

Sally Uzvalova With Her Mother Tonia Barzak, Cousin Shoimu, Aunt Etia



I, Sally Barzak, and my family visiting me in Yassy, where I was taught. We were photographed at the entrance to the French boarding school where I studied. From left to right: my cousin Shoimu, the son of my mother's older brother Mark; my mother Tonia Barzak, nee Roitberg; I, Sally Barzak; and my aunt Etia, my mother's younger sister. Photo made in Yassy in 1939, one year before the Soviet power was established in Bessarabia.

When I turned 7 my parents sent me to the French grammar school in Yassy. I stayed in the boarding school. This grammar school was founded by French nuns and they were also teachers at the school. We studied all subject in Rumanian. There were quite a few Jewish girls in the grammar school. My mother and her sisters also studied at this grammar school. The fee to pay for my studies was rather high, but my father was sure that he would be able to provide for me.

I was to study 12 years at the grammar school: 4 years of primary school and 8 years of grammar school. We studied all general subjects plus embroidery, sewing rules of conduct, music, reception of guests, ethics and esthetics. The nuns wore long black skirts with white stripes and always had books of prayers in their hands. All nuns had finished closed higher educational institutions for girls and had at least the level of B.S. During classes there was silence in the building of the school. We had uniform of our school.

We were taught to respect older people. We were taught to be honest and kind to people. These nuns taught me the basics of morale and ethics. I was a spoiled girl from a wealthy family. We were also supposed to speak nicely to guests and be well mannered and reserved. We were to move in a nice manner and bear ourselves decently. The girls were prepared to a wife, a mother and mistress of the house. We studied to play the piano, sing and dance.

Jewish girls arranged charity concerts and invited our families to attend them. The money that we collected selling tickets was spent to buy clothes for girls from poor Jewish families at Pesach.

We were taught to help less fortunate people. We celebrated all religious holidays at the boarding school. Jewish girls learned to celebrate Shabbat and light candles. We celebrated Pesach, Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah and Purim. Jewish girls also studied the rules of kashrut where we learned to make a menu for different occasions, cook and lay the table.

We had mandatory classes of religion - separate for believers representing different religions. The Rumanian government respected the right of national minorities to study their own language. We were taught to respect somebody else's religion. A rabbi came to teach Jewish girls Hebrew and Yiddish. We had a special classroom for our classes. There were also services in a small synagogue conducted by a visiting rabbi. Also there were a small Catholic church and Christian church.

There were rich libraries with a big collection of books in Yiddish translated into Rumanian. Jewish rules were well respected in the grammar school. Religion played the main role in the life of every family.

In 1940 the USSR declared an ultimatum to Rumania demanding Bessarabia and Moldavia. My father realized that the situation was rowing severe and came to Yassy to take me home. I had finished primary school and was in the 2nd year of secondary school. My grandmother Golda was terrified and begged my father to move to Rumania. My grandmother invited some Russians that had emigrated from Russia in 1918 that told my father about the horror of the Soviet power. We believed the Soviet propaganda about equal rights and friendship between all nations, the right to labor and rest and social justice. My father strongly refused from moving to Rumania. . When I was leaving the boarding school the nuns told me something that imprinted on my memory and stayed there forever: "Girl, we are sorry that you are leaving, because there can be no good in the country where people don't believe in God. There is no other truth on the Earth but faith in the God. Please remember what we've taught you and stick to these rules in life".