

Sophia Stelmakher's Mother Evgenia Bekker



This is my mother Evgenia Bekker as a student of Odessa grammar school for girls. The photo was taken in Odessa in 1915. My maternal grandparents, Issac and Sarah Bekker, nee Mirochnik, had more than ten children. I don't remember how many exactly. The children were born weak and died in infancy. Only three survived: my mother's older brother, Grigory, born in 1898, my mother Evgenia born in 1902, and my mother's younger sister Polina, born in 1908. Their Jewish names were Gersh, Genia and Perl, respectively. My grandfather made good money, but my grandparents were not wealthy people. They spent money to buy food and clothes and the remaining amounts

were spent on providing education for the children and buying books. All children received religious education at home. They had a Jewish teacher to teach them to read and write Yiddish and Hebrew, and they studied the Torah and the Talmud. My mother could read and write in Hebrew. Children also studied music. I remember my mother's violin. Inside there was the inscription 'Stradivarius', but of course, it wasn't an original instrument. My mother kept this violin until the war and often played it. All three children studied in a grammar school in Odessa when they were nine or ten years old. It was a private school. There were separate schools for boys and girls. Rybnitsa was 150 kilometers from Odessa and during their studies the children lived in the boarding school, which had classrooms, a canteen and bedrooms for few pupils. The children could go home at weekends. Jewish children had no classes on Saturday. I don't know whether Jewish students had to forego their religious rules, kosher food for example, and traditions at school. My mother had two close friends, Jewish and Russian, from grammar school. She said that she was a very short girl. She did well at grammar school and finished every year with honors. My mother told me that when she came home on vacation after she finished the 1st grade my grandmother told her to walk along the street holding her diploma of honor so that everybody might see how smart her girl was. My mother finished seven years of grammar school. After the Revolution the grammar school was closed and my mother returned to Rybnitsa. The next year my mother went back to Odessa where she entered the Faculty of Philology of Odessa University.