

Maria Rolnikaite's Mother



This photograph shows my mother. Here I'll tell you about her, about the years of quiet before the war.

Mom was a housewife. She had four children and trembled over us like every Jewish mother. Her name was Tayber Koganayte.

I can't recall my Mom's father, but I remember her mother. Unfortunately I can't recollect her name. She was very religious. She lived in Telshe, but when she visited us, she used to be sitting and praying all the time. She also was very displeased if we broke rules during Shabbath. My mother's father died before I was born, his surname was Kogan.

We had a housemaid, though Mom did not work. Sunday was the housemaid's day off; therefore we (together with my elder sister Miriam, who was 3 years older than me) had to clean our rooms ourselves. Being rather little, we had to wash, iron and sew white collars and cuffs to our school uniform. We also were obliged to clean our footwear. If we got up late, our housemaid helped us, but later she terrorized us 'I'll give a report to your Daddy!'

Daddy kept an order everywhere. Mom's chief concern was to feed us. And Daddy used to say 'We have got bread, butter, tomatoes, and salt.' He also told us that we (girls) had to get prepared for future life, to learn to cook from Mom. Daddy worked alone, therefore his financial situation was not very good: he had got 4 children, his family also had a housemaid. I had a younger brother Ruvel (he was born in 1934) and a younger sister Raya (she was born in 1936). When somebody asked Daddy why he had so many children, he always answered he was waiting for a son.

Regarding Jewish traditions, it was my grandfather who observed them especially strictly. Therefore we celebrated Pesach and I always asked those 4 questions. After that I used to get 1 kg of nuts. Together with my grandmother we lighted Sabbath candles. And though Mom was not very religious (as well as Daddy), she observed kashrut: separated meat and dairy food.

Germans came to Vilnius when I reached the age of 14. Beginning of the war was the end of my childhood. Only my diary connected me with my previous life. I kept my diary being a schoolgirl (it was in fashion!) and I went on doing it during the war. Mom often said 'Learn it by heart! Your notes will repeat your fate.'

In Vilnius Germans arranged ghetto for Jews.

My brother Ruvel learned to read in the ghetto. He was very proud of it, and used to say that Daddy would be pleased. Ruvel was afflicted that we were going to take only clothes (no books). 'What shall I read there?' he asked. Mom answered 'You will read when we get our liberty.'

One day hitlerites decided to liquidate ghetto and ordered people to get out. They let people out through the gate one by one, and Mom ordered me to go first. A soldier seized me and pushed aside. Mom and two children remained behind the gate. I tried to get back to my family and suddenly I heard that Mom begged the soldier not to let me back in. She said that I was young and could work well. Then she shouted to me 'Live, my child! At least you alone!' And she lifted children a little so that I could see them. And I saw them. For the last time in my life!