

Sonia Leiderman With Her Schoolmates



This photograph was taken at the celebration of 1 May in our school canteen. I am sitting at the first table on the left, looking at the photographer. This photo was taken in Mogilyov-Podolskiy in 1940.

My parents got married in 1922. Mama was a housewife after getting married. Their first daughter was named Zina - this is a Russian name, Zisl in Jewish; she was born in 1924, their second daughter Etia was born in 1926. I was the third daughter in the family. I was born in 1932. I was named Sonia, and my Jewish name is Sosl. My younger sister Nyusia was born in 1939. She was given the Jewish name of Hana. She was called affectionately Hanusia - Nyusia at home, and this name was put down in her birth certificate. It was hard for my father to provide for the family of six of us. My father made plain furniture, doors and window frames. We could hardly make ends meet. Nyusia and I wore our sisters' clothes that they had grown out of.

Both of my older sisters went to the Russian general education school. I also went to this school in 1938, when I was 6 years old, but I was a tall and strong girl. My sisters taught me to read and write a little, and our teacher allowed me to come to the first form, though other children were admitted to school at the age of 8. I didn't study very well. I was a vivid girl and it was hard for me to sit still 45 minutes that our lessons lasted. The teacher always had to talk with mama about me turning around at school and talking to other children. I became a young Octobrist at school. I also sang in the choir and went dancing at school. There were Jewish children and Jewish teachers at school. There was no anti-Semitism at school. I think anti-Semitism appeared after the war.

In June 1941 my summer vacations began. Etia finished the 6th form and Zina was having her graduate exams after finishing the 8th form. The summer was warm. I spent time at the riverside and walked and played with my friends. On Sunday, 22 June, mama promised that we would go to the cinema. We were looking forward to Sunday since we didn't often go to the cinema. In the morning mama was doing housework and I was playing outside with my friends, when my father came into the yard and said that he heard on the radio that Germany had attacked the USSR and that Belarus and Kiev were already bombed. All I knew about war was that boys played the war,

and I could not understand why my father looked so worried and why my mother burst into tears. I was 9 years old and did not understand that this was the end of my childhood.