

Leonid Aptekar And His Family



This is our family. 1st row, from left to right: my grandmother Denia Brodskaya, me sitting on a small stool, my mother Heisura Aptekar. 2nd row: my mothers sister Boba Damskaya, her husband Idl Damskiy and their daughter, whose name I can't remember. This photo was taken in Skvira in 1932.

My maternal grandfather Lazar Brodskiy and grandmother Denia (nee Volodarskaya) were born in Volodarka town, Belaya Tserkov district Kiev province [37 km from Belaya Tserkov, 115 km from Kiev]. I don't know my grandparents' dates of birth. My grandmother was very religious. There were five children in my mother's family. My grandmother may have had more children, but those five survived. My mother Heisura, the oldest of the children, was born in 1895, and my mother's brother Gersh, born in 1910, was the youngest. Between them came mama's brother Teviye and sisters Boba and Udl. My grandfather Lazar died in 1918, before I was born.

My grandmother had to support her family and took over any job to earn their living. She baked bread for sale at home and did cooking and baking for other families in her clients' homes where she worked, but the family was big and it was difficult to provide for all of them. Mama became an apprentice of a dressmaker. When she learned this vocation she began to take orders herself. It was still hard to find clients in Volodarka: many of its residents were poor. In 1916 Jewish pogroms overwhelmed Volodarka. Bandits broke into the town robbing and killing Jews and burning the Jewish houses. My grandmother decided to move to Skvira [40 km from Belaya Tserkov, 105 km from Kiev]. In 1920s was established cooperative companies started to develop in Skvira. There was a shoemaking company, a repair company and a tailors' company where my mother worked.

My mother and her sisters had no education. After the revolution of 1917, when they were quite grown up, they finished a likbez where they learned to write and read. Even after the revolution Jews commonly turned to matchmakers to prearrange weddings. Matchmakers also visited my grandmother. They arranged Boba's marriage with Idl Damskoy, a Jewish man from Pavoloch, Zhitomir region [25 km from Skvira, 105 km from Kiev]. My aunt had a real Jewish wedding with the chuppah and the rabbi. After the wedding the newly weds stayed to live in Skvira and both worked at the Metallist shop. They received an apartment in 1940, but I don't remember where they lived before. They had two children: an older son and a daughter. I don't remember their names. They were poor and grandmother supported them.

During the Civil War a partisan unit was deployed in Skvira. My future father Iosif Aprekar, a Jew from Odessa served in it. My mother liked him and they got married. They had a chuppah and klezmers at their wedding. Mama told me no details. My father stayed to live in Skvira. I was born on 25th July 1925. I was given the Russian [common] name of Leonid. My Jewish name is Luzer after my maternal grandfather. Some time later my father left us for Odessa. He sent money for some time before he disappeared completely. We had no information about him. We were very poor. My grandmother and mother raised me to be a decent and honest man and I am very grateful to them for this. They taught me to do any work about the house. I took the goats to the pasture, geese and ducks to the pond and weeded the vegetable garden. We always had goose fat and meat. My grandmother melted the fat with onions: it was very delicious. I liked it spread on my bread. My grandmother did the cooking on the Russian stove in the kitchen: she made broth, borscht and stew. She also baked delicious pastries. Nobody else could cook as delicious as my grandmother! Mama worked and grandma took care of the housekeeping. My grandmother was the head of the family. The children obeyed her strictly. None of us ever argued with her or doubted what she said. I went to a kindergarten before going to school.