

Irina Voinova's Mother. Berta Aizman



This is a picture of my mother, Berta Aizman, taken in Petrograd in 1916. My maternal grandparents had seven children. The eldest was Aunt Polya, Polina Jacovlevna. Then came my mom, Berta Jacovlevna; she was born in Ponevezh in 1900. Then came Aunt Raya, Uncle Jasha (Jacov), Uncle Borya, Aunt Lena and Aunt Roza. All the Ansher sisters were very beautiful. I don't know if my mom ever studied anywhere, but she was very literate nonetheless. She wrote in Yiddish very well. Both my dad and mom's parents also wrote well in Yiddish. And Daddy, generally speaking, knew several languages very well, including Estonian, Hebrew, and German. Mom was a housewife, but she sewed at home as well, helping Dad. Once Dad had some large children's order? either for a school or for an orphanage. They were winter coats, I even recall that they were green. Mom sewed them at home. Our parents also sewed the clothes that we kids wore; they

never bought any. Mom was very religious. I always wondered why sometimes she didn't allow us to carry things from somewhere, and only now I realize that, most likely, it was Shabbat. She tried to keep all the traditions, but she went to synagogue only rarely and in secret from Daddy. Daddy never went to synagogue. He was a communist? I remember my relatives saying that Papa was a communist, and at that time everything was strict; a communist couldn't go to synagogue. Mom had a small chest, and in it was a little velvet cap. She had some sort of small casket? she must have inherited these things from her parents. Once I dropped the casket? Mom was so upset; she kissed it and all the time whispered in Yiddish (she spoke Yiddish well). Our flat was situated in a big building that had several floors. We lived on the third floor, and Uncle Leva (dad's brother) lived on the ground floor. Our family was poor. There was only one room in the flat, a big one? may be, of 40 square meters. There were beds and a big table. We all, seven people, lived in one room. We never had any nannies. Mom always cooked and cleaned up. She was a very orderly person. We had a big ancient candelabra. Mum would light candles in it say, 'Be quiet, don't get close to it and don't touch it'. I also remember that we had a big white tiled fireplace at home, with a small mantelpiece. And also there was a big iron chest. Mom was very hospitable, and she was a good cook. Of the Jewish dishes she cooked, I remember tzimes, chicken necks, and stuffed fish. Always on [Passover] we had matzo. Mom would go to some place early in the morning and buy matzo. When Mom and aunt Anya cooked chicken soup, they made matzo dumplings. Mom died on May 23, 1937 as the result of an unsuccessful abortion. She is buried in the Jewish cemetery in Leningrad. I remember that she had a burial service in the synagogue of the Jewish cemetery. When Mom died she left 5 little children, one smaller than the other.