

Vera Pasternak



This is my maternal grandmother Vera Pasternak. The photograph was taken in Tartu in the 1920s.

My maternal grandfather, Abram Pasternak, was from Latvia. Apparently, his wife, my grandmother Vera, was also born there. I do not know anything about my grandparents' life before their arrival in Estonia. I think my grandmother came from a very poor family. Even back in that time, the girls

from well-off families were given some education, but Grandmother Vera was totally illiterate, she even could not sign for herself. The only relative from grandmother's side I knew was her brother, who lived in Riga. I cannot recall his name. I remember that Grandmother told me about him. He was a very wealthy man, the owner of a company. I do not think it was inherited from his parents.

Grandfather was a very religious man. Jewish traditions were kept. We lived together and had meals together not only on holidays, but on other days as well. We marked Jewish holidays. On Purim my grandmother always baked tasty triangular pies with poppy seeds, called hamantashen. On Yom Kippur adults always fasted for 24 hours according to the tradition. Small children were released from fasting. When I started going to lyceum, I was also supposed to fast. I was very active and agile, feeling hungry all the time. I managed to snatch some food in the kitchen, without anyone seeing it. Adults spent the whole day in the synagogue on Yom Kippur praying, until the first evening star appeared in the sky. My cousin Alexander and I went to the synagogue with the adults, but we could not stay there all day long, so we played football with other Jewish guys in the yard of the synagogue.

There was only kosher food at home. Grandmother had a Jewish cook, who fixed scrumptious Jewish dishes. There was a shochet not far from our house. We bought kosher meat from him and took living chickens to him that were to be cut in accordance with the kashrut rules.