

Gisya Rubinchik's Mother Maria Lapis



This is my mother, Maria Gersheva Lapis. The picture was taken before the war in 1938 in Shklov for some documents. I don't know too much about my mother Maria Gersheva Lapis' family. Here's how I learnt about her difficult childhood. I remember that once I was very offended with my mother for something. I was sulky and angry, and suddenly my grandmother, Genya Orman, the wife of my grandfather Gersh Orman, came to me. My mother was crying in the bedroom: I hadn't been eating or talking for three days in a row. She said to me, 'Okay, let's go over to our place, since you don't listen to your mother and upset her so much!' Without thinking twice I put on my coat and went with her. This all happened in winter. We walked slowly, and she told me that when my mother was only 12 years old, her mother died. My mother was very gifted and wanted to study. She had an inclination to literature and even wrote compositions for her cousin, who was a student in grammar school. But she couldn't continue her education because from the age of 12 she had to do all the work around the house. She even had to step on a bench to light the oven. It was then that grandfather Gersh married the younger sister of his deceased wife: grandmother Genya, who was actually my mother's aunt. And I had thought to that very day that grandmother Genya was my real grandmother. Her story shocked me so much, that I rushed home to apologize

to mother. I stood on my knees, promised never to misbehave, and she, certainly, forgave me. I cried all night long, and my parents couldn't understand why. I was very upset. My father got married soon after he returned from the front. So my mother married an invalid. She was only one year younger than my father. Mother and him loved each other very much and had known each other from childhood, because they were cousins. That means that my grandmothers were sisters. All the housekeeping was done by my mother. She was skilful in everything she did, and besides, she was very quick. The family had a small kitchen garden. At one stage there was even a cow, but later all dairy products had to be purchased at the market. My mother carried heavy buckets and iron pots, and she brought water from three blocks away! She worked day and night. I don't know how she could handle it all. While we lived in the family, my brother and me helped her as much as we could. My mother was buried alive by the fascists in Shklov in 1941. I still have my mother's last letter from 27th June 1941. She wrote, 'Maybe we can survive this thunder-storm, as we did in 1918?'. She couldn't imagine what would happen to them, what vile atrocities the Germans would commit. They were all buried alive in Shklov, in the mound between the lake and the Dnieper River, in the very same place, where the mill once stood, where my father and grandfather worked. For three days the ground was stirring on that spot, and groans of people were heard from under the ground. All my relatives were murdered there: my mother, father, both grandfathers, both grandmothers, my sister Sonya, Aunt Haya and her son Misha; and, thousands of other Jews. I didn't know about it back then. After the war I wrote many letters to official bodies in Minsk and many other places. I was searching for exact information, but it was in vain. I got no answer whatsoever. Later I learned everything about this tragedy from eyewitnesses.