

Yelizaveta Zatkovetskaya With Her Father Haim Zatkovetskiy



I, Yelizaveta Zatkovetskaya, photographed with my father Haim Zatkovetskiy in Odessa in 1935. I went there, when our college moved from Kiev to Odessa, and my father came to see me right away.

My father Haim Zatkovetskiy was born in 1889, I don't know the exact date of his birth. My father got an elementary Jewish education. He studied in cheder till the age of 13 and then he followed into grandfather Benyum steps taking to farming. This is all I know about his childhood. I know that shortly after he married my mother, and they had a traditional wedding under a chuppah at the synagogue, my father was recruited to the army during WWI. My mother was pregnant with me. I was born on the 2nd day of Chanukkah in December 1916. My mother had mastitis that resulted in blood poisoning. She died in winter 1917 when I was one and a half months old.

When I turned 6, my father remarried. His wife Esther came from Bobrinets, a Jewish town in Kirovograd region. She didn't have children, and my father wanted to take me with him moving to her town, but my grandmother didn't let me go: she promised my mother that she would not let me grow up with a stepmother. She promised my father that I would visit them. Once every few months my aunts Manya or Yelizaveta took me to Bobrinets. I didn't like it there: my stepmother, who actually wasn't a wicked woman, was cold with me. She wasn't bad, but probably having no children of her own, she didn't have any motherly feelings. My father loved me dearly and missed me a lot. Therefore, one or two years later he insisted that they sold their house in Bobrinets to buy

one in Sagaydak. My father bought a small house across the street from where my grandmother lived. From then on I sort of lived with my father, though I spent all of my time with my grandmother. My father bathed me and washed my hair. He combed my hair plaiting in ribbons and putting fancy combs into my hair.

In 1932 I finished 7-year school. Two of my friends also wanted to become teachers and convinced me to go to the Pedagogical College in Kiev. There were interviews and exams, and I was the only one of the three of us who was admitted. I stayed in Kiev. I became a student of the Jewish Faculty of Kiev Pedagogical College. This faculty trained teachers of the Jewish literature and language for Jewish schools. There were many Jewish schools in Ukraine at that time. We studied in Yiddish. I lived in a hostel. There were huge rooms. There were 16 tenants in my room. We got along well and had a lot of fun together. Then the period of famine began. Our stipends of 24 rubles were only enough to buy tea and sugar plums. So we had sugarplums with boiled water. I wasn't going to quit the college. I even wrote my father that everything was fine and that we had good stipends. He wrote back that he was happy for me. In summer 1934 I visited my father, and he proudly walked with me around the town bragging of my successes.

I also became a Komsomol member, when I was the first-year student and took an active part in public activities. Again I was responsible for helping other students with their studies. After the second year of studies this Jewish Faculty moved to Odessa to be farther from the capital. We didn't understand then that it was a beginning of a slow attack on the Jewish culture and education. I lived in a hostel in Odessa. We celebrated all Soviet holidays, went to parades and festivals, but I also remembered the Jewish traditions. Being a Komsomol member, I couldn't openly celebrate holidays or go to the synagogue, but I tried to observe traditions quietly. I tried to do no hard work on Saturday and fasted on Yom Kippur without mentioning it to anyone. Of course, following the kashrut was out of the question since we were always hungry and ate whatever we could get.