

Surah Gethmann And Moshe Wainshtein



This is my mother Surah Wainshtein photographed with her brother Moshe Wainshtein shortly before his departure to Argentina, South America. The photo was taken around 1909. My maternal ancestors, the Wainshteins, were merchants and wealthy. My grandfather Ehil was a skilled roofer and my grandmother Anne was a housewife. She was busy raising her five children: Dvoira, Leib, Moshe, my mother Surah and Abram. The boys studied at cheder, where they received the basics of Jewish religious education, and at the Jewish elementary school. The girls also finished two or three years of the Jewish elementary school. My mother's older brothers Leib and Moshe left for South America around 1910 hoping for a better future. My mother loved her brothers dearly, especially Moshe. She had a picture of the two of them shortly before he left for South America.

Her brothers settled down in Argentina. They corresponded with their grandparents for several years. Some time later Moshe died of some disease. He was still young when he died. My mother was born in 1893. She finished a Jewish elementary school and began to help her sister Dvoira, who had several children by then, about the house. My mother grew up in a religious family. My aunt told me that their parents celebrated all Jewish holidays, observed Sabbath and followed the kashrut and Jewish traditions. Life took a routinely pace until my mother met my father-to-be, Aron Gehtmann. My father returned to Tomashpol before he turned 18. He met my mother. He had known her since he was a child, but hadn't seen her for a few years. My mother was two years older than my father. She was a beauty and sang wonderfully. My father fell in love. My mother also fell in love with him, although he was just a boy then. According to Jewish custom they couldn't get married. If a girl had the same name as the boy's mother they weren't allowed to be married. [Editor's note: This custom was followed only among certain ultra-Orthodox groups.] Superstition had it that this might lead to the mother's death. My mother's name was Surah and so was the name of my paternal grandmother. My mother was kind of destined to bad luck. Her sister told me that her first fiancé's mother was also called Surah. The boy was madly in love with my mother and thought of ways of making her his wife but had to give up. He left Tomashpol and my mother never saw him again. My father was different. When my grandmother Surah consulted a rabbi and had his support to forbid my father to marry the girl he loved, he took my mother away without telling anyone. Only my mother's sister Dvoira was aware of their plan. They went to a Ukrainian village near Tomashpol and settled down in a Ukrainian house. They had a kitchen garden and kept livestock. This happened in 1914. My mother soon got pregnant. When my father's parents heard about it they asked my father and mother to come home and live with them. When the baby was due my parents went back to Tomashpol.