

Berta Rapoport With Her Daughter Polina Shein



This is my mother Berta Rapoport with my elder sister Polina. The picture was made in Tallinn in 1928. There is hardly anything I know about my mother's family. I had never seen my maternal grandfather. I do not even know his name. Maternal grandmother Doba Shlakhtman had died 2 years before I was born. I do not know what my grandfather did for a living. Grandmother was a housewife as most married Jewish women at that time. Mother's family lived in Latvian town Dvinsk. Before revolution 1917 Baltic countries were part of Russian Empire. They gained independence after breakup of the empire. Dvinsk was given a Latvian name, Daugavpils [Latvia, about 200 km from Riga]. It is still called that name. My mother Berta, Jewish Rohe-Braine, was born in Dvinsk in 1890. She was an only child in her religious family. Mother had some Jewish education. I do not know exactly which school she went to, but mother knew how to read and write Yiddish and Ivrit. In the 1900s mother finished Russian lyceum. I do not know how my parents met. Maybe mother told me the story, but I was a child and must have had other interests and did not remember her tales. Of course, parents had a traditional Jewish wedding. Back in that time Jews stuck to Jewish traditions, even if they were not too religious. After getting married parents lived in Riga for a while. Father did well. He owned couple of houses in Riga. Soon they moved to Tallinn and father purchased a house for our family. After revolution as of 1917 father's house in Riga were sequestrated. He was left a house in Tallinn and timber warehouse. Father purchased boards and plywood and then sold them to the joiners. My elder sister Polina was born in 1912. Then my brother Samuel was born in 1917. I was the youngest, born in 1924. I was named Simon at birth. My parents were not religious bigots, but Jewish traditions were observed at home. Parents observed Kashrut and marked Jewish holidays. Mother lit candles on Sabbath and prayed over the candles with the hands on her face. Parents went to the synagogue on holidays. We had kosher dishes- separately for meat and milk food. Certain dishes were used only on Pesach and stored separately from everyday ones. There was no bread on Pesach. We ate only matzah for the entire Paschal period. In general, all traditions were observed, but without any zealotry. At home parents

spoke Russian between themselves. My father died in 1930 and mother being on her own took over father's business. She was constantly being busy and could not pay me enough attention. My governess mostly took care of my upbringing. Many of our acquaintances considered timbering to be for me, but mother was a brisk woman and eager to work. It was even harder for mother as her Estonian was poor. She was from Latvia and was fluent in Latvian, not Estonian. The warehouse was not very big, but still she had to pay a lot of attention to it. Mother purchased the goods herself. She took trips overseas, viz. to France, Yugoslavia, Poland. Mother was a petite woman and all suppliers wondered how she managed to conduct a purely masculine business. Maybe it was the reason for their being sympathetic and giving her the goods in credit. We were pretty well-heeled owing to our mother. Having finished lyceum my elder sister Polina got married with a Jew Leib Shein, from Estonian town Valga, bordering on Latvia [250 km from Tallinn]. Leib was born in 1903. Of course, they had a traditional Jewish wedding. After getting married sister and her husband moved to Valga. In 1936 their son Solomon was born. Leib was an entrepreneur and Polina was a housewife and raised her son. When brother finished lyceum, he started helping mother about work.