

Polia Gersh



This is my mother Polia Gersh, photographed by my father's grave in the Jewish cemetery in Kishinev, one year after he died in 1931. This cemetery was ruined by the bombing during the Great Patriotic War. My mother was a beautiful girl. Her thick hair that she wore in plaits, was particularly attractive. Matchmakers didn't take a long time to marry her. My mother and my father's families were rather wealthy and there were no problems with agreeing about the wedding. The wedding was traditional Jewish and took place in the most beautiful synagogue in town, with a chuppah, with a klezmer band and the tables were covered with traditional Jewish food. I guess everything nice and good ended with my mother's wedding. She and my father settled down in a small apartment on Alexeyevskaya Street. Nine months later, in 1925, my older

sister named Sarah, came into this world. In 1926, my father was recruited to the Romanian army, but he didn't serve there for long: doctors discovered that he had tuberculosis and he was demobilized. When my father returned home, my mother was glad at first, but then, when he became bed-ridden, our family lived the hardest years of our life. In 1927, my brother, called Ruvim after my grandfather, was born. After the Great Patriotic War my brother changed his name to the Russian name of Grigoriy. By that time my mother, my father and the children moved in with my widowed grandmother. On 16th February 1930 my father died. On 17th February 1930, the day after he died, I, Shlima Dvoira Gersh, was born. After my father died my mother didn't recover for a long time. However, she had three kids and she had to provide for us. My grandmother worked hard selling buns and rolls, and doing her daily work, but she couldn't provide for all of us. My father's relatives incited my aunt, Sima, to tell us that it was my mother's fault that my father had died because she hadn't taken good care of him. She said that they weren't going to support us and that their kin ended with my father's death. Only rarely did they allow my mother and us to go visit them. We were starving and my mother had to send all three of us to an orphanage. My brother was sent to an orphanage for boys and I went to an orphanage for girls in Kishinev.