

Leya Shykler



This is a picture of my mother Leya Shykler [nee Kronefeld]. She had this picture taken at my request in Putila in 1938. I had finished the grammar school in Chernovtsy, got a job and lived at my aunt's at the time the picture was taken. The family of my mother lived in Vizhnitsa. Vizhnitsa was a small town on the bank of the Prut River, 50 kilometers from Chernovtsy. My mother was born in 1897. I don't know how my parents met. I believe they must have been introduced to one another by a shadkhan, which was a traditional way of arranging marriages at the time. They had a traditional Jewish wedding in my mother's hometown. My parents settled down in Putila. I remember their house. My family lived in it until the beginning of the Great Patriotic War in 1941. My father had bought this house for his future family before the wedding. The house was removed after the war. There were three rooms, a hallway and a kitchen. There was an orchard and a flower garden in front of the house. There was also a kitchen garden, sheds and pastures near the house. My parents were religious people, but they weren't fanatically religious. They celebrated all Jewish

holidays and Sabbath. My mother always cooked Saturday meals on Friday. She left the food in the stove to keep it warm for Saturday. It wasn't allowed for Jews to light a fire on Saturday to warm up the food. It wasn't even allowed to have a fire to heat the room in the winter. However, my parents asked our Ukrainian neighbor to come in and light the fire in the stove and the lamp. On Fridays we said a prayer, my mother lit candles and we began Sabbath. On Saturdays our whole family went to the synagogue. When we returned, my father used to read the chapter of the Torah which is read on Saturday. Then we sat down at the table. In the evening we conducted Havdalah, the separation of Saturday from weekdays. In 1940 Stalin threatened the Romanian government to start a war if Romania didn't transfer its western regions, Moldavia, Bessarabia, the Carpathian Mountains and Bukovina, to the USSR. Romania agreed and all these areas joined the USSR. I was on vacation visiting my parents in Putila when the 'liberators' came to town. In 1941, ten days before the war, a bigger part of the - not only - Jewish population of Bukovina was deported to the North of Siberia on Stalin's orders. My parents, my brother and my sister were also deported. I wasn't aware of it. I visited my family in May 1941 and returned to work in Chernovtsy. My family was accused of being wealthy cattle dealers, and that was sufficient for the deportation to Siberia. I learned about it after the war.