

Iosif Rubalskiy And Feige Rubalskaya



This is my grandfather Iosif Rubalskiy, my grandmother Feige Rubalskaya, nee Bloovesteyn. This photo is from a newspaper, I guess it was a 'Vechirniy Kyiv' ['Evening Kiev'] September 1973 issue, this was an illustration to an article dedicated to the anniversary of the shooting of Jews in Babi Yar. I found this photograph of my grandfather and grandmother, my father's parents, in our abandoned and looted home when I returned there from the war in 1946. It was in the attic and water was dripping onto it through holes in the roof. Of course, the photograph was severely damaged. Unfortunately, I only have this newspaper copy. The editor's office had lost the original. This photo was taken in Kiev in 1934, one year before my grandmother died.

My father's parents came from Pavoloch town [120 km from Kiev], Kiev province during the czarist time, which became Zhitomir region after the revolution of 1917 [Russian Revolution of 1917]. Pavoloch was a Jewish town, one of many around Zhitomir. The Jewish population in Zhitomir region reached 50% of the total population. There was also Ukrainian and Polish population in the town residing in the suburbs. All residents got along well, made friends and visited each other.

My paternal grandfather's name was Iosif Rubalskiy, and my grandmother's name was Feige Rubalskaya, nee Bloovesteyn. Non-Jews called her Fania. I think my grandparents were born some time in the late 1850s - early 1860s. Iosif was a tall handsome man with a big beard and right black eyes. My grandfather wore a hat to go out and a kippah at home. My grandmother was short, slender and had fine features. She must have been beautiful, when she was young. She had gray hair that she always covered with a dark kerchief. My grandmother wore long dark skirts and long-sleeved blouses like all other Jewish women in the town. My grandmother was a housewife like all

married Jewish women. My grandparents had seven children. Jewish families usually had as many children as God gave them.

Jews in Pavoloch were religious and observed Jewish traditions. On Sabbath and Jewish holidays they dressed up to go to the synagogue. Women wore their best outfits and silk shawls. My father's parents celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home and raised their children to be Jews. Grandfather Iosif was a rather secular man. He read religious and fiction books, was interested in politics and subscribed to newspapers. He was well-respected in the town. Before the construction of railroad to Skvira [140 km from Kiev] my grandfather went to Kiev to convince the authorities to construct the railroad via Pavoloch and managed to make them accept his point of view. My grandfather was a very decent and fair man, the man of his word and duty.

After the revolution in 1917, when the Pale of Settlement was eliminated, my grandfather Iosif, my grandmother and their children moved to Kiev in 1918. My grandfather bought an apartment in a nice brick house in the center of the city, in 47, Artyoma Street. My father's brothers and sister got married in Kiev. They stayed to live in their parents' apartment with their families installing partials to divide the rooms. On Jewish holidays my grandfather, his children, their husbands and wives and their children went to the synagogue. They returned home to have a festive lunch. My grandmother was a very good housewife and cooked delicious Jewish dishes. There was a dining room in their house where the family sat at a big table.

In 1930s my grandfather went to work in the store where bread was distributed by cards. He supported us well. Sometimes I came to his work. My grandfather pretended he was tearing off my bread coupon [Card system] giving me some bread in return. I rushed home to share it with mama and my sister.

In 1935 Feige died. She was buried in the Kiev town cemetery. In 1941 my mama, sister and grandfather decided against evacuation. My grandfather remembered Germans from the time of World War I and believed they might persecute communists, but not Jews. They stayed and followed the commandant's order to walk to Babi Yar on 29 September 1941. Besides my grandfather, mama and my sister Shiva, who finished the 1st course of the Food Industry College in June 1941, my maternal grandmother Itta Pogrebinskaya, mama's sister Riva Pogrebinskaya, grandfather Iosif's sister Hana Leschiner and her husband perished in Babi Yar.