

Hava Goldshtein With Her Mother Sonia Epelbaum, Father Leiba Goldshtein And Sister Sheindlia Goldshtein



Our family: from left to right: Mother Sonia Epelbaum, I, Hava Goldshtein, father Leiba Goldshtein and my sister Sheindlia Goldshtein photographed in Poltava before departure to the Crimea in 1927. In 1919 my older sister Sheindl was born and on 24 February 1924 I, Hava Goldshtein, was born. My grandfather Mosey often came to stay with us, children, while our parents were away. He told us stories and fairy tales about wood goblins, witches and house spirits in Ukrainian. My mother told me that after pogroms made by Denikin troops during the Civil War grandfather did his best to conceal his Jewish identity. Grandfather never went to the synagogue that functioned in Poltava even after 1917. We didn't observe any Jewish traditions at home, only father prayed quietly in the corner of the room. In 1926 my sister Sheindl went to a Russian secondary school. I don't even know whether there were Jewish schools in Poltava. Our mother took us to a photo shop in the central street to get photographed just out of curiosity and this was the first time in my life that I was photographed. Life was hard in Poltava: my parents couldn't find a permanent job. In 1926 our family moved to Odessa that was not so far from Romania. Mother told me that my father was hoping to cross the border of Romania somehow where his family resided, but he failed. At that time Joint began its activities in the Soviet Union. In 1927 our family moved to a Jewish settlement in the Crimea that was formed with the help of Joint. We settled down in the village of Kalay, Djankoy district. There was Ukrainian, Russian and Crimean Tatar population in this area. People treated us kindly. Jews formed an agricultural cooperative association. We were accommodated in houses (four families resided in one house with a common kitchen), toilets and water were outside, there was no power, they cooked on primus stoves and lighted rooms with kerosene lamps. There were initially 50-80 Jewish families in this area. Joint built cottages in the outskirts of the for them. We bought food products at the village store. Jews worked at the collective farm. All collective farm products belonged to the state. In the Crimea life was gradually improving: my father began to work as veterinary and my mother became a milkmaid at the farm.

There was no synagogue in Kalay and religious Jews including my father and our neighbor Shmul Bershak got together for a minyan to pray. They often got together in our house and Bershak's son Syunia and I often watched them. We found it funny how they prayed swinging with their thalitles and tefillinwiln on their heads and hands. We began to observe some Jewish traditions in Kalay. My father didn't eat pork and often argued with mother who that didn't follow the kashrut. Every Friday there was a general cleanup of the house and we, children, got involved in it. We washed the floors, dusted the furniture and scrubbed casseroles and kitchen utensils. We laid the table in a big room and our family and all other tenants of the house got together at the table. Saturday was a working day in the collective farm. Before Pesach we baked matszah and cooked Gefilte fish, chicken broth, meat stew and made pastries and pudding from matzsah flour. At Purim mother made triangle pies with poppy seeds - the so-called 'Oman ears' [hamentashen] that we liked. My father fasted at Yom Kippur and my mother joined him. Children didn't fast - our father believed that we would learn everything when we grew up. I don't remember other holidays. We made dolls from rags, played with a ball and ran in the streets. My father became an activist in the collective farm: he took part in construction. My father wasn't a member of the party, but he was a 'non-party communist' as such people were called at the time. He didn't think he was spiritually prepared to become a communist. He liked communist ideas and liked living and working at the collective farm. In few years we received a small house of our own with two rooms, a kitchen and an open terrace. We didn't have a garden or livestock. Our father provided well for the family and life was inexpensive. There was a plot of land near the house that my father planted with diminutive fruit trees. The most amazing thing was running water in the house: there was a water pump facility built in the village that supplied water to the houses. My mother was very happy about it.