

Raissa Gragerova



My mother Raissa Gragerova. This photo was cut out of a group photo of the students of the institute in Rouen, France, where my mother studied. It was taken in 1913. My mother's parents, Boris and Cecilia Gurvich, lived in Rostov-on-the-Don, an industrial and cultural town in Russia [900 km from Kiev], outside the Pale of Settlement. The majority of the town's population was Russian, but there were also Jewish families there. My grandfather, a merchant of Guild I, owned a garment store and a tailor shop. My grandparents had two children: my mother Cecilia and her sister Bertha. Their parents could afford to give them a good education. My mother finished grammar school in Rostov and left for France to continue her studies. She studied in Rouen for a year or two, and in 1913 she moved to Paris where she met my father. They dated for a year. They went to theaters, museums, small cafes and restaurants in Monmartre, enjoyed themselves and had no thoughts about returning to Russia. My father was going to study science in Paris, and my mother wanted to get education in order to become a doctor. But at the beginning of World War I, in the summer of 1914, my father and mother immediately left for Russia. It took them a long time to get to Russia, whereupon my father went to his family in Odessa, and my mother went back to Rostov. My parents didn't see each other for two years. My father was helping his father. My mother did her 3rd year at the Medical Institute in Rostov-on-the-Don and graduated in 1916. I believe my father went to Rostov to propose to my mother. All I know is that they got married in the fall of 1916. They had a wedding in Odessa. Although my parents were atheists, they gave in to their numerous Jewish relatives and had a traditional Jewish wedding with a chuppah, even though there were only the closest relatives and friends at the wedding.