

Ester Kleinstein And Her Family



This is a group photograph of the Solominas, my mother's family. From left to right standing: my mother's brothers Meishel and Lipo Solomin, my mother Ester Kleinstein, nee Solomina, to her left is her brother Shimon Solomin. In the center is Grandmother Yena Solomina. I don't know the rest. This picture was taken in Pilviskiai in the 1920s. I barely remember what my grandparents or their house looked like. I remember that Grandmother Yena wore a wig, dark skirt and blouse like all Jewish women back in that time. My grandmother was a devoted Jew. All Jewish traditions were kept in her house, holidays were marked and the kashrut was strictly observed. Jacob and Yena raised their children religiously. They had sons and one daughter, my mother. There's nothing I can say about my mother's brothers' religious status. As for my mother, she wasn't religious and didn't observe the traditions when she was an adult. My grandparents perished in 1941 during the occupation. I think they were killed during one of the actions against Jews in Pilviskiai. My mother's youngest brother, whose name I don't remember, died when he was an infant. My mother's two elder brothers, Shimon and Lipo, born in the 1890s, went abroad. Lipo settled down in America, and Shimon went to Canada. We had our own business before the Soviet occupation. My mother corresponded with them. Then she didn't keep in touch, as it wasn't safe and was fraught with persecution. Her brothers were married. I don't know anything about their families. When the war was over, my mother's brothers sent us parcels via some strange people, and we received them in the Vilnius synagogue. There were medicine, products and clothes in them, but in the 1960s we stopped keeping in touch. As far as I know they died in the 1970s. Another one of my mother's brothers, Meishel, lived with his wife and daughter Riva in a village not far from Vilkaviskis. Meishel owned a small store. He was surrounded by Lithuanians. He and his family remained in occupation and perished at the very beginning of the war. My mother, Ester Solomina, was born in 1901 in accordance with the documents, though she always used to say that she was born in 1905. Maybe it was her desire to appear younger. My mother was born in Pilviskiai. I don't know which elementary school she went to. With the outbreak of World War I, my maternal grandparents decided to leave the town temporarily, fearing the status of a frontier town. They went to a Russian city: Voronezh. It was a large cultural Russian city, where the family of Jacob Solomin had lived for

several years. There my mother entered and finished a Russian lyceum. Owing to the opportunity of living and studying in Voronezh with Russian girls, my mother was fluent in Russian, and she was fond of classic literature. She was good at foreign languages. When she returned to Vilkauskis, she taught German at the local lyceum for a while.