

Mikhail Leger And His Co-Students



This is me, Mikhail Leger (fourth from left), 1st-year student of the Machine Building Faculty of the Moscow technical school of the Ministry of supplies, and my co-students. This photo was taken in Moscow in 1953.

In 1952 I finished school. I already knew that it didn't matter where I wanted to study. What mattered was where I could be admitted, being a Jew. I grew up quickly and I understood that the routinely anti-Semitism in the USSR spread to the state level. Jews were not admitted to colleges and faced employment problems. Mama wanted me to become a doctor, but I had no hope to be admitted to a medical college. I had to look for a college with lower competition where Jews were admitted, however few of them. Jews had to find a college where they could be admitted rather than starting from choosing a profession. My cousin Mikhail Voloshyn had practical training in Moscow. He found a college with the lowest competition and suggested that I took exams to Moscow Auto mechanic College. I went to Moscow and passed exams, but failed the competition. I returned to Mogilyov-Podolskiy, and went to work as a draftsman at the plant named after Kirov. In 1953 my former schoolmate and I went to Ivanovo town in Russia where we took exams to the Technological College. I failed again. I'm ashamed to say that my examiners discovered that I had a crib and ordered me to leave the classroom. I went to the admission commission to have my documents back. Another Jewish guy from Georgia, who also failed, went there with me. The secretary had the list of our documents in her notebook. When she opened it, we saw the word 'Jew' written against our names while there were no notes against other names. The guy from Georgia asked the secretary why this was so and she began to explain that the others were all Russian and there was no need to make such notes. On my way back home I stopped in Moscow and passed exams to the Design Faculty of Moscow technical school of the Ministry of supplies. I stayed in Moscow to study in this school. I lived in the dormitory for 3 years. I studied well knowing that I had to be a high-skilled specialist. I only once heard anti-Semitic expressions from a guy who came to Moscow from a province. The rest of students told me he was a fool and I should ignore him. I finished this technical school in 1956 and had a job assignment to a village in Kaluga region. The local authorities were not very happy to see me. There were hardly any specialists with a diploma. Even director of the enterprise where I was to work only had a certificate of lower

secondary education. The local bosses were afraid that I could spoil their careers. One year and a half later I submitted a letter of resignation they approved my resignation, though I had to complete the mandatory term of job assignments of 3 years. I went back home. My parents lived in our prewar house. I went to work at the design office at the machine building plant named after Kirov. This is the biggest plant in the town. I still work there, even though I've stepped over the retirement age.