

Vladimir Khalfin's Mother Golda Khalfina



This is my mother Golda Khalfina, née Bergheener. The photo was taken in Lutchnets in 1936, for the family album of her parents at their request.

My mother Golda was born in 1902. She had three siblings - Hana, Aron and Gedalie - as far as I can remember. The boys studied at cheder, my mother and her sisters were taught at home. A melamed from cheder taught them Hebrew, Torah and Talmud. My mother could read and write in Yiddish and Hebrew. She had a book of prayers in Hebrew, which she received from her father at her bat mitzvah - when she was 12 years old. They spoke Yiddish in the family and Ukrainian to their neighbors. They were a religious family. On Saturdays and Jewish holidays grandparents went to the synagogue, and when children grew older they also attended. They all had special fancy clothing that they wore to go to synagogue, my grandmother wore a black shawl and the girls didn't need a headpiece.

In 1920s my mother and her sisters became apprentices of a dressmaker. My mother learned to make plain clothes for village women.

My mother never told me how she met my father. They probably got married through matchmakers since it was a common way of getting married for Jewish families at that time. My

parents got married in 1925. They had a religious wedding since they both came from religious family. The young couple married standing under the chuppah and the rabbi registered their marriage in his books. After they got married, my mother was a housewife. My mother was pregnant with Itzyk, when in 1933 my father went fishing and never came back. My mother was alone with three children: my older sister Clara, me and Itzyk. The chairman of the collective farm suggested that she sent my sister and me to a children's house to be able to raise our baby brother, but my mother refused saying that Jews never gave up their children however hard life might treat them.

My mother didn't have any savings. Her brothers and sisters and in-laws provided some assistance, but they didn't have much and mother went to do field work in the collective farm. After work she came home and did some sewing. She got orders from village women. I woke up at night from the sound of my mother's sewing machine. Now I understand how difficult it was for my mother, but she never complained. I cannot even imagine at what cost our mother supported us.

My mother kept on observing Jewish traditions. Since she had to work on Saturday she couldn't observe the Sabbath, but she observed the Jewish holidays. On holidays she dressed up and went to the synagogue. We, children, didn't go with her since we believed there was no God and became atheists, but we enjoyed observing the Jewish holidays at home. Mother made matzah and traditional food at Pesach. We were poor, but mother always saved for a festive dinner at Pesach gefilte fish, chicken broth with matzah dumplings and boiled chicken. She baked strudels with jam, nuts and raisins and cookies in the shape of hexagonal stars. We liked matzah pudding with eggs. On the first day of Pesach we visited mother's parents. My mother's brothers and sisters and their families also came there. Our grandmother wanted her family to get together in their parents' home on high holidays. Grandfather conducted the Seder. I remember children waiting intently for Elijah the Prophet to come into the house. My mother explained to us that we couldn't see him since he was a spirit, but every time I hoped to see wine in his glass stirring up when he touched it.

Mother fasted at Yom Kippur. At Purim she made hamantashen - triangle pies stuffed with poppy seeds and raisins. At Chanukkah she always had her bronze chanukkiyah, her wedding gift, polished until it shined. On the first day of Chanukah mother lit two candles and every following day she lit one more candle. We got money from our relatives at Chanukah and bought sunflower seeds and lollypops with this money. Mother celebrated Jewish holidays even during the war. She prayed before each holiday. Of course, we didn't have any special food, but mother didn't eat bread at Pesach. She fasted at Yom Kippur.

My mother didn't receive any pension. All pre-war archives were lost and she didn't have any document to prove that she had worked before the war. This was the way the Soviet law worked: they only paid pension to those who worked for the Soviet power. We helped and supported our mother in her old age. She died in 1992 at the age of 90. She was a nice and decent woman. We buried her in accordance with Jewish tradition at the Jewish corner of the town cemetery in Chernovtsy.