

Berta Mazo's Cousins



This photograph shows my cousins Lasar and Alexander Shlionsky.

My cousins were very nice to me, I was their only sister. They were very cheerful and loved music (especially Lasar, my elder brother). They took me to theatres, for instance to the Theater for Young Spectators and Maryinsky Opera and Ballet Theater.

My cousins Lasar, Solomon, Alexander and Grigory were sons of my aunt Bella Yakovlevna and her husband Efim Shlionsky. Parents kept in touch with all my aunts: Liya Yalovlevna also lived in Belinsky Street (she was a doctor), and Anna Yakovlevna lived in Sestroretsk [a suburb of Leningrad], she worked in a drugstore as the pharmacist. For some period of time she lived with us at our place. All of them were my father's sisters. They all finished some technical school in Vitebsk [a town in Belarus]. We often met together on different occasions, went for a walk together. Anna Yakovlevna and Liya Yakovlevna did not get married.

Daddy also had got 2 younger brothers Moissey Yakovlevich and Israel Yakovlevich. Moissey worked with peltry-ware. He had got no children. Israel lived with his family in a small town near Vitebsk and worked in a drugstore. He had got a son Semen.

My father's name was Yevsey Yakovlevich Mazo, and my mother's name was Maria Efremovna Merport. Daddy was born in 1883, and Mom in 1893 (she was 10 years younger). They both came from Krucha shtetl. They got acquainted in Krucha and then got married. I remember I read one of old letters that '...Yevsey is going to marry Maria...' Most probably they had their wedding ceremony as was customary (no chuppah).

My Mom was a very beautiful woman and a good housewife. Among her traditional dishes there were tsimes, stewed carrots, and cholnt [meat with potatoes]. And she baked tasty pies.

In Malaya Vishera we lived not richly, but we had got a cow - our real mother. We called her Burenka. Parents stored up fodder for her, let her out to fields, met her back, and milked. I was brought up milk-fed. In my childhood I was a plump child with rosy cheeks, and my aunt, Liya Yakovlevna called me a bun. We lived in one big room. Grandfather had got a small shop (he sold different small items there), but the shop had different entrance. We also had got a kitchen, but no bath-room (we used to wash in the river). There was a hayloft, where we kept hay for our cow. Our furniture was ordinary. There was no water supply and we heated the house by means of stove. Certainly, we had got no assistants: everything was made by ourselves. My parents had neither an orchard, nor a vegetable garden.

At home we had got a lot of different books, including fiction, science, and religion. My Mom was an educated person (but I do not know in what sphere). She worked in a library, therefore our family members read much: she made us free of her library. I read much, especially fiction. Till now I remember by heart several fragments from Eugeny Onegin [the best known poem by Alexander Pushkin]. My parents also read newspapers regularly, but I do not remember which ones. For the most part my parents spoke Russian, but they knew Yiddish and spoke it to each other when it was necessary to keep something from me. Nevertheless they celebrated all Jewish holidays, including Sabbath. Kashrut was not strictly observed, Daddy visited synagogue not often (the same with Mom). Parents were not active members of the Jewish community, they were ordinary persons of narrow interests.