

## Makhlia Khalzova



This is me photographed in Lvov in 1946 after Vassiliy Khalzov and I got married at the registry office. During the war I worked in a hospital in Kharkov. The front was getting closer and the hospital moved to a settlement in Krasnodar region [150 kilometers from Kharkov]. I worked day and night in this hospital. The doctors, nurses and patients treated me well. Vassiliy Khalzov was an attendant and then a medical nurse in this same hospital. He was a Tatar man who came from the Volga area in Russia. He was born in 1919. He was very handy, and he was a great storyteller. We were friends and he proposed to me several times. I couldn't understand whether it was a joke or he was serious and replied that I wished to be a spinster. I hoped to meet a Jewish man, but where was I to find one? So many Jews perished either during the occupation or at the front. Vassiliy often went on trips to the frontline or to escort a patient home. When he came back he used to say, 'Don't be afraid of me, I'm a Jew, too', meaning that the two of us had to stick together and that we were alike in some respect. I was raised in such manner that developed a conviction in me that Jews had to marry their own kind and I wasn't used to thinking about a man of a different

nationality. The war was coming to an end. We worked 15 hours per day in the hospital, had meals and slept there. Ukraine was liberated in the winter of 1944. Our hospital moved to Lvov in the spring of 1945. Vassiliy kept proposing to me, but I just cracked jokes in return. When my brother returned and met Vassiliy they became friends. My brother said to me, 'Makhlia, he is not a Jew, but he is a good man. He won't let you down'. Vassiliy told me that he was also circumcised. [Circumcision is also customary with Tatar people.] Vassiliy always made a good impression on people. I don't know where he studied, but he seemed to know everything. He could discuss any subject and was great company. My brother and Vassiliy convinced me to marry Vassiliy. Actually, we didn't have a ceremony - we just began to live together in a room in the hospital. I got pregnant. In 1946 I gave birth to three girls. Vassiliy was away taking some patients home. The doctors gave me only one girl: she was the tiniest of the three and weighed only 900 grams. I didn't even see the two other girls and have no idea what happened there, the doctors probably gave them away for adoption for money. What could I do being a weak, hungry and helpless woman with no education? I didn't even know where to get help. There were many childless families after the war. Women wanted children, but couldn't bear them due to the hardships that they went through during the war.