

Anna Ivankovitser's Maternal Grandmother Leya Schigol



My maternal grandmother, Leya Schigol. The photo was taken in Polonoye in the 1900s. My grandmother was born in Polonoye in 1862. I don't know her maiden name. My grandmother told me that she was the only daughter in her family. Her mother died in childbirth. Her father didn't remarry and spent all his time with his daughter who looked very much like her mother. My grandmother's father called her Mamele [mummy in Yiddish], and she was called so for the rest of her life. Even our neighbors in Shargorod called her Mamele. My grandfather and grandmother's family was a wealthy family. Their daughters and sons had rooms, there was their parents' bedroom, my grandfather's study, a dining-room and a living-room, besides a kitchen and bathroom and storerooms. They had good solid furniture. It wasn't posh, but they had all they needed: chairs, tables, beautiful wooden wardrobes and chests of drawers. They had books I believe they were mostly religious books in Yiddish. They also had classical world literature in

Yiddish. My grandmother gave birth to 12 children, six of which died in infancy. My grandmother was a housewife, as was traditional at that time. She also had a housemaid to help her about the house. There was a big orchard in the backyard and a flower garden in front of the house. My grandmother kept a cow. My mother told me that had all the dairy products were made at home. My mother's parents were very religious. My grandfather and grandmother went to synagogue at least once a week, and they prayed at each meal, in the morning and before going to bed. My grandmother always went out wearing a wig. She wore it at home, too. She had long, beautiful silk and velvet gowns. She also wore a golden Magen David around her neck. They always celebrated the Sabbath at home. My grandmother lit candles and cooked a festive dinner. My grandfather read a prayer. I don't remember them singing. My grandmother strictly followed the laws of kashrut. They celebrated all the Jewish holidays. At Pesach they bought matzah, made stuffed fish, chicken, goose cracklings and stuffed chicken necks. They baked strudels with jam, nuts and raisins, sponge cake from matzah flour and special Pesach cookies. All the adults and children over 11 fasted on Yom Kippur. There was Chanukkah gelt at Chanukkah and concerts of klezmer musicians at Purim. They spoke Yiddish in the family, and they knew Russian and Ukrainian very well. In the summer my sister and I visited grandmother Leya in Polonoye. I remember having evening tea parties at grandmother's long table with a samovar on it. We had tea and jam and our grandmother told us stories from the Bible in Yiddish. My grandmother told these stories in a very nice manner, as if she were talking about somebody she knew well and loved a lot. She animated the Biblical characters for us. Grandmother Leya used to stay with us during the winter. Her visits were always very much welcomed. We loved her dearly and she loved us. My grandmother told us episodes from Jewish history. I can still remember the story she told us about how Joseph was captured and held in a pit. My grandmother could read Yiddish. It was not very common at that time. Most Jews had no education. Our neighbors in Shargorod liked to come to grandmother's house, and she would read the Bible to them in Yiddish - both Jews and Ukrainians understood and could speak Yiddish. My grandmother knew all the prayers. She prayed at home daily. During the Soviet era my mother did not follow the kashrut and my grandmother visited us with her own kosher pot and plate. She cooked her own food and called my sister and me to help her eat it. She was very nice. She didn't wear a wig in those years. She covered her gray hair with a little shawl. She was still beautiful even in old age. She wore beautiful clothes. I remember she had a nice black suit. During the war we exchanged my grandmother's clothes for food.