

Rosa Gershenovich



This is a photo of me taken in Rybnitsa in the 1930s. My name is Rosa Gershenovich [nee Veltman]. I was born in Rybnitsa in 1914. We lived there until I was about 6 months old, and then we returned to Odessa. We lived in a one-room apartment in the center of the city. After my father's death in 1919, we moved back to Rybnitsa, to my mother's sister. In Rybnitsa my mother got a job as a nurse. In 1922 I started going to the Russian lower secondary school, which I attended for seven years. There was also a Jewish school in Rybnitsa. But my mother told me that she and my aunt had discussed the subject of which school I should attend and they decided that it was better for me to study Russian in order to be able to continue my education later. My school was in a two-story building in the center of town. The majority of the children at the school were Jewish. I mastered my Russian at this school. There were Russian and Moldavian children, but we Jews stood separately. We stayed together - not on purpose, it just happened to be so. We communicated and

played with the other children, but were not close friends with them. I can't say that there was any anti-Semitism. Only once, I remember, when we went out with other children and there were Russian girls there, one of them approached me and asked me to say the letter 'r'. It was a common belief that Jews couldn't pronounce this sound. I pronounced it perfectly and she said, 'Good'. They didn't want to play with any of the children who mispronounced this letter. Our life in Rybnitsa was rather plain. There was a dancing club, but it was closed in the 1930s. It was closed because there were only Jewish youngsters there. They danced Jewish dances like the 'Seven Forty' and the waltz. Life in Rybnitsa back then was like living in the Middle Ages. Electricity came to this town in the late 1930s only. There was no sewerage system or running water, and no central heating. There were only dirt roads. People had no education and the general level of culture was very low. Young people were always trying to leave Rybnitsa. I finished school in 1931. There was famine in Rybnitsa in the 1930s. We didn't have anything to eat and we were starving. My mother had two golden dental crowns. She took them to the Torgsin store and exchanged them for some corn flour to make corn porridge. I was admitted to the Financial College in Odessa. This was the largest city near Rybnitsa, and Surah's family lived there. It was good to have somebody to turn to. I lived at my aunt's. They lived in the center of the city in a big five-story building in a communal apartment with many tenants, but I don't remember them. I studied accounting, Russian and Ukrainian and mathematics. There were many Jewish students and teachers at the college. Nationality was not an issue at that time. I didn't have any real friends, but there were companions for going to the cinema or for a walk. I like Odessa very much. I liked going to the port, Richelieu Street and the center of the city. Once, I saw Verdi's Aida at the Opera. I don't know whether there were Jewish theaters in Odessa then.