

Rachel Gitelis



This photo of me was taken in Odessa in 1934 after I finished lower secondary school. There were several Jewish schools in Odessa before the war. In 1929 my sister, my brother and I went to the Jewish lower secondary school. I remember a big gym, and I also recall concerts where I sang Jewish songs. We had a very good singing teacher. We called him 'Tra-la-la'. We studied Yiddish language and literature, German and Russian, mathematics, history and many other subjects. We didn't have any special Jewish subjects. [Editor's note: In Jewish schools in the USSR the students were taught the same subjects as in other schools, but the language of instruction was Yiddish.] We studied in Yiddish and I still have a very good conduct of Yiddish. I had many friends of various nationalities. During my summer vacation after the 8th form I took up jobs at the port as an

accounting clerk to help my parents. I had many friends at school, but none of us was a pioneer or a Komsomol member. It wasn't mandatory at that time, and we didn't find it necessary. In 1933 there was a famine in the country. It was a hard time for our family. My father was ill and my mother couldn't find a job. My mother took her golden earrings to the Torgsin store to exchange them for some bread. My mother and Hava, Shimon's wife, were selling this bread at the market to buy some other food from the money. Every evening we had some bread, a loaf among the five of us, and some soup. Every afternoon I came from school and took a bowl of soup to Grandmother Brana, who was living with Uncle Shimon. Sometimes she stayed with us for a few days, but she always hurried back home 'to sleep in her own bed', as she used to said. She was very old, and it was hard for her to endure the hardships of the time. She died in 1934 when she was about 80. She was buried in the Jewish cemetery near the Chumka. All our neighbors came to her funeral. The Kaddish was recited in the cemetery and for seven days we all sat on the floor wailing for her.