

Haya Shulman, Mother Of Mera Shulman And Her Family



This photograph was taken in the apartment of my parents in Riga in 1952. At that time my mother was only 50 years old, but she always looked older. I do not remember who took the photograph, but taking into consideration the informal domestic atmosphere, it was probably one of the family members.

My Mum Shulman, nee Kravets Haya Hirsh-Leybovna was born on March 24th, 1902 in a small settlement Glazmanka in Latvia. I remember her always bustling about the house. She both cooked, and washed, and did the rooms. Only Mum helped us in our studies, we had neither nurses, nor governesses. When my brother was a little boy (do not forget that he was already the third child in our family!), we hired a parlourmaid for a short period of time to help Mum about the house.

My parents differed greatly in their educational level. Mother was much better educated than father. She finished a high school, therefore she knew Russian well. She brought me up in Russian language. I really imbibed it with my mother milk. Mum made an agreement with my father that he would not spoil me with his Yiddish. That was why while I was a little girl, my Daddy was almost silent. Father's relatives told him 'Oh, why did you marry an educated girl - will she count grains before putting them into the copper?' And Daddy answered 'No, she will not count grains, she will train the child and help him to do lessons.'

My parents' attitude to books and reading was very different. Daddy never read anything. Mum liked to read very much and Daddy always became angry with her. When he came home, he wanted my Mum to meet him on tiptoe. And Mum liked to read a book lying in bed. And there it began! 'Books again!' He understood and encouraged Mum, if she read books to children, but reading for her own pleasure was naughtiness!

My father was very clever and purposeful man. He always looked only forward and was very enterprising. But he was hard to get on with. Being offended by his relatives, he could have kept silence for half a year.

My mother was much easier to get on with. She suffered much, because her husband was a difficult man, but he gave her his full support.

Our parents rarely punished children. I mean corporal punishments. I already told you that Daddy stopped talking with us, when he was angry. But there were some exceptions, and one case I remember very well. I was 7 years old, and my sister was 2 years old. We lived on a high first floor. Below our window there was an abat-jour above the entrance door to the semi-basement. Together with my sister we climbed out to that abat-jour and were sitting there, kicking legs up and down. Our neighbors saw us, got very frightened and told everything to Mum. She complained to Daddy about us. He whipped me strongly, but I consider it to be fair.

My brother Elya Alterovich Shulman was born on January 9th, 1936. He died on October 10th, 1982. My brother was circumcised (parents arranged bar mitzvah for him).

I was not so close with my brother in compare with my sister, possibly we were affected by a great difference in age: 11 long years. I remember myself doing my lessons, and my little brother lying in my lap. At that time there were no pampers, therefore my relatives used to say 'Mera, come to dry your knees!'

My brother was sent to school in Riga after our return from evacuation. He finished that school and later a Technical School. Later, when I already lived with my husband in Leningrad he was in the army in Pushkin (a neighboring suburb of Leningrad). Actually speaking, only at that time we really got acquainted with him. After the army he studied at the Northwest Correspondence Polytechnical College and graduated from it. He married a good Jewish girl from Minsk. They made their home in Minsk and gave birth to two daughters Olga and Anna. It was in Minsk where he died from cancer. He was only 46 years old.