

Sheina Patova And Beniamin Patov



These are my parents: my mother Sheina Patova and my father Beniamin Patov, photographed shortly after their wedding. This photo was taken in Viljandi in 1919.

My mother did badly at school, but she was also eager to study. Unfortunately, she had no such opportunity. At the age of ten, she had to help my grandmother about the house. She also made hat linings and attended to the younger children. My grandfather had no money to pay for my mother's education. My grandfather said to my mother, 'Sheina, you can sign your name, read and count. This is when you have to stop your studies. You're very handy and will assist me with my work.'

My mother sewed hat linings while standing at the table, being too short to sit. She was clever with everything she did. She also taught us that nothing in life is easy. It can never be. She used to say, 'If you want to accomplish things in life, you have to be quick-witted. You have to pinwheel to have your rear ahead of you.' I often recall my mother's witty and wise expressions behind her joking manner. She only finished two years in elementary school, and this was all the education she managed to get. However, she did her best in learning things by herself. She spoke Estonian, German, Russian and Yiddish. She wrote in Russian with mistakes, but she could write well in Estonian. My mother wanted to go to Paris [today France] before she got married. It was quite common for girls from poorer families to go to Paris to learn dressmaking. When the training was over they returned home and opened their own businesses. Local ladies willingly ordered their dresses from dressmakers trained in Paris. This was quite a profitable business. My mother tried to convince my grandfather to send her to Paris, but he said he had no money. Therefore, my mother's dream to study never came true, and the only thing she had left in this regard was to dream for her children to get a good education.

I don't know how my parents met. I think they got married in 1919. Since their families were religious, I think my parents had a traditional Jewish wedding. I don't think it could have been otherwise at that time. After the wedding my parents lived in Viljandi for some time before moving to Rakvere. I don't know what made them move. Unfortunately, I shall never get answers to these questions.