

Rachel Rivkina And Her Family



This photograph was taken in 1933 in Gomel in a photo studio. It shows all the members of our family. Standing from left to right: my brother Samuil, brother Mendel, my mother's sister Mussya Slutsker, my brother Isaac, brother Haim. Sitting from left to right: brother Semen, my mother Mira Slutsker, me (Rachel Rivkina), my father Boruch-Afroim Rivkin, my brother Zussya. I was born in 1925 in Khotimsk shtetl of Mogilev district. My paternal grandfather's name was Nachman-Ishe Rivkin. He earned his living by repairing ironware in the shtetl. My father was born in 1887 in Khotimsk, his name was Boruch-Afroim Rivkin, and Russians called him Borukh Nakhmanovich. He studied in a cheder. In 1910, my father married my mother, Mira Yakovlevna Slutsker. She was born in 1888. She also lived in Khotimsk. My parents had six sons and one daughter, and I was the youngest. Aunt Mussya, my mother's only sister, lived with us. My mother was always busy because of the large family. For the most part, Aunt Mussya took care of me. I remember her singing Jewish lullabies to me. She gave me a pet name, Chillinkess, an affectionate version of Rachel. I keep in memory the following lullaby in Yiddish: 'Unter Chillinkess's vigele, shteyt a klor-vays tsigele, dos tsigele iz geforn handlen, dos vet zayn dayn baruf, rozhinkes mit mandlen, slof-zhe, Chillinkess, shlof.' It means: 'Under Chillinkess's cradle stands a small white goat. The goat travelled to sell his wares, this will be your job, too. Trading in raisins and almonds. Sleep, Chillinkess, sleep.' After Aunt Mussya graduated from a chemical technical school, she started working as a foreman in a chemical co-operative in Gomel; they produced violet ink. She didn't get married. When my mother got married, Aunt Mussya had a fiancé, Meir, who was my father's younger brother. But according to Jewish laws, blood sisters can't marry blood brothers of another family. Therefore, she parted from him. My elder brothers weren't admitted to the eighth grade at their school because they were the children of a private craftsman. They finished seven classes and left school for a technical school. Later they got jobs in order to gain seniority, and only after that they finished an evening school.