

Lazar Gurfinkel



This is a picture of me as a first-year student at Chernovtsy Medical Institute in 1946. In 1946 Jews, Romanians and Moldavians living in the USSR were allowed to move to Romania. The Soviet power allowed the population living in the areas that had joined the USSR in 1940 to move out. The border was open, and there was a minimum of formalities for departure. My brother decided to leave the country. My sister, who had divorced her husband in evacuation and came to live with us, decided to go with him. I was in the army when they made the decision to move. My mother decided to stay and wait for me to come. I was the youngest and my mother's favorite, and she didn't want to leave me there alone. When I came to Chernovtsy I went to the visa department to obtain a permit to move to Romania. I explained that my brother and sister were there and that my

mother and I wished to reunite with them, but the authorities refused. I went to their office several times until they told me that if I didn't leave them alone I would move, but to Siberia rather than Romania. So my mother and me stayed in Chernovtsy. Life was very hard: we were starving. There was a system of coupons to get food and everything was a big mess. Anti-Semitism was getting stronger. I decided to continue my studies and entered the Medical Institute in Chernovtsy. I was admitted without exams because I had been at the front. I didn't face any anti-Semitism at the Institute. Most of my fellow students were demobilized soldiers, and they didn't assess people by their nationality. Besides, they had met Jews at the front. Many Jews served as doctors. Anti-Semitism was getting stronger and stronger in the town from 1948, during the campaign against 'cosmopolitans', and Jewish workers of science and culture were accused of Zionism, espionage and disruption of the basics of the Soviet regime. The Jewish school and theater were closed. Many Jewish workers in the fields of science and art were fired. Many Jews were arrested on charges of espionage or Jewish bourgeois nationalism. Fortunately, there were no close friends or relatives of mine among them. My friends and I were enthusiastic about the formation of Israel in 1948. We viewed it as a home for Jews. My fellow student, an invalid of the Great Patriotic War and officer of the Soviet Union, a communist, wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Union saying that since the Soviet Union voted in the UN for the formation of Israel, veterans of war wanted to go to Israel to defend it from Arabs. They replied: 'We find it unnecessary?'. He moved to Israel in the 1970s when a number of Jews departed. I didn't think about going there at the time.