

Viktorya Levi



This is my aunt Viktorya Levi, my father's eldest sister. The photo was taken in Istanbul in the 1950s. Viktorya was born in 1895, in Constanza, a port city by the Black Sea. My aunt, Tante Viktorya, was very close to us. I called her Tantika. Women enjoy speaking and tend to share a lot; and so did my aunt. She spoke frequently about their house, whereas my father did not. Viktorya was educated up to the secondary level. Interestingly, she attended a Greek school in Constanza. She knew Greek very well. Since her mother was ill most of the time, my aunt did housework from a very young age on, and was very good at it. She also knew how to sew very well. I have in my

possession an old foot-operated Singer sewing machine which she had brought all the way from Romania to Turkey. It must be 100 years old, but is still in good working condition. In 1917, when my father was 14 years old, their mother died. My aunt was 22 then. Being the only woman of the family, she had to take care of her father and three brothers, which meant keeping the house, cooking and acting as a mother to them. Of course, it is possible that they had help in the house, considering that they employed a coachman - you don't have a coachman and not afford a maid - but I don't remember any mention of helpers. When they came to Istanbul in the 1920s, Tantika was a young girl. She loved people and established good relations with the neighbors in no time. She learned a great deal from the friends she made, yet she had some skills others didn't have and knew some things from Romania that people here did not know, like preparing chicken with dried apricots. Viktorya was rather heavily built and had light brown hair. She was not particularly pretty, but walked keeping her body upright and with a self-confident allure which reflected her strong personality. She was of medium height. She valued cleanliness and orderliness, which were reflected in the way she kept herself - no hair out of place, so-to-speak. She liked to dress well, chic but on the formal side, suits in the winter, sun dresses or prints in the summer. She always wore jewelry: pins, earrings, rings. All in all, she was a doer, hard on herself. She never spent an idle moment. When she had nothing to do, she found something to sew.