

Sheindlia Krishtal's Parents: Liya Gontar And Gersh Krishtal



My parents: Liya Gontar and Gersh Krishtal. Photo taken shortly after their wedding. Zaslavl, 1907.

I don't know how my father met my mother, but they got married in 1906. My mother told me that they had a Jewish wedding: there was a huppah in the yard of my mother parents' home and there were klezmers playing. There were many guests.

My father Gersh Kryshtal was born in 1878, he went to cheder when he was three. He enjoyed studying, but he didn't continue his studies and after finishing cheder he began to assist his father with his trading business. After my grandfather died my father moved to Zaslavl, near Ostrog in Volyn. [in 1910 the town was renamed to Iztaslav]. I don't know for what reason they moved. In few years he opened a store there. In 1905 my father bought a two-storied house in the central square.

My father and mother lived in the center of the town where they had a haberdashery store that occupied a part of their two-storied house. In 1908 their older daughter Fira was born. Before her there were stillborn twins. In 1911 my brother Samuel was born, in 1914 Faina, in 1916 Riva and I was born in 1922. The revolution of 1917 didn't bring any changes into my parents' life. Our family continued to live in a big house with a front and a backyard entrance. There was a big and fancy front door that led into a corridor, then to the kitchen with a big stove and to the backyard. There were li-lac bushes (white, lilac and purple) in the yard and a nice orchard. We were a wealthy family. We had a housewife - Marta, a German woman. I remember her singing me German songs. I could understand German. My mother tongue is Yiddish, but we also spoke Russian and Ukrainian at home.

Our parents were religious: on Friday my mother lit a candle pa pronounced prayer, and the family sat down to a festive dinner. My mother made delicious kigeleh - "dumplings" in Yiddish - from potatoes, flour or matsah. We also had chicken broth.

In 1928 our well being broke to pieces. We were ordered to move out of our house. I was only 7 years old and have only dim memories of the event. It happened in 1929 and now I understand that NKVD confiscated our house and store. We had never seen our father nervous before, but when it happened he became rather irritable. Martha disappeared all of a sudden. I couldn't understand what was happening. We moved to the outskirts of the town. My father rented a small apartment of one room and kitchen. Our life changed dramatically since we moved. My mother baked bread by herself and we rode a horse-driven cart to buy food products in a village. My father didn't have a job and we were constantly hungry. We dropped observing Jewish traditions or celebrating holidays. Authorities struggled against religion, and we were scared of these authorities - we didn't quite know what to expect from them.