

Lazar Sherishevskiy With His Friends In A Pioneer Camp



My friends and I in a pioneer camp. This photo was taken in Liustdorf near Kiev in 1935. I'm the 3rd from the left. I don't remember the others.

I was born in Kiev in 1926. Our family lived with my maternal grandparents. We lived in two rooms of the 5-bedroom apartment that had formerly belonged to my grandparents, but later soviet authorities accommodated two other families in two rooms, and my mother's sister Mania lived in one room. My grandparents were very religious. They lit candles on Saturday and had silver stands for them. They often went to the synagogue and had old prayer books. My grandmother prayed every Friday. Being a pioneer at school where we were taught to be atheists, I tried to convince my grandparents to change their views, but without success, I guess. We had delicious traditional food on Pesach, delicious Haman ears [hamantashen] with poppy seed filling on Purim. When I knew them, my grandfather was a pensioner, and my grandmother was a housewife. She had never gone to work. She was very kind and loved me dearly. She believed I would become a writer. So, I became a literature man following my grandmother's forecast.

My parents spoke Russian at home and switched to Yiddish, when they didn't want me to know the subject of their discussion. Mama and papa had finished Russian gymnasium and were both atheists. When I started learning French at school, my father talked French to me at home. My father loved literature and taught me to like it. I knew many of Pushkin and Lermontov's works by heart. My father also knew Jewish antiques and Jewish literature. He told me Biblical stories with no reference to religion or Jewish traditions. My father also taught me to read Sholem Aleichem and he knew the works by Mendele Sforim. When I was small, we spent vacations at a dacha. After I spent my summer vacations in a pioneer camp in the woods near Kiev. I enjoyed my time there - there were

many children, we had lots of fun, played sports games, sang songs sitting by the fire and swam in the river.

I studied well at school and was fond of literature and poetry and wrote poems. I went to a Russian school: we spoke Russian at home and I didn't know Yiddish. Besides, my parents wanted me to continue education after school, and this was only provided in Russian, which was the state language. The school syllabi were no different from other schools, but the teaching was in Yiddish.