

Yevsey Abramovich Kotkov



This is a picture of me, Yevsey Abramovich Kotkov, at 13 years old. The photo was taken in the Ruvinskiy shop in Vassilkovskaya street, Kiev, in 1917. I was born in 1904. I was born in Rafalovka, near Lutsk. There were five of us kids in the family. There was a primary school for Jewish children. We didn't study Yiddish at school, but in summer, when I went to visit my mother's parents in Rafalovka, I had a teacher who taught me to write and read in Yiddish. Everything had to be af Yiddish (in Yiddish). My grandfather paid for these classes. I studied Yiddish, my teacher was a rabbi. My grandfather took me to the synagogue with him and we used to pray together. Once,

when I was six years old, my father was fixing the roof of the synagogue. My mother sent me to take my father's lunch to him. He told me to sit in the spout while he hit a nail. When he looked for me I wasn't there any longer -- I had fallen off. It was my good luck that I didn't fall on the bricks ? this would have been the end of me. Everybody around started crying. They called a doctor. They listened to my breathing. My father whispered to me to pee. I did and he said 'He'll be O.K.' He was afraid that I injured my bladder. They took me home. My mother was already grieving for me. I asked her to turn me on the stretcher to show her that I was alive. At the age of nine I went to work. My job was to clean the bookstore in the building where we lived. I took to reading books in this store, and I always loved reading. At first we lived in a noisy neighborhood near the market. The 'countess' allowed us to move into an old janitor's quarters in the basement. But before the revolution ordinary Jews didn't have the right to live in Kiev. They needed a special permit for it. An inspector asked us to present our documents or get out of there and never show up again. At that time, however, the left bank of the Dnipro belonged to Chernigov province. We rented a place, but we only went there to sleep. In the morning we crossed the bridge into Kiev. We could have taken a tram, but the ticket cost 10 kopecks and we couldn't afford it, so we traveled 7-10 km on foot each day. I didn't go to school in Kiev. I was my father's assistant and sold little pies at the market to earn a little. We were very happy when I could bring my mother 5 kopecks or so.