

Bella Chanina With Her Mother Sarah Fichgendler



This is me, Bella Chanina, with my mother Sarah Fichgendler, nee Rosenthal. This photo was taken in Kishinev in 1927.

I was born in the Jewish hospital in Kishinev in 1923, and was registered in the rabbinate book. When after the war I needed to obtain a birth certificate since the original was lost, they found the roster of 1923 at the synagogue and found an entry about my birth there. Following the family tradition, my mother wanted to name me Yulia after her father, but the others talked her out of it: 'What if you have a boy one day?' We lived in a two-bedroom apartment on the second floor: one bigger room - a dining room and a smaller room - my parents' bedroom. I slept on a couch in the dining room behind a screen.

Our family was rather poor. I remember that my mother had one fancy dress of black silk, very plainly cut. I don't remember my parents going to the theater, but they were often invited to charity parties arranged by the Jewish community. My mother wore her only fancy dress and pinned her brooch on it. If she lost weight she draped the dress on her side and pinned it with this same brooch. My mother was beautiful, had expressive black eyes and always looked nice in her outfit. Men couldn't help liking my mother, but my mother was not soft. She was strict and imperious. My mother knew Russian literature well and read a lot in Russian. When guests came she liked to recite poems by Lermontov: 'Tell me, the branch of Palestine, where you have grown. Where have you bloomed? What hills, what valley have you adorned?'

My parents always celebrated Jewish holidays and went to the Choral synagogue, the biggest synagogue in Kishinev. Sometimes they took me with them. I sat on the balcony with my mother.