends were one year older than I. On 1 September 1930 they went to the first grade and I joined them. I liked the primary school teacher Mirra Hovar, a tall, stately, nicely dressed lady with her hair neatly done. She took her new schoolchildren to their classroom, but she sent me away saying that I was too young to go to school yet. I ran to my mother's shop and begged my mother to help me go to school. My mother managed to convince the teacher and she let me stay in class few days. I stayed in the classroom two days and then didn't want to go to school again. It was hard to stay quiet for long and I felt like going to play with my friends. In 1931, a year later, I went to the first grade of this Jewish primary school and I enjoyed going to school.

I dreamt of playing the balalaika! There was a folk orchestra in our school and I kept nagging at home: 'I want a balalaika, buy me a balalaika'. A balalaika cost 3 rubles, but it was too much for our family to spend 3 rubles. I kept asking for a balalaika for three years until my father bought it and I joined our folk orchestra. However, I was no good at hearing the tunes and soon I was expelled from the orchestra and after that I put away my balalaika.