

Sophia Stelmakher With Her Family



This is a family picture. You can see my grandfather on my mother's side Isaac Bekker and my mother Evgenia Bekker. My grandfather is holding my cousin Sophia, the daughter of my mother's younger sister Polina. My mother is holding me. The photo was taken in Rybnitsa in 1937. My grandfather was the only member of the family to get a higher education. This student of grammar school began to help my grandfather. My grandfather did so well that he passed exams for four years of grammar school and later for eight years of grammar school. It took him five years. He continued working for his master saving money. When he got enough money to pay for one year at university my grandfather went to Odessa in 1880. At that time there was a five-percent admission restriction [five percent quota] for Jews in all universities. My grandfather passed the admission exams. He was an excellent student and after the first year of studies the dean solicited that my grandfather had his fees waived. My grandfather was allowed to get training at the Odessa clinic of veterinary medicine. Upon graduation he was offered a veterinary job in Rybnitsa. There was no veterinary clinic and my grandfather received his patients at home. My grandfather was very religious. He went to the prayer house on Saturdays and Jewish holidays. He also prayed at home in

the morning and in the evening with his tallit on and a prayer book. We, children, knew that we were not supposed to distract grandfather when he was praying. I still have my grandfather's tallit as a keepsake. I was born on 29th December 1935. I was named Sophia and given the Jewish name Sarah. My cousin, Polina's daughter, was born in the summer of 1936; I didn't know her father. She was given the same name, Sophia. I don't know why we were named after our grandmother who was alive - it was against the Jewish tradition.