

Yevgenia Kozak's Grandmother Etl Mitzel, Mother Bluma Shafer, Aunts Golda Breiman, Mania Biller



This photo is taken in Bershad in 1925. In the center is my grandmother Etl Mitzel, on her left is mama's sister Golda Breiman, on the right is my mama Bluma Shafer, standing is mama's older sister Mania Biller. This photo was taken on the occasion of mama's sisters visiting from Odessa. On top there was a picture of her younger sister Riva cut out for a newspaper. There were no other pictures of Riva available and my mama cut this one out. My grandparents died before I was born. All I know is that they were born to big Jewish families in Bershad, traditionally religious and observing all traditions. I believe my both grandfathers were raised Jewish: they studied in the cheder, but this was all education they got. My maternal grandfather Shloime-Yoina Mitzel, born in 1870, was a high-skilled cabinet maker. Mama told me my grandfather made not only solid and usable, but also beautiful furniture. My grandmother Etl Mitzel (I don't know her maiden name), my mama's mother, studied midwife's vocation and became a good midwife. Many babies in Bershad entered this world through her kind hands. She taught young mothers to bathe and swaddle their babies. She handled the navel string and taught mothers to take care of their babies. Granny Etl was always busy with either her midwife's business or having to look after someone's baby - it's amazing how she managed to raise her own eight children: four sons and four daughters. I remember the names of my aunts and uncles, but not the years of their birth. My mother, born in 1895, was the oldest. Then came the sons: Sina, Motl, Abram and Haim, and after them three daughters: Golda, Mania and Riva. The house was very much like other houses in Bershad: three rooms and a kitchen with a big Russian stove. Grandmother Etl baked bread and Saturday challit in this stove, and also kept Saturday dinners in it. My grandparents' family strictly observed traditions, followed kashrut and honored Saturday. Mama's sisters Mania and Golda, born in the early 1900s, had no education. They were raised to be good housewives and raise children. They married Jewish men from Odessa in the 1920s through matchmakers and moved to Odessa. Mania's husband Aron Biller was a tailor. He arranged for his cousin brother Isaac Breiman, also a tailor, to meet Golda, the youngest sister, and they also moved to Odessa. Mania had two children:

son Semyon (the first boys in our family were traditionally named after grandfather Shloime, with the corresponding Russian name Semyon, and daughter Lusia. Golda had two sons: the older one's name was Semyon, but I can't remember the name of her younger son. Riva married Rafail Podolskiy, an engineer at the distillery in Bershad. He was a communist. Riva, the youngest in the family, was the only one to get fond of revolutionary ideas. She was an active Komsomol member. During the Great Patriotic War fascists shot Riva in Bershad for being a messenger of a partisan unit. Her daughter Lusia and son Semyon were raised in our family. Lusia lives in Israel now. The husbands of my aunts perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War. Golda died in 1965, Mania in 1974 in Odessa. All my mother's sisters but Riva, observed Jewish traditions throughout their life. Mama didn't have any education - this was quite customary for Jewish families. She helped grandmother Etl about the house since her early age, as grandmother Etl had to travel even to the neighboring villages: people believed her to be better than any educated assistant doctor. Mama learned to cook traditional food: gefilte fish, thick broth with delicious kneidlakh, sweet and sour stew and chalet for Saturday. She also cooked Saturday dinners and was good at preparing the house for a holiday.