

Dzhamila Beniesh



In this photo you can see my grandmother Dzhamila Beniesh, the stepmother of my mother Elvira Lidgi and second wife of my grandfather Itshak Lidgi. In her hands she is holding the diapered Itshak - her grandson from her son Solomon, whose name was the same as his grandfather's. She is holding Itshak's sister - Haviva - by the hand. On the back of the photo there is an inscription in pencil: 'As a souvenir for Elvira Lidgi from Haviva and Itshak Beniesh, 17th April 1947.' The photo was taken in front of a building in the En Shemer kibbutz in Israel.

Granny Dzhamila was very religious. She married my grandpa Itshak in 1916. She was 38 at the time. She acquired three stepchildren from the previous marriage of grandpa with granny Sarah Beniesh, who died in 1916. The children's names are Mois, Nisim and Elvira. She gave birth to three more children: Sarah, Solomon and Clara. After grandpa died in 1939, she left for Israel and lived in a kibbutz.

There had always been some tension in the relationship between my mother and Dzhamila. On the one hand, it appeared because grandpa married her too soon, only forty days after granny Sarah died and, on the other hand, grandpa made my mother give the jewels, which were left to her by her mother Sarah, to Dzhamila. Eventually, she gave them, but this gave an edge to the relationship between her and her father Isak. (The third reason was that Dzhamila used to be a beautiful, domineering woman, very religious. She had special requirements for the food and even later, when she visited us she didn't have anything to eat because she had doubts as to whether the food had been prepared according to all religious requirements. She had imposed the same

order in the family that was new to her. At that time the family was already living in Sofia. I don't know any details about their life but my mother told me that the family had a difficult existence because grandpa didn't earn very much and it was difficult to provide for the six children. The poor way of living and the strained relations were a torture for my mother and she used to feel very depressed at home. That's why she didn't call her stepmother 'mum' for a long time. Not until much later, during one of our visits to Israel in 1960, when Dzhamila was already living in a kibbutz, did my mother call her 'mum' and granny Dzhamila, deeply moved, allowed herself a bite of the cake, which my mother had prepared and afterwards expressed satisfaction that she had prepared it 'very cleanly'. Only then did their relation get warmer.