

Leonid Poberezhskiy's Grandmother Haya-Rukhlia Shehtman



My grandmother Haya-Rukhlia was born in 1875. I don't know where she was born or her nee name. I can talk endlessly about my grandmother. I loved her dearly.

I hardly remember any details of the life of our family in Uman. My mother told me that my grandfather and grandmother rented half a house from their landlords. There were 4 or 5 rooms in the house. Our family was renting two of them. I only remember my grandmother Haya-Rukhlia of our life in Uman. She was a lovely woman, very kind and loving. She was never spoiling me, as she was never spoiling her own children. But she was giving her love and care to me all her life. She was short and very lively. She was always working at several things at a time and telling me fairy-tales at the same time. Later when I grew up I found out that she was telling me Biblical stories in a

way that I could understand what they were about. My grandmother was both kind and smart. People always said that my grandfather was a very intelligent man. However, I think that my grandmother was more intelligent than he was. My grandmother had a great sense of humor but her jokes were not offensive. My grandmother was not a fanatic woman; she was against fanatics. She was a wife of a rabbi (rebetsen) and she observed all traditions, but she did it dutifully rather than from her own convictions. My grandmother usually wore long dark gowns and covered her head with a shawl only to go to the synagogue. Basically, she had more progressive views than my grandfather. My grandmother spoke Russian with a slight accent. My grandmother and grandfather spoke Yiddish with their children.

After moving to Kiev my grandfather led his customary way of life. There was a synagogue in Schekavitskaya Street in Podol (it's still there). My grandfather often went to the synagogue. They observed Sabbath and celebrated Jewish holidays at home. I remember Pessah very vividly. The whole family got together at the table, besides Uncle Syunia. He was a communist and avoided staying with us on such days, he left home or stayed in the room, but never sat with us for the table. But my parents, Tsylia and Abram did not mind celebration of these holidays. My grandmother cooked traditional Jewish meals: stuffed fish and goose neck and strudel with jam and nuts, (I do not know whether this was kosher food but it tasted delicious). There were no prayers or singing cantos at the table; this was just getting together at the dinner table. My grandmother was a great cook. I have never had clear soup as delicious as my grandmother could make it. There was always matsa in the house. This was our tribute to the tradition, as we usually ate a lot of bread in the house. I understand this religious surrounding was mostly arranged for my grandfather. Even when I became a pioneer and an ardent atheist I still enjoyed sitting at the festive table with my family.