

Lazar Gurfinkel's Mother Sarah Gurfinkel



My mother, Sarah Gurfinkel [nee Akkerman], was photographed on my father's request in Khotin in 1925. He kept this photo on his desk. My father and mother got married in 1912. My mother didn't work - she had housekeeping responsibilities. We had a housemaid and a cook. They were Ukrainian. The housemaid was responsible for cleaning the rooms. She had to clean seven rooms every day. In winter she had to stoke the stove and clean it. The cook did the shopping and cooking every day because there were no fridges to store food. There was a built-in boiler in the stove for heating water. My parents didn't follow the kashrut. We ate all kinds of products, including traditional Jewish food. We didn't observe Sabbath, but we celebrated the major Jewish holidays: Pesach, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, Chanukkah, Purim and Sukkot. My parents weren't deeply religious people, but they paid a tribute to religion. My mother knew all the traditions. She kept fancy dishes and utensils for Pesach in a special box. She made traditional food on Pesach. Our cook helped her with the cooking. We didn't have any bread in the house during Pesach but ate matzah instead. All Jewish bakeries in Khotin sold matzah. Before Pesach the rabbi went to all the

Jewish bakeries to issue a certificate confirming that they had cleaned the bakery of all the bread and bread crumbs. They made matzah flour for sale, too. We had gefilte fish, chicken broth and boiled chicken on Pesach. My mother also made chicken cutlets, stuffed chicken neck and pudding of matzah and eggs. There were also delicious pancakes from matzah meal that we ate with jam or honey. My father conducted the seder very ceremoniously. He had several prayer books. I also had a few of those books. I still have one that my parents gave me before the war. During seder I asked my father the traditional 'four questions' [the mah nishtanah]. Each member of the family drank a glass of wine. We opened the front door. It was a tradition that any traveler that didn't get home could enter the house and join the family for seder. There was also an extra glass of wine for Elijah the Prophet. It was believed that he visited every family at seder. On Chanukkah our father gave us some change and a spinning top [dreidel]. I also remember Tu bi-Shevat. We had various fruit growing in Israel: dates, figs and raisins. We could buy them in stores and had them on the table. We had guests for Purim. Poorer Jews, adults and children, gave performances in the houses of wealthier people and received money for them. These performances were short, because Purimshpilers had to make the rounds of as many families as possible to earn more money. It's obligatory to partake a festive meal on the day of Purim. It is customary to eat food with seeds, for example, hamantashen with poppy seed filling. One should drink more wine than one is accustomed to. It's correct to invite guests, especially the needy. The conversation should be focused on words from the Torah. On Yom Kippur and before Rosh Hashanah we fasted for 24 hours including children over 5 years of age. After going to the synagogue [on the day of Yom Kippur], when the first evening star appeared in the sky, the family sat down for a festive dinner.