

Chaya Kagan



This is my grandmother Chaya Kagan. The picture was made in 1920s in Siauliai.

I was named after maternal grandfather Aron Kagan. Unfortunately, I just know his name, as he died before I was born. I do not know what he did for a living. He was born approximately in the middle of 19th century in a small Lithuanian town Seduva [about 150 km to the west from Vilnius]. My grandfather, his wife Chaya and their children moved in Siauliai. When grandpa died, grandmother Chaya lived with our family. I loved her very much. I can say that it was she who raised my siblings and me. I do not know her maiden name. She was born in Seduva in 1860s. Chaya was a true Jewish lady. She was a true Jewish woman. She did not just mechanically follow traditions, but was a deeply religious woman. While she was alive, kashrut was observed at home, Sabbath and all Jewish holidays were marked. She was the pivot of religious life of our family. She did not let us forget about traditions of the ancestors. My parents worked hard, and feeling tired they most likely would not observe the traditions as ardently, but out of respect to grandmother, they went to the synagogue every Friday and Saturday. Friday evening grandmother lit candles being the oldest lady in the family. She had a white laced kerchief on her head. I had never seen her with her head uncovered. Grandmother Chaya was fluent in Yiddish and Lithuanian, therefore I think she should have got some elementary education. Grandmother did not know Ivrit. She must have learnt prayers by heart, as she did not read from the prayer book. She died in spring 1940 shortly before the Soviets came to power in Baltic countries. She was buried in Jewish cemetery without a coffin and according to the rite she was carried across the city on the boards in white shroud. We observed shivah after the funeral and I remember that father cut the collar of his clothes which was the sign of the mourning.

I do not know much about my mother's relatives. She had a brother Simon, who was several years older than he. He lived in American city Baltimore, had a family there. I do not know his wife's and children's name and have no information about their fate. Mother had sister Buna, who left for the USA in early 1920s with Simon. She also got married there. I do not know anything about her family either. Mother's sister Golda lived in a town Osmiani in the vicinity of Vilnius. Mother had not seen her sister for many years. Only in 1940 after Vilnius had been annexed to Lithuania, she visited us with her family. Golda did not have a chance to get evacuated. She and her husband perished during occupation in Oshmiany. Her daughter Leya Dveira, who married a Polish Jew, lived in Bialystok in Poland and also turned out to be in the occupation..Leya Dveire and her husband were in ghetto and fortunately they survived. After war they lived in Bialystok and even wrote letters to my mother for a while and sent her pictures. With time, they stopped keeping in touch. I do not know further fate of Leya Dveira.