

Israel Schlifer's Grandmother Chaya Polisskaya



My maternal grandmother Chaya Polisskaya. She was photographed for a document in Kiev in late 1930s.

My mother Reizl Polisskaya, Rosa, as she was commonly called, came from Rzhishchev. Her father Benjamin Polisski was a wealthy man. He owned an agricultural equipment plant that he inherited from my great grandfather Gershl Polisski. The plant was on a hill and there was also my grandfather's house where I grew up. My grandfather and his family lived in a big brick house. There were four big rooms and a big storehouse where the family kept food stocks. There was a kitchen garden and an orchard near the house. They also kept chicken and ducks.

My mother's family wasn't much religious. However, they observed all Jewish traditions: they followed kashrut. They also celebrated Sabbath, but it was more like tribute to tradition and an opportunity for the family to get together. Grandmother Chaika was a housewife like all Jewish women. She also managed housemaids and employees in the house. There were seven children in the family.

I was born in Kiev in 1922. It was a hard time shortly after the Civil War: destitution, hunger and destruction. My father worked and studied and came home late at night. My mother and I went to Rzhishchev. I stayed there until the age of 6 and my mother returned to Kiev and I stayed with my grandfather and grandmother. I enjoyed being with my grandparents. I was their favorite. My grandmother and grandfather and numerous relatives were spoiling me. At the age of 6 my parents

took me to.

In early 1930s the state nationalized my grandfather's plant and house. We were happy that they didn't arrest him. My grandfather Benjamin and grandmother moved to Kiev and settled down in their apartment in Nizhni Val. My parents had their own apartment and when they had to travel to another town they left me with my grandparents. During famine in 1932 my uncles, grandmother and grandfather returned to Rzhishchev where they hoped it was easier to survive. They only found ashes of their big house with my mother grand piano's frame. We moved into one of my uncles' house. My mother's brothers and their wives worked hard growing vegetables to feed the family. In winter we found dead people on the porch of our house. They knew how kind our family had always been and hoping to find shelter they fell asleep and died from cold and hunger. My grandmother kept her door open for starving people and shared no matter how little we had. Fortunately, all members of our family survived.

Grandparents returned to Kiev in 1934 after the famine was over. Grandfather sold his apartment in Nizhni Val and bought a smaller one in Spasskaia Street. Grandfather worked in a joiner shop. My grandparents didn't have much to live on. I liked to go to work with him. I liked it more than going to school. In Kiev my grandmother and grandfather celebrated Jewish holidays. One of them was Pesach. However, my grandfather stopped praying. He didn't wear a kippah any longer and my grandmother didn't cover her head. On some big holidays she went to synagogue.

In early 1941 grandmother Chaika died. All relatives, even my father's sisters from Tashkent came to her funeral. They all loved and respected my quiet grandmother that dedicated her life to her husband and children. From hospital the coffin was taken to the synagogue in Podol where a rabbi recited prayers.