

Sarra Shylman's Son Mikhail Shyfris



My son Mikhail Shyfris. He was photographed by our neighbor, a circus artist. Kiev, 1952.

I met my future husband Chaim Shyfris, a Jew, at a party. It happened in 1950. A year later we got married. We lived in our apartment: my parents, I and Chaim. We didn't have a Jewish wedding. Chaim was a Komsomol member and my father was a Communist and observation of any Jewish traditions was out of the question. We didn't even celebrate Jewish holidays.

On 2 January 1952 our son Mikhail was born. We lived with my parents. My father went to work and my mother was a housewife and looked after her grandson.

Since I went to work I had to send Mikhail to a kindergarten that wasn't easy at the time. However, we managed, but he was small and didn't want to go to kindergarten. My mother took him to the kindergarten and then watched him crying in the yard through a slot in the fence. Mikhail was a sociable boy and he got used to the kindergarten soon. After the kindergarten he went to a Russian school. He studied very well, he had all excellent grades.

Mikhail was very sickly in the 1st grade and his doctor said he needed to spend time in a village. My husband's cousin brother lived in the little town of Pynovo in 20 km from Kiev, on the Desna River and we took Mikhail there every summer 8 years in a row. I took vacation in June and then my husband took a vacation and we stayed with Mikhail there. Mikhail was cheerful and sociable and his classmates liked him. He never had to do his homework since he remembered subjects listening to his teachers in class. He used to say: 'It's so hard for me! I have to get only excellent grades. With everybody else it's easier while I must have excellent grades'. 'He decided it for himself. I never spoke to him about it.