

Lev Dubinski's Grandmother Liya Rezis



My grandmother, Liya Rezis shortly after my grandfather Meyer died. My grandmother is in the mourning. Kiev, 1934.

My grandmother was born in a town near Belaya Tserkov in 1867. After she married my grandfather the newly weds moved to Belaya Tserkov. My grandfather earned little for sorting bags and my grandmother kept cows and sold dairies. They had five children.

When in 1915 the Pale of Settlement was abolished my grandfather Meyer decided to move his family to Kiev. He wanted his son Moisey to get a good education and arrange successful marriages for his daughters. In Kiev grandfather Meyer opened a store selling construction materials. It was located in the center of the town. Grandmother worked there as a shop assistant. The store was closed at the end of NEP in 1929. My grandparents moved to 21 Malo-Vasilkovskaya Street near the Brodski synagogue. They rented an apartment in a private house. There was a terrace and two connecting rooms in this apartment. They were poor, but their relatives came to celebrate Jewish holidays with them anyway. Their children and their families were not religious and didn't observe any Jewish traditions in their homes, but they enjoyed visiting their parents on Jewish holidays. My grandfather and grandmother were religious. They went to the Brodski synagogue. My grandmother wore a kerchief that was a rule for Jewish women. On Friday my mother's sisters and their families visited their parents and my grandmother lit candles. My grandparents always celebrated Pesach. I remember one celebration. The table was covered with a snow white tablecloth. There was red wine, fancy wine glasses and food on the table. I was surprised to see wine since we never had strong drinks at home. Grandfather sat at the head of the table with a white cloth with black stripes on him. This was a tallit. He had leather boxes on his forehead and on his hand: tefillin. I also remember Chanukkah: a merry holiday when the whole family got together to celebrate. Grandfather gave his grandchildren Chanukkah gelt. There was a chanukkiah with 7 candles and one in the center. When my mother's sisters and my father's brothers got together for a celebration they only spoke Yiddish.

Our grandmother spoke Ukrainian that she could hardly speak to the grandchildren [they were Russian speaking] and Yiddish - to her children and our grandfather. She was a very kind woman, but she had no education whatsoever. However, she loved us dearly and we did love her.