

Sima Shvarts With Her Mother Risya Shvarts



My mother Risya Shvarts and me. I am two years old here. The photo was taken in 1916 in Rzhishev. My mother was born in Rzhishev in 1885. She only completed a Jewish junior school. Her family was very poor and didn't have the money to pay for the education of their children. Besides, my mother had to help grandmother with the housework and take care of her younger sisters. Later, when she got married, she couldn't study because she was busy. My parents got married in 1913. They lived together for only one year. When the war broke out, my father was called up to the army. He was sent to the front, he wrote to my mother, but then his letters

stopped coming and he didn't return from the war. In Rzhischev we lived in my mother's parents' house. I can vaguely remember that house because I was only four years old in 1918, when we moved to Kiev. I remember almost nothing of our life in Rzhischev before we moved to Kiev, but I can vividly remember the Jewish pogrom. Maybe I remember it so well because I was in stress because of the fear. One night, when the light was put out (there was no electricity then) and we went to bed, suddenly we heard whistles, noise, and clatter. Bandits came to the town on horses. I don't know if they went to every house, but they knocked at our door. When nobody answered, they broke the window, opened the door, entered and asked, 'Who lives here?' When nobody answered them again, they set fire to somebody's blanket on the bed and it began to burn. I remember my mother was terribly scared. She asked them, 'What do you think you're doing? Can't you see that a child is sleeping here?' I don't remember what happened next because I was very scared. Mother took me to another room. I think the adults gave the bandits some money, and they left and went to another house. This was one story. Another one of this sort took place during the day. I mean, nobody gets really scared during the day. People go outside if they need to. And the streets were very narrow then, so that people could come to one another's house easily. So, one Jew was walking down this street. A bandit caught up with him from behind on a horse, took out his sable and hit the Jew on the head with his sable. The man's head flew away, while his body made two more steps forward and only then fell down. It was a terrible picture that is still before my eyes. I was 3 or 4 years old, but I can still remember it vividly. Fortunately, none of our family suffered during the pogroms or the Civil War.