

Rebecca Levina's Family



This is a photo of the Alpert family: my father Isaak, mother Esther, my brother Eizer and me. It was taken in one of the Bologoye photo studios in the 1920s.

In 1921 my parents got married. I don't know exactly, but I think they had some kind of a Jewish wedding. Certainly not the big traditional event, but, probably, something like a chuppah.

At home they called Mom Esphir, sometimes Phira. Father was Isaak at home. They spoke Yiddish in our family. Apparently, Father didn't know Russian very well. Mother knew Russian, but not too well either. How come I spoke good Russian, I don't know. I understood Yiddish, but I never spoke it. My mother tongue is Russian, and their mother tongue was Yiddish. It seems to me that my father even knew some ancient Hebrew. We said 'Shabes,' and he said 'Shabbat.' I mean that we used the more usual and everyday words, and he spoke real Hebrew. When he prayed, he wore his tallit and kippah.

My father didn't join the artel; he was an independent dressmaker all his life. He worked very much: from early morning till night, it was necessary to feed the family. He worked at home and listened to the radio all day long: both music and literature programs. My mother never worked, she was a housewife. She didn't work because she didn't have any education. They wanted her to become a milliner, but she refused, saying that crafts and such professions weren't interesting for her. Mother was so mal-adapted, all the time behind Father's back!

Father had a patent [permission to have private labor activities] and a signboard. Bologoye was a small town, and everybody knew about his business, he worked very well, and people came to him, there was no lack of orders. He had to pay high taxes, but we lived not very bad.

As a young man, Father liked to play cards, but then Mother took him in hand. He was a very nice guy, and she always thought that she wasn't beautiful, and she was always very jealous. So he went to play cards, she got jealous, she didn't like it all, and, finally, she got what she wanted and he didn't go to play cards any more.

Mother read a lot: both newspapers and fiction. And Father read only the Talmud. Father never made us do the same, or explained why he did so. He just stayed alone and read the book and prayed. Mother probably didn't go to the library, but we had books at home. She read very much, and even just before she died, when she had both glaucoma and cataract, she was blind on one eye, she had very strong glasses, but she always sat in the evening, lit the lamp and read a little. We had some books at home, when I was a child. I think we had mainly Russian classics. And when I became an adult and independent, I bought all kinds of books: manuals, Russian classics, historical books. All those books were in Russian, I never read in Yiddish or Hebrew. And I remember very well that, being old and sick, my mother read newspapers and contemporary Soviet books.