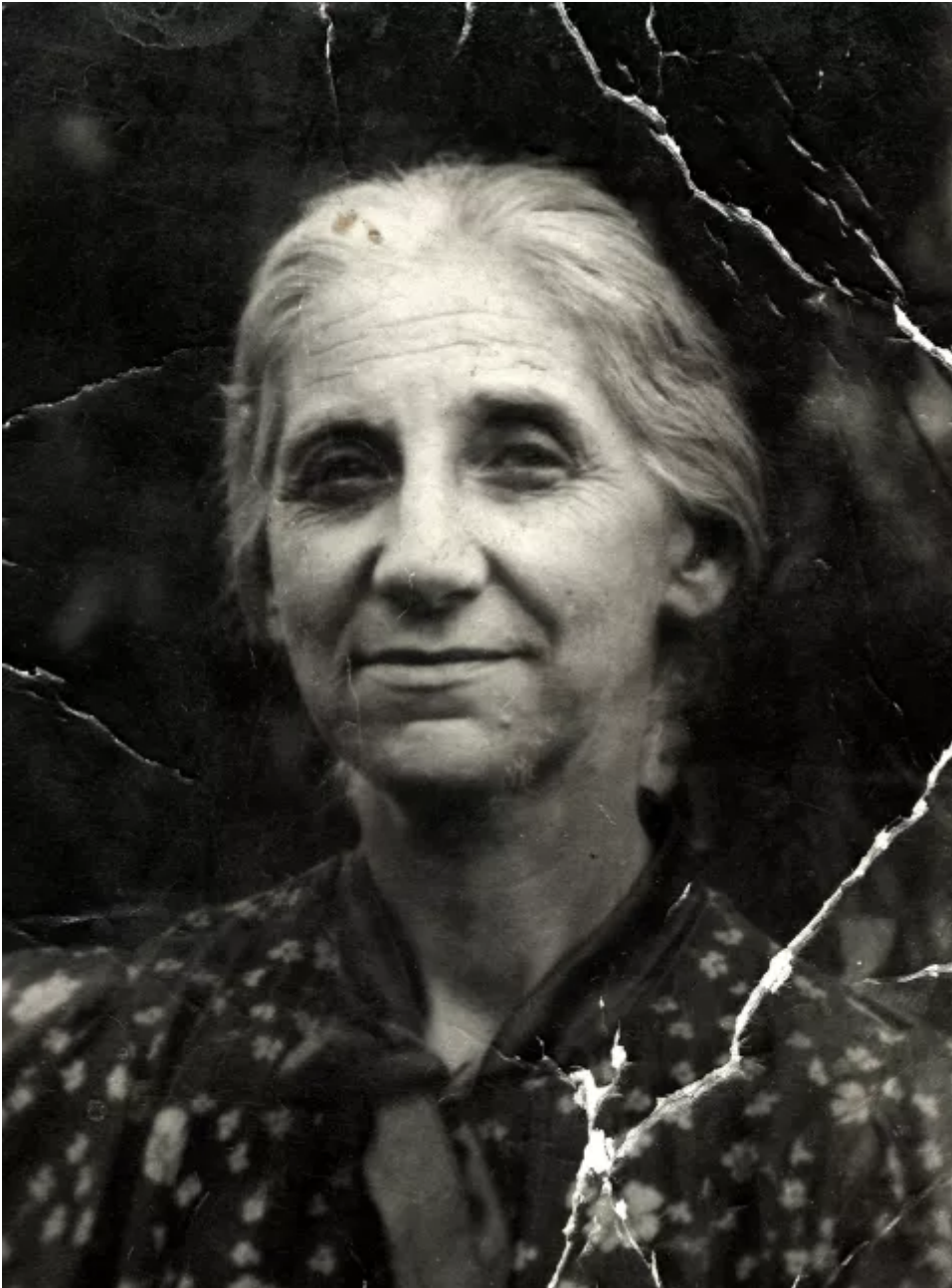


Anna Danon's Mother Rebeka Isak



This is my mother Rebeka Isak, photographed in Sofia in the mid-1940s. She must be around 50 here but she looks older. Her life had been very hard - full of financial difficulties. She was a great person - kind, modest, noble and hard-working. She died at the age of 53 of cancer. My parents married in 1919. They probably had an arranged marriage because he was from Sofia and she was from Kiustendil. I don't know who arranged it, but it was common practice in those times. In my opinion my mother made a mistake. They had different interests and mode of living. My father was a handsome man, always very tidy, always carrying three handkerchiefs in different pockets. He devoted considerable time to his morning toilette - teeth, ears, nose: everything. He was really good-looking and his nose was of the 'Jewish kind' - a big one. My mother was just the opposite - a humble woman, neat and simply dressed. She didn't pay attention to those things. I was born on March 5, 1928 in Sofia. I have two sisters: the eldest Klara Levi is 9 years older than me, the younger Ester Rubenova is 5 years older. Our family often moved from one house to another

because our parents weren't able to pay the rent regularly, and the contracts were usually suspended. The new house needed to be cleaned up and whitewashed. My mother was a fastidious and very accommodating person. She got along with everybody and we co-existed well with our neighbors. We lived in Iuchbunar 1, which was mostly inhabited by Jews and Macedonians. Jews and Macedonians used to coexist quite well together. My mother's best friend was a neighbor of ours, Donka the Macedonian. I don't remember any special custom observed by Macedonians, but the Jews mostly observed Pesach with boios and matzah. We lived in a yard with at least 4 or 5 small houses that were inhabited by separate families. We had no electricity. At a fixed hour each family's housewife used to go out and light a fire in a charcoal brazier in order to cook dinner. There was the constant smell of roast peppers. The streets were poor and miserable, but not covered in mud. There wasn't any religious literature at home. My father was a worldly person, he only visited the synagogue on major holidays and only because other people went there, too - he did it for the sake of socializing. My mother was more religious without being fanatical. She went to the synagogue almost every Friday evening. At Pesach she didn't eat bread for 7 days. She ate boios [unleavened bread] instead. On special holidays, particularly on Pesach, all families used to gather and every housewife arranged her table with unleavened bread, such as boios, matzah and other traditional dishes. They used to cover the table with a patchwork cloth and after dinner everybody sang the Pesach songs, which narrate Jewish history. They also used to sing another song about a little goat. My father and the other men put several breads in a cloth -imitating the march for saving the Jewish people from Egypt. I remember we used to eat something like a roll with leaves of lettuce filled with walnuts and raisins, but unfortunately I don't remember its name.