

Rive-Malka Karpas, Efim Karpis And Mother Sofia Karpis



From left to right: my paternal grandmother Rive-Malka Karpas, my father Efim Karpis and mother Sofia Karpis. The picture was made in 1917 in Ekaterinoslav, the place where my family lived at that time. Grandmother came to see her son and his family.

My father's family lived in Lithuania in the village of Olkeniki. My parental grandfather Gesel-Tsodik Karpas was a forester. My grandmother Rive-Malke was a tall slender brunette with a beautiful face. They say my face looks like hers. Grandfather worked, and grandmother was a housewife, which was customary for those times. There were five children in the family. My father Haim-Dovid (Efim), the youngest, was born on the 20th of April 1893.

Grandfather died in 1895, when father was 2. Grandmother remained a widow with 5 children. I have no idea how could they have survived without a bread-winner. Father told us that the family was getting assistance from some relatives, but still it was not enough to get by. Grandmother Rive-Malke never got married again. The living was hard and my father's childhood was over very early. He had to help the family. Grandmother apprenticed my father to the wood-carver since early teens. Father had been an apprentice for 4 years, which was a hard and painstaking. It caused the myopia because eyes were strained. When father understood that he would not be able to use his potential, he went to the Russian town Valuiki and found a job as a construction/technician. Both the workers and the management treated him very well and appreciated as a good specialist. Father learnt a lot in construction. He was supposed to tackle technical tasks independently and it was very useful for him.

I do not know how my parents met. All I know is that it happened in 1910. They got married on the 8th of February of 1912. My maternal grandfather made a traditional Jewish wedding in Kraziai. First they lived in grandfather's house and shortly after the wedding father was offered a job at the pipe mill in Poltava to work as a technician/builder. Parents moved to Poltava and in half year they moved to Ekaterinoslav, where father also worked in construction. There in 1913 the first child was born, Evsey. Daughter Esfir, named after early deceased sister of my mother, was born in 1915. My parents were rather well-heeled. Before revolution father got 110 golden rubles per month. It was a lot of money. According to my parents' tales the life before the Revolution was not that bad, if not by a coming change - the Revolution as of 1917.

In 1917 my father lost his job. It was the period of unrest, when construction workers were not needed. There was a total devastation. Then Civil War was unleashed. Father ought to earn money for the family so he decided to make soap. He boiled soap and cast them in bars. Mother and father sold the bars of soap on the market. Of course they did not yield that much profit, but it was enough to get by.

I was born in 1918. I was named Rahil. In late 1917, before I was born, grandmother Rive-Malke came for a visit. I do not remember her, but my brother remembered that kind and beautiful woman. He always remembered her affectionately. Father worshiped her and siblings loved her very much. Grandmother was going to help my mother after I was born and then she planned to return to Olkeniki. Grandmother tended me, cooked food and watched elder children. Parents sold soap on the market and grandmother sent the elder brother to bring them food in the pots covered with towels. Then in 1918 Lithuania was severed from Russia, and grandmother turned out to be abroad. She was supposed to get the permit from the Soviet regime to come back home. She did not live to get it. She died in 1918 in Ekaterinoslav. She was buried in the local Jewish cemetery. She got the permit posthumously.