

Sarra Nikiforenko With Her Sister Polia Zelyonaya Brother Boris Zelyony And With Their Friends



I, Sarra Zelyonaya (upper row - in the middle), my sister Polia (first on the right) and brother Boris Zelyony (second on the right) and our friends, shortly before my wedding . The photo was taken in Smela in 1930.

There was a Jewish school named after Sholem Aleichem in Smela. I, my sisters and brothers studied there. There were all subjects taught in Yiddish and there were Russian and Ukrainian classes in it. We read Sholem Aleichem's stories about a hard life of Jewish children within restricted residential areas - the Pale of Settlement We felt happy that nothing like that would ever happen in our country again. There were portraits of Lenin in each classroom. We were told that only thanks to him we got everything that we had. When in January 1924 it was announced that he died we cried a lot. We couldn't imagine life without him. I remember it was freezing on that day and when I was running home tears from my eyes were turning into ice. I don't think my mother or father cared about Lenin's death. I studied well at school. I was praised for my successes. I didn't become a pioneer at school since I was older than the age of 14 until when children could become pioneers. I didn't join the Komsomol, either. I didn't participate in any activities, besides, my origin was far from proletariat: I was an entrepreneur's daughter. I wasn't 'politically educated' or active and I didn't care about Komsomol. I was very fond of singing. My friends and I used to go to the bank of Tismin River where we sang Russian and Ukrainian songs, but mostly Yiddish, of course.

Many boys fell in love with me when they heard me singing. Young people, used to get together in the evening: there was quite a bunch of us. We played lotto - it was a popular game then [the players got 3 cards each with numbers in them written in rows. The game master took wooden casks with numbers out of a bag and a player having this or that number took a cask and put it on a card. The winner was the one that was the first to fill up his card], went to the park - there was a big park in Smela. In summer we went boating on the Tiasmin River. We liked going to the cinema at weekends: there were silent movies, but we liked comedies, especially the ones with Charlie Chaplin. I had Jewish friends. We spoke Yiddish, but we had fluent Russian as well. The synagogue

in Smela was closed by atheists of various nationalities in 1929. My father was very unhappy about it. All churches were also closed during this period of struggle against religion. There was entertainment center at the sugar factory where young people came to dance in the evening. I don't remember other programs.

After finishing school in 1926 I entered the College of Food Industry in our town. Most of the students were Jewish. Jewish young people were eager to get a good education. I was to become a lab assistant for sugar industry. I was a painstaking student.