

Faina Gheller's Mother Bertha Rabinovich



My mother Bertha Rabinovich (nee Weisman).

This photo was made in Tsaritsyn (present-day Volgograd) in 1938.

My mother Bertha Weisman was born in Kamenets-Podolsk in 1903. My mother Bertha Zalivanskaya finished three years of cheder for girls in Kamenets-Podolsk. This is all education she got.

She was the oldest child and had to help her mother about the house. Her mother tongue was Yiddish. She spoke poor Russian. At the age of 16 she married Michael Rabinovich, Jew and a communist.

They were introduced to each other by matchmakers and grandmother and grandfather, therefore, gave their consent to their marriage. My mother also got fond of revolutionary ideas. I

n 1920 they moved to Tsaritsyn [renamed to Stalingrad, present-day Volgograd, about 1000 km from Moscow], where Michael Rabinovich held an important Party position at a plant. My mother was a housewife. She observed Jewish traditions in secret from her husband. She lived with her husband for about 10 years.

They didn't have children. He died of consumption that developed from his stay in tsarist prisons when he was young.

After Michael Rabinovich died my mother returned to her parents in Saratov where she worked as a seamstress in a shop. For her outstanding performance she received a room in a former two-storied merchant's stone house in Nizhniaya Street.

The house was divided into cells of rooms. There was a window and a half in my mother's room. My mother was an activist and spoke at meetings on Soviet holidays, although I don't know who could understand her poor Russian with a strong Jewish accent. She wore a red kerchief that was in fashion at that time.

In 1934 she married my father Naum Zalivanski. They met through matchmakers that was quite a custom with Jews at that period of time. They registered their marriage in a registry office. They were Komsomol members and activists and they didn't have a Jewish wedding.

They invited their closest ones to a small wedding dinner. My father had a daughter from his first marriage. Her name was Mirah. My father and Mirah moved into my mother's 16-square-meter room in Nizhniaya Street. There was a 12-square-meter kitchen with no windows.

My mother didn't have children with her first husband and she believed she couldn't have children at all. For this reason she married a widower with a child. They didn't marry for love, but they respected each other. My mother loved her stepdaughter.

Then my parents got three children of their own. After they were born my mother quit the factory and became a housewife. My father was the breadwinner in the family.

My mother often went to the synagogue. She and other women cleaned and washed the synagogue before holidays. Sometimes I went with my mother.

My father didn't go to the synagogue. My mother had old religious books. Se didn't give me to read these books and didn't teach me Yiddish. Although her Russian was very poor she only spoke Russian to me. My mother wrote her sisters in Yiddish.