

Yankel And Molka Barenboim



This is a picture of my parents, Yankel and Molka Barenboim. The photo was taken in Kishinev in 1910. My father was born in a Moldovan village in the 1880s. He had one brother and seven sisters. Five sisters lived in Kishinev, and I knew them and their families. The family was very poor. He used to say that the children often went to bed hungry. Their mother was always concerned with feeding such a large family, she worked around the house unstintingly. Clothes were passed from the older kids to the younger ones. The biggest problem were shoes: in the summer everyone walked barefoot, and in the winter children often stayed in because they all had to share one pair of boots. My father and his brother attended cheder. In the winter they had to take turns, again, due to the shortage of footwear. The children learned how to make an imitation of a bast-shoe from the stem of a corn plant. Needless to say that these shoes didn't keep them warm, but it was possible to wrap ones feet in some rags first and then put on these pseudo-shoes. Neither my father nor his sisters wanted to spend their entire lives in poverty in a small Moldovan village. The children grew up and, one by one, they left for the capital of Moldova, Kishinev, in search of a better life. My father left, too. He had no education. He found a job as a construction worker and rented a small place to live. My mother was born in 1889 in a small village in Podolskaya Province. That part of Ukraine borders with Moldova. Her Romanian was poor, and she preferred to speak Russian. I don't know how my parents met because they never talked about it. They got married in Kishinev in 1909. They had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah. My parents were religious, just as their parents were. My parents rented their first apartment. I remember that apartment. Our family lived there until 1932. There was a large courtyard with a flowerbed in the middle. There were a few separate small houses in the courtyard. They all belonged to a single owner, a middle-aged Jew, who rented them out. Each house had two rooms, a kitchen and a vestibule. There was no bathtub and no toilet. We had no running water. Water was brought in from a well and stored in a large barrel, which stood in the kitchen. We bathed in the kitchen, in a large galvanized trough. The water was heated in a samovar and poured into the trough. The toilet was in the yard.