

Rita Wilkobrisskaya's Mother Bertha Vilkobrisskaya With Friends



My mother Bertha Vilkobrisskaya, nee Eishynskaya, (in the first row) photographed in Smolensk in early 1920s. Mother is wearing a uniform of the soldier of Red army of times of Civil War in the picture.

My maternal grandparents Ilia and Hasia Eishynskiy lived in the town of Lubcha in Minsk province. The family was very poor and their life became extremely miserable after grandfather Ilia died in 1914.

Grandmother Hasia had to raise seven children. She went to do daytime work: washed floors, did laundry and worked at the bakery. She had no education and had to do any work to support her children. The children helped her about the house. In 1917 the family moved to Minsk running away from pogroms. Older children went to work and the younger ones, including my mother, were sent to a children's home.

It was a Soviet children's home for orphan or homeless children of all nationalities. Children lived and studied there. The children also attended dance, singing or technical clubs at the boarding school. The children were raised in the socialist and communist spirit. There were about 300 children in this home, 10-12 children in one room, girls and boys lived separately. Children were allowed to visit their relatives at weekends, but my grandmother didn't take my mother home often since she didn't have food to give her. My mother didn't like to recall this period and told me very little about it. Before they moved to Minsk they observed Jewish traditions, but after moving to Minsk the children in the family got fond of revolutionary ideas and dropped religion. Grandmother celebrated few holidays as tribute to the past.

My mother Bertha Eishynskaya, the youngest in the family, was born in Lubcha town in 1907. From 1917 she and her brothers Efim and Max was raised at a children's home in Minsk where she got a lower secondary education. After finishing school in 1924 my mother went to work as envelope maker at the envelope factory in Minsk and later went to work at confectionery factory. In 1925 she joined Komsomol and in 1928 she became a candidate and then a member of the Communist Party.

In Minsk my father met Maria Eishynskaya, my mother's older sister, I don't know how or where they met. They got married and in 1923 their son Ilia, was born, he was named after his grandfather. Maria died of galloping consumption in 1926. Before she died she demanded that my father promised her to marry her younger sister Bertha. She also asked Bertha to agree to marry my father. She wanted him to be well set and cared for.

My mother was an active and cheerful girl. Her friends were her schoolmates of various nationalities. Nationality was an issue of no importance at that time. She had many friends in Minsk and Smolensk where she went to visit her sister Sophia. Therefore, when her older sister Maria asked her to marry her husband before she died, this suggestion was a complete and quite undesirable surprise for my mother. My mother didn't love my father, but grandmother Hasia said 'Bertha, marry Michael for Ilia's sake'. In 1929 my mother married Michael Wilkobrisskiy. At that time he had an important position in Minsk aviation regiment. They had a civil ceremony at a registry office and a wedding dinner at home in the evening. I guess, at that time my father was more like a friend to my mother. She wasn't in love with him, but she had to follow her sister's will. However, in due time she fell in love with him while he just adored her. The more my parents learned about one another the closer they became. They lived their life in love for 25 years.