

Sima-Liba Nerubenko With Her Friends



I, Sima Rotzenmar, student of Kharkov University (upper row on the left) and my friends. Photo made in Kamenets-Podolskiy in 1932. I was very happy to come to see them, my friends. I was eager to study when I was a teenager. My parents supported this urge of mine. My mother used to say "If we couldn't get proper education let our children get it". Kamenka was a small town and the only educational institution there was a lower secondary school, so we couldn't wait to leave Kamenka for a bigger town to continue education. There was a higher secondary school in Peschanka, a small town 27 km from Kamenka. Two of my friends (I don't remember their names) and I went to Peschanka by ourselves and rented a room there. My parents paid my rent. Peschanka was no different from Kamenka with same small houses and a lot of Jewish population.

We finished school in 1927 and left Peschanka for Rybnitsa, a bigger town in 50 km from Kamenka. There was a rabfak in Rybnitsa. I went to work at a woodwork shop. I became assistant accountant at this company. This was considered to be a manual work position so I officially was a worker. This was important for me since my father was a private craftsman and only children that came from workers' or collective farmers' families had a right to study at higher educational institutions. Or it was necessary to have a working experience.

Between 1927- 1931 I was preparing to go to an institute. I studied additionally for entrance exams. After a year in 1928 I moved to Kamenets-Podolskiy from Rybnitsa. This was a bigger town in Western Ukraine in about 60 km from Kamenka with institutes, schools and training courses. I finished rabfak and then a preparatory course for applicants to an institute. I was fond of chemistry. I rented rooms from Jewish families where my landlords asked me to teach their daughters, nieces and granddaughters the Russian language. This was how I became a teacher. I didn't quite like this profession. When I had free time I went home to help my parents about the house. My mother grew older and couldn't manage the household. When young people left their parents' houses they spoke only Russian and didn't observe any traditions. This seemed old-fashioned to us, but when we returned home we became Jewish children again returning to our roots. However, we always identified ourselves as Jews, but this didn't matter at that time.

I found out that there was a Technological Institute in Kharkov, a capital of Ukraine at that time in Eastern Ukraine in 900 km from Kaments-Podolskiy. It prepared specialists for glass industry. This was what I dreamed of doing. In 1931 entered this Institute without exams since graduates from

rabfak were not required to take exams. I have the happiest memories about my life as a student in Kharkov. We lived in the hostel like a family helping and supporting each other. Nobody cared about somebody else's nationality. We lived in a big and beautiful town and we were young. We took the hardships of life easy. Now I recall that people around were starving and we never had enough food, but when one is young any difficulties seem to be temporary.