

Tania Benderskaya



This is a picture of my mother, Tania Benderskaya [nee Tomashyna]. The photo was taken for the family album in 1930 in Kishinev. Our family was very religious. The kashrut was strictly followed in our house. We only ate kosher food. We had special utensils for meat and dairy products. There were kosher food stores at the market, and there was a shochet, who slaughtered all chicken and geese. On Friday mornings my mother began her preparations for Sabbath. She baked challah and cookies, cooked stuffed fish and boiled chicken. In the evening my mother lit two candles and prayed over them. On Saturday my parents went to the synagogue. We joined them when we grew older. After dinner we sang religious songs in Hebrew glorifying Queen Saturday. Before Pesach my mother did a general clean-up of the house. She had a woman coming in to help her. They bought a lot of matzah at the synagogue to last during Pesach. We didn't have any bread in the house on these days. My mother also made beetroot kvass [beetroot broth] for borscht [vegetable soup].

She cooked stuffed fish and stuffed chicken neck. The chicken neck stuffing consisted of fried flour, onions and giblets. My mother made clear chicken soup with matzah dumplings and borsch. She made lots of pastries: sponge cakes, strudels with jam and nuts and cookies; all from matzah flour. When my brother and I grew older my mother made it our responsibility to crush matzah in the mortar. She also made latkes, small pancakes from potatoes, matzah and eggs. My father bought special red wine for Pesach. Even children were given some wine on this holiday. We went to the synagogue and later had seder at home. Father read the Haggadah. The entrance door was kept open on the first night of Pesach. My mother explained to me that it was kept open for the prophet Elijah to come into every house. Everybody fasted on Yom Kippur, even children over 5 years of age. On the eve of the holiday my mother brought white hens and roosters from the market for the kapores ritual. It went like this: my mother took a hen and gave another one to Frima, my sister. My father and all sons took the roosters. We had to turn these chickens quietly above our heads after the prayer saying, 'May this be my atonement'. Later my mother took these chickens to the synagogue for the poor. We weren't supposed to eat them. We went to the synagogue in the morning, then we came back home, read the Torah and had a nap. Then we went to the synagogue again. The services end at nightfall, with the blowing of the tekiach gedolah, a long blast on the shofar. It was required to wear white clothes on this day. The family strictly followed all rules. My mother made sure that everything went smoothly, and my father observed it all because he loved and respected her very much and wanted to please her. My brothers and I always looked forward to Chanukkah. This was a very merry holiday. There were lots of delicious things on the table, we had guests and received Chanukkah gelt. At Sukkot my father made a sukkah in the yard, and we had lunch and dinner there. We celebrated all holidays.