

Hava Goldshtein's Mother Sonia Epelbaum And Father Leiba Goldshtein



My parents Sonia Epelbaum and Leiba Goldshtein photographed before their wedding in Poltava in 1918. In 1914 when WWI began my father went to the Romanian army. He was at the front and was captured and sent to a camp for prisoners-of-war in Poltava, a provincial town in the center of Ukraine in 300 kms from Kiev. My father was in captivity between 1915 and 1917. I do not know about a life of the father in the conclusion, he did not like to tell about it. Inmates of the camp worked at road construction. A young girl often came to sell cigarettes to prisoners. This was Sonia

Epelbaum, my mother. Mother was born in the family of Moisey and Frieda Epelbaum in Poltava in 1897. Her father was an assistant forester. My mother's family was poor. They lived in a small house with thatched roof and one room with a big stove in the middle of it, any part-time farm at them was not. The house was in the outskirts of the town. My mother was the first and only child. Her mother, my grandmother Frieda died of consumption in 1900. Grandfather Moisey didn't remarry. Although there was a big Jewish community in Poltava - the Jewish population constituted one fifth of the whole population of the town: 80 thousand people, there were quite a lot synagogues and Jewish schools, grandfather Moisey communicated with Ukrainians for the most part. Perhaps, this was because he spent most of his time in the woods staying on sites where Ukrainian woodcutters worked for few months in a row. He got on well, there was no anti-Semitism among his neighbors and employees. Moisey wasn't religious, at least I can't remember him praying or observing any Jewish traditions. He spoke Ukrainian and Yiddish. My mother Sonia also communicated with Ukrainian children. My mother only spoke Ukrainian and didn't know one single word in Yiddish, her parents speak Ukrainian at home. She didn't go to school and couldn't write: she put a cross if she had to sign a paper. The only thing Sonia learned to do before she turned 17 was making cigarettes. She sold cigarettes in town with a box on her neck. She was very pretty and my father fell in love with her at first sight. I don't know in what language he told her about his love - my father only spoke Yiddish and Romanian, but they got married in Poltava in 1918 after he was released from captivity. Later they spoke Ukrainian. My father told me that they had a traditional Jewish wedding under a chuppah at the synagogue and then had a civil ceremony at the registry office. Only grandfather Moisey attended the wedding ceremony since there were no other relatives of my parents in Poltava. My parents didn't tell me any other details. My parents couldn't go to Romania where my father's family lived since after 1917 the Soviet authorities didn't allow Soviet citizens to leave the country. My parents rented a room in a basement in the center of Poltava. My parents were very poor. This was a period of famine and unemployment. My mother sold cigarettes and my father got occasional jobs at construction sites.