

Grigoriy Kagan



This is me upon finishing the 7th grade of a 7-year general education school. I was photographed for the school board of honor. This photo was taken in Kiev in 1933.

I turned 8 in 1928 and my mother and I went to the nearby 7-year Ukrainian school. I was the best pupil in my class. I was one of the first to become a pioneer in my class, though I was the youngest. I was elected chairman of the pioneer unit in my class and then chairman of the pupils' committee at school. There were few other Jewish children in my class. There was no anti-Semitism. There was no national segregation in my school.

I had many chores at home. My father got up very early. He had his horses harnessed before 5 o'clock in the morning to go to work. He hauled beer, sweets, sugar and he did the loading himself to save his earnings. He returned home by 5 p.m. and was exhausted after a day's work. Mama and I were waiting for him at the gate. I opened the gate and unharnessed the horses. Mama had a bucket of water for my father to wash himself. I was to feed the horses, give them oats or hay, give them water and clean them an hour and a half later. I was to take care of the horses. Occasionally I took the horses to a vet. I rode one horse and led another holding it by the bridle. I had to stand in line to the vet and these visits might last a day or so. I always smelled of horses. Once Pyotr Shebiakin, with whom I shared my desk in my class, said that I smelled of horse manure. I hit him. The teacher asked what the matter was and when I explained she told Pyotr to go out of the classroom and told me that I was right. I can still remember this.

There was a club and a gymnasium near our house. When I was in the 5th grade, I enrolled into a wrestling club. When I told my father in the evening, he said I was a fool, and on the following day I enrolled in a box club. My father didn't mind it, though he did not quite like the idea. Having attained numerous bruises and bumps, I was soon awarded a junior category, and before finishing the 7th grade at school I already had the 3rd grade in boxing. This helped me to enter a military school later. Boxing was not my single hobby. I went to the radio station the moment I heard there was one, established by Ierehim Tolochinskiy, a smart and keen Jewish guy. We studied the Morse receipt and transmission. It didn't take me long to learn it. Ierehim sent me to the short wave class on the corner of current Kreschatik and Institutskaya Street. My trainer was Aaronov, unfortunately, I cannot remember his first name. I learned the Morse code receipt and transmission promptly. Over a year later in 1936 I became a skilled radio operator. This became the main course of my life. It determined my future career success. In 1936 I returned to Ierehim's radio station, but this time I became an operator. The call letter of the radio station was UK5KJ, and I was assigned a personal international call letter: ORS 1030. There was an operator work schedule. I was to take up the shift, sign up in the roster and work 2-3 hours before the next shift man came. This short-wave transmission hobby spread all over the world at that time. I sent messages and someone responded. I corresponded with many people. To confirm our communication my partners were supposed to send me their QSL-cards and I sent them mine.

After finishing the lower secondary school I had to go on with my studies. I was admitted to the 8th grade of a Russian school. Russian was no problem for me. I joined Komsomol in the 8th grade. I wouldn't say I made my parents happy with my successes at school. The radio station was what I dedicated most of my time to. After classes I went to my club and returned home before my father was to come home. My classmates went to the cinema or theater and met with their girlfriends while I spent my time sitting by the radio transmitter sending my call letter on the air. I finished school in 1937.