

Shifra Shamesh



This is my great-grandmother Shifra Shamesh. The photo was taken in the 1910s in Kharkov.

Shifra Shamesh – unfortunately I don’t know her patronymic – was a native of Lithuania, she came from Vilno. She lived in Kharkov and was married twice. She had children both from her first and from her second marriages. In the second marriage she had two daughters, my grandmother Sara Yankelevna and her sister Reizl Yankelevna. Shifra was an extremely religious woman and observed all Jewish customs. For example, as soon as she got married, her own hair was shaved off and she wore a wig ever after.

Shifra was going to marry a man named Yankel, but he was taken away as a soldier for as long as 25 years, and so she married another man. Yankel, having returned from his service earlier – for what reason I don't know – also got married. But soon Shifra's husband died, and at the same time Yankel's wife died, and they got together again. A boy was born to them. And Grandfather was a tough man, and he declared, that if she didn't bear him any girls, he would divorce her. And then she prayed zealously, and God sent her a girl, and later another one. One of their daughters was my grandmother, Sara Yankelevna Shamesh.

Shifra wasn't a housewife, because she had to care about our daily bread. Her husband Yankel was a man of a very difficult nature, and besides, that service in the army made him into a lover of drink, he played at weddings, and probably earned some money this way, but he would immediately drink off everything he earned. Therefore Shifra had to arrange a pawn shop right in her house and in this way she managed to feed their children. It was a very difficult situation. Shifra knitted herself, and I think we even have the leftovers of that lace somewhere.