

Zoya Lerman's Grandmother Elizaveta Gilik



This is a portrait I painted of my beloved grandmother, Elizaveta Gilik. The photo of the painting was taken in Kiev in the 1950?s. My grandmother always advised those who addressed her on various matters. She also helped her neighbors to resolve their problems. She always knew how to save money; she could give advice on medical treatment or on the upbringing of children. She was a very wise woman. My grandmother always made her own clothes and the clothes for her daughters and me. Before the war my grandmother took me to the ballet school at the Opera House. I was in the junior group. She made me beautiful gauze tutus. The war put an end to it all. I often heard Yiddish at home. When my grandmother and my mother wanted to be secretive, they

spoke Yiddish. My grandmother wore long, dark gowns. She always wore a shawl. Her favorite was a white silk shawl. She always wore it when she went to pray. My grandmother knew all the Jewish traditions and holidays, but I don't think she observed them all. She was afraid that somebody would report her to the authorities and that her family would suffer. There were always big festive dinners on big holidays. My grandmother was a great cook. I can't remember whether she cooked only traditional Jewish food, but I know that her cooking was delicious. She wasn't very religious. She went to synagogue only on holidays. I can't remember whether she prayed at home. I don't think she had time for that. She was always busy doing something. She worked from morning till night on weekdays and on Saturday. I don't remember her ever taking a rest. She had to earn money to provide for her family. She needed money to implement this dream. So, she began to bake rolls at home and sold them to earn money. She opened one window, made a sort of a counter on the windowsill and installed a partial wall in the room. She had very little space, just a few meters long. From this window, she was sold the rolls that she baked. Sometimes people came at night to buy her rolls. They were very delicious. My grandmother also made gomentash pies (little triangle pies with poppy seeds), strudels and pies. She managed to educate her children. I don't know exactly what kind of education their children got, but it was higher education. My grandmother always helped me with my studies at art school. I had to draw many portraits, and my grandmother never refused to pose for me. I painted this portrait of my grandmother when I was in the 7th or 8th grade. My grandmother didn't go to synagogue after the war. She could hardly walk so far. I don't remember her praying at home. My grandmother died in October 1960. It was a big tragedy for me. My grandmother had been with me since I was a baby. It was very hard for me to learn to live my life without her.