

## Dobrina Rivkind's Mother Pesya Khodek With Her Family



This is my mother's family, the Khodeks. From left to right are: mother's grandfather (name unknown); the small girl sitting next is Khana, mother's younger sister; man and woman in the center are Vulf Meyerovich and Tsylya Samuilovna, my maternal grandparents; Tsylya holds Liya, mother's younger sister, she is about 1 year old here; standing next is my mother, Pesya Khodek. The boy with a hoop is Lev, mother's younger brother, he perished at a young age at the beginning of the war. The photo was taken in Vitebsk in 1909.

All of my mother's relatives come from shtetles not far from the town of Vitebsk - a rather large city in Belarus. My mother's family was very poor. Grandfather Vulf Khodek worked for a container seller. His obligation was to mend the sacks and fix other containers. He earned about three rubles per month, which was very little. I do not remember my maternal grandfather well, he died in 1939, when I was six. He was a very kind man and loved me and my sister, his granddaughters, very much. I remember him and grandmother together: she was short and he was tall and bald. Grandmother's name was Tsylya Khodek, nee Rukhman. She was not tall, with gray, beautifully set hair. She did not work as many women did in those days, and took care of the family. Tsylya had a small store downstairs in the same house where they lived, which worked around the clock. It was not a store in today's meaning; it was really a very small shop. It was possible to buy bagels and cakes there and various other small things. People could knock on the door at any time and ask for her. She would open up and give them what they asked for. However, the profit was small. Grandmother devoted the largest part of her life to the family, children and household, and the shop was simply an extra earning. There were four children in the family: three girls and one boy. All four were born in Vitebsk. Mother was the eldest, her name was Pesya, she was born in 1899 and died at the age of 95 in 1994. Her sisters' names were Khana (1907 - 1993), Lilya (Liya) (1908 - 1954), and brother's name was Lev (1904 - 1942). There were also other children in the family but they died at a very young age.

Grandparents spoke only Yiddish. They were very religious people. I remember very well grandfather's praying clothes. Grandfather put something like a white towel or sheet onto his

shoulders. On his head he had a leather strap, a band, in the middle of which there was a leather box. When he prayed, the small box rocked and, I suppose, must have had to hit the floor. I remember how he put it on and prayed in it. I saw him praying at home, but he also attended the synagogue. They celebrated all holidays and attended the synagogue. I also remember that they lit the candles for Hanukah. All common dishes were put away on Pesach and the house was very thoroughly cleaned and washed: there should not have remained even the spirit of bread. Various delicious food was cooked, matzah, for example, which we ate instead of bread. After the meal we had fun and danced. Besides, we celebrated very merry holidays like Rosh Hashanah and the Torah Day [Simchat Torah], when we simply went to the synagogue and danced and had fun there. Grandmother cooked very well, she knew all Jewish cooking traditions. For example, she cooked very delicious stuffed fish. I remember grandmother to be very tidy, and a very good housewife.