

Matilda Ilel



This is my mother Matilda Ilel holding a tambourine in one hand and a cigarette in the other. The photo was probably taken in the 1930s in Vidin. My mother was a workaholic. She couldn't sit doing nothing. She could knit and embroider with a needle. In her free time she attended to her flowers. She loved flowers very much. Her favorite flower was the dahlia. We also had lily-of-the-valley, snowdrops, hyacinths, but most of them were dahlias. I hated the dahlias and I had reasons for that. Dahlias are sown from tubers; they are gathered in the fall, kept during the winter and sown in the spring. They should be kept in a warm place. My mother put them in a crate near the stove and I was very annoyed that there wasn't enough space. The charcoal was on one side of the stove and the crate on the other. My mother had a very keen sense of smell; she could smell the scent of

the flowers from afar. There were always people at home and my mother offered them jam. I wasn't given jam, it was only for the guests. We had jam from everything: plums, cherries, mostly of plums, because there were different varieties. We had quinces in the yard. When we grated them for jam, their stubs remained. My mother cut them, boiled them, drained the water, put some jam and it became some kind of puree, which she wrapped in paper and preserved in tins. It was called 'tajiko.' My mother took very good care of the house. We never had carpets, but we had rugs. My mother made bands from the old sheets, gowns, and cotton clothes. My father brought threads from the market, which were the base for the rugs, then put them in a cauldron with paint. This took a long time. My mother was very neat and when she had a lot of washing up she got up at 5am. She would make a fire in the yard, would put the cauldron with the water on the fire, then she put the sacks with ash in and started washing the sheets, which were eight in number. There was a trough, in which one could fully lie down and she rinsed the sheets three times in it. There were some vendors who sold us water from the Danube, it was very smooth and we kept it in a barrel in the cellar. When I returned from school, I would find her still washing the sheets. She also put laundry blue in the washing, which gave the sheets a nice tint. She hung the washing in the yard and it froze in the winter. Then we put it inside to get dry. There was a lot of hard work to be done. My mother starched all the bed covers so that the embroidery could be seen. She made the starch and did the starching herself.