

Ester Kagan



This is my mother Ester Kagan. The picture was made in Liepaja in 1925.

My mother's family lived in Dvinsk. Grandfather had the business of selling kosher meat. He had his own stores and a house. Grandmother was a housewife. They were very rich. The family was large. They had 8 children. My mother Ester was born in 1892.

Mother said that the elder children were educated at home. The tutor came and taught all of them at once, age difference of one or two years was not important. The teacher taught them rudiments of reading, writing and counting. The four younger beginning from Hanna went to lyceum and got good education. Everybody got Jewish education. Boys went to cheder, melamed came home to teach the girls. They were taught Jewish traditions, religion, how to read prayers in Ivrit. All family members were pious.

In 1908 when father turned 18, he was drafted for the mandatory service in the tsarist army. He met mother before he was drafted in the army. I do not know the story how they met. Mother's family lived in Dvinsk, not far from Borovka. Mother said that she had been waiting for father all those years of his army service. He served in remote Siberia, Irkutsk [about 5500 km to the east from Moscow]. Father said that he did well in military service. He was a disciplined soldier, so in the second year of his military service he was granted with a leave. At that time the trains were very slow, so it took father almost three weeks to get to Dvinsk from Irkutsk. He came home, visited mother and left for his service. Father was demobilized in 1911. In late 1919 my future parents got married.

Mother started her own business after getting married. Her two sisters Hanna and Mina became housewives when married, mother's elder sister Musya and mother were owners of kosher meat stores. Both of them were very clever, energetic and entrepreneurial women and they probably felt bored at home. In general, mother's family was involved in business of selling kosher meat. Apart from mother and Musya, all mother's brothers owned stores of kosher meat. Father had his own business- he dealt with wholesale trade of products and had contracts with Germany and England. Our family belonged to middle class. We were neither poor nor rich.

I was the eldest child. I was born in 1921 and called Rosa. My Jewish name is Rohl-Leya. My middle sister Hinda was born in 1924 and younger, Sarah - in 1930. Parents ran business, so we always had maids at home- to cook food and watch children. Since childhood I could see from my parents how hard people should work in order to achieve anything in their life. They got up at 5 a.m. While mother was cooking breakfast, father prayed. Mother fed father and I and went to the store. She had to open the store by 7 a.m.- the time when the hostesses and maids from rich houses came to buy meat for lunch. Mother had a lot of clients as Jewish ladies saw that we were a righteous Jewish family, observing Jewish traditions, so mother was trusted. Certainly, mother would not be able to cope with all that work herself, so she had an assistant working for her in the store.

All members of our family were pious. On Fridays parents finished work earlier and went to mikvah. When they came back, mother lit candles and prayed over them. Then everybody sat at the table. Father said kidush over bread and everybody started festive dinner. On Saturday parents went to the synagogue obligatorily. None of my parents did work about the house on Saturdays. Father had a very beautiful voice so he worked part-time as a chazzan in Hasidic synagogue. When father came back from the synagogue, he read torah, and then all of us went to see some of our relatives.