

Sofia Rubinshtein



This is a picture of my mother, Sofia Rubinshtein [nee Kapnik], as a student in Kiev in 1903. My mother's family was a traditional Jewish family. They celebrated Sabbath and all the Jewish holidays. Her parents went to the synagogue every Saturday. My mother didn't tell me any details.

When I was growing up it wasn't safe to talk about such things because the Soviet power struggled against the bourgeois and religious past. If a child blabbed about his wealthy ancestors, it might have been interpreted as nostalgia for the tsarist regime, and the whole family might have been arrested or executed. They spoke Yiddish in the family, but they all knew Russian well. My mother's parents believed that girls were to learn to be good housewives. They were a patriarchal family. The boys went to cheder and the girls got religious education at home. My mother took little interest in housekeeping. She was fond of reading. She read in Yiddish and Russian. She prepared for the grammar school by herself. She was the first child in the family and my grandfather was spoiling her more than the other children. My mother convinced him to send her to grammar school. He gave in, and she was the only girl in the family who finished grammar school. The rest of the children studied at a secondary school. My mother's sister Sarra was the only one to get higher education. She finished the Leningrad Institute of Chemical Industry in the 1930s.