

Ronia Finkelshtein's Grandmother Polina Izrailevich



My grandmother Polina Izrailevich. The photo was taken on her 25th birthday in the photo shop of L.G. Izrailevich, in Doctor Gurvich's house in Alexandrovskaya Street, in Poltava. My grandparents on my mother's side were born in Poltava, or in a town near Poltava, in the 1860s. After their wedding my grandfather rented an apartment and they settled down in Poltava. Now Poltava is a big town, a regional center [350 km from Kiev]. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the

20th century Poltava was an industrial center: there were several plants, factories, smaller enterprises and shops. There were also theaters and libraries. Jews constituted about one third of the population in Poltava. There were also Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, Lithuanians and Belarus. My grandmother told me that the Jewish community was prosperous at the beginning of the 20th century: there were ten synagogues, a yeshivah, a cheder, a Jewish hospital, an old people's home and a Jewish library in town. My grandfather was an accountant at the timber warehouse, and my grandmother was a housewife. She wore a white silk kerchief. She was a beauty: She was slim and tender and had a caring heart. My grandfather loved her dearly. They had six children. My grandparents weren't a very wealthy family. My grandfather Moisey didn't have a house of his own. I remember the small building in which they were renting an apartment. They had a big verandah and two rooms, poorly furnished. They were very religious and my mother, being their older daughter, did her best to please them. My mother, Adel Finkelshtein [nee Izrailevich], went to the market to buy a chicken and took it to the shochet to have it slaughtered, and she bought all kosher food for them. My grandfather knew Hebrew. He prayed every morning and evening and recited a blessing before every meal. They had a mezuzah on the door: a small box with a prayer inside. They touched it with their hands and kissed it before going into the house. It was believed to protect from evil. I liked the big bookcase in my grandparents' home: I enjoyed looking at the books. I couldn't read at that time and don't know exactly what kind of books they were, but I remember some bigger volumes in Hebrew and the Torah among them. The rest of the books were in Russian. My grandparents spoke Yiddish, especially when they wanted to conceal the subject of conversation from us. They also knew Russian. They celebrated all Jewish holidays and honored traditions. They went to the synagogue every Saturday and on Jewish holidays.