

## Polia Gersh And Her Daughter Alexandra Kravchenko



My mother Polia Gersh with my sister Sarah (Russian name: Alexandra). This photo was taken in the orphanage in Kishinev in the late 1930s. After my father died in 1930 my mother didn't recover for a long time. However, she had three kids and she had to provide for us. My grandmother worked hard selling buns and rolls, and doing her daily work, but she couldn't provide for all of us. My father's relatives incited my aunt, Sima, to tell us that it was my mother's fault that my father had died because she hadn't taken good care of him. She said that they weren't going to support us and that their kin ended with my father's death. Only rarely did they allow my mother and us to

go visit them. We were starving and my mother had to send all three of us to an orphanage. My brother Grigoriy was sent to an orphanage for boys and my sister and I went to an orphanage for girls in Kishinev. Girls had the bat mitzvah ritual when they turned 13. They also fasted on Yom Kippur walking pale and swaying a bit as if they hadn't eaten for a month. My sister was with the older girls. She felt jealous about me since when my mother visited us at the orphanage I climbed onto her lap begging her to take me home. My mother got angry and hushed me, and my older sister pinched me pulling me down. I didn't understand how hard it was for my mother to know that I was so unhappy in the orphanage. At the age of seven I went to the Jewish vocational school. We studied in Yiddish, but we also knew Romanian. We studied general subjects for four years and did a vocational course during our fifth year at school. My sister studied dressmaking. I was to become a carton folder, but I never went to study this course - the Soviet regime was established. Our dear patroness, kind and fair Helena died in 1936, but her husband continued her charity initiative.