

Mark Derbaremdiker



This is a picture of me, taken in Kiev in 1937, when I was student of the Institute of Light Industry. My father recommended me to study to become an engineer. My Russian and Ukrainian was poor and I started learning these languages at 15. We had Pushkin in Russian and Shevchenko in Ukrainian. I learned their poems by heart and wrote them down. This helped a lot. I did well in mathematics, physics and chemistry. I studied a lot and finished the 9th and 10th grades in one year. I had to rush with my studies to start helping my father. In 1936 I arrived in Kiev and entered the chemistry department of the Institute of Leather Industry. I liked chemistry. My father was a soap-boiler, almost a chemist you could say. He could make other chemical materials like shoe polish, soda powder, etc. Almost all my co-students were Jews. There were probably three students that weren't Jewish. The director and dean were also Jews, and so were many lecturers. It was the same in many other educational institutions. It was because previously Jews hadn't been allowed to study. In the 1920s we were the first to go to schools and then continue our studies. I was an excellent student; we all were trying to do our best. I became a Komsomol member when I was a 2nd or 3rd-year student. However, during the war I lost my Komsomol membership card and never restored it. I also tried to avoid becoming a party member, not because of my political views but because I wasn't interested. I lived in a hostel on 32, Gorvits Street [Bolshaya Zhytomirskaya at present]. The building of our institute was under construction in Pechersk. We used to go to the

construction site. We started our studies there when we were in our second year. Chemical laboratories were on the first and second floors in the new building and our hostel was on the third and fourth. I lived there until 1939. Then we had to move to another hostel on Vladimirskaia hill, as our floors were to house some official institutions.