

Gitl Shaposhnik



This is my grandmother Gitl aged 63. We lived together since I was born. She had dark wavy hair.

She is wearing a beautiful dark dress, which she liked very much. The picture was taken in Leningrad in 1957.

My maternal great grandparents were born in Belarus, not far from Orsha [Orsha is a town in Vitebsk region, located in the North-Eastern part of the Belarus Republic, 700 kms to the South of St. Petersburg], where they lived almost all their lives.

Their children were also born there: sons Iosif, Boris and Solomon and daughters Gitl, Feiga and Frida. Gitl Khaimovna Grienblatt, my grandmother, was born in 1893.

I was told by her that her parents were religious people observing traditions: kosher, Sabbath, celebrating traditional holidays and attending the synagogue.

In 1910 grandmother Gitl married my grandfather. My maternal grandfather, Berko Shaposhnik was born in 1881. He also came from Belarus, they were distant relatives with grandmother. My grandparents both studied in Jewish religious school.

They spoke mostly Yiddish with each other. Later grandmother learnt Russian rather well, spoke without accent and could write rather correctly. They moved to Kiev from Orsha in approximately 1910. Grandfather was a qualified tailor and grandmother was a housewife.

Their family was not religious, they did not observe any traditions and did not perform any ceremonies. In his youth grandfather was a member of Bund, a social-democratic organization, which consisted mostly of Jews-craftsmen.

During the first years of the Soviet power he was once even elected delegate in the Municipal Council. Financially, though, they were an average family. My grandparents had two children: Eidel Shaposhnik, my mother, (1912 - 1975) and her younger brother Miron (1918-1998). Uncle Miron lived in Kiev, and then also in Biysk (Siberia) and in Moscow. He was an economist and married a Russian woman.

My mother married father in Kiev in 1933. I was born in Kiev in 1934. We lived together with my maternal grandparents and my uncle Miron. Besides, my great grandmother, mother of my maternal grandfather, lived with us too.

Our whole family was not religious, we all wore common clothes, grandfather did not wear payot or kipa, we did not observe the ceremonies or attend the synagogue. Since grandparents often spoke Yiddish to each other, I understood Yiddish and still do, though I never spoke it.

Grandfather worked as a cutter at that time in a tailoring atelier, mother was a controller in a Savings bank department and father worked as an engineer at the Municipal Water Supply Station. Grandmother Gitl kept the house.

When the Great Patriotic War broke out, grandmother Gitl evacuated with the rest of our family. Only my father and maternal great grandmother stayed in Kiev (father's duty was to blow up the Kiev Water Supply Station, if the Germans came; and great grandmother was very old then and did not leave the house).

They perished in Kiev: the Germans executed them all by shooting in Babi Yar [a gully in the north-western suburbs of Kiev, a place of mass massacre of peaceful citizens (mostly Jews) by German occupants and prisoners-of-war during 1941-1943. In total 100,000 people were destroyed in Babi Yar]. After a very long travel we finally reached the town of Alma-Ata, capital of Kazakhstan, where we lived until the end of the war.

After the war ended in 1945, my mother went to Leningrad where grandmother Gitl's younger sister, aunt Fanya lived. Grandmother Gitl, grandfather and me came to Leningrad from Alma-Ata only several years later, after mother and aunt Feiga managed with great difficulty to obtain bigger space for us in another communal apartment.

Grandmother helped with the household until the end of her life. She died in 1965.

Grandfather lived a long life and died in 1974. All my relatives are buried in the so-called Jewish ground at the Yuzhnoye (Southern) cemetery in Leningrad - though they were not religious people, as most of the Jews in Soviet time.