

Ilia Rozenfeld



I, Ilia Rozenfeld. This photo was taken on my birthday in a photo studio in Poltava in 1928.

I was born in Poltava on 1 August 1922. My father worked in the pharmacy and later he became director of a pharmaceutical school in Poltava. My mother worked and studied in college. I had a nanny, a Ukrainian woman from a Ukrainian village near Poltava. Unfortunately, I don't remember her name. I loved her dearly: she spent all her time with me telling me fairy tales and fables. She was a full member of our family living with us. She was very old. After living with us for ten years she left our house in 1933, during the period of famine thinking that my parents were not able to support the whole family. For some reason, my parents didn't insist on her staying and she walked back to her village and this is all I know about her. It was dramatic for me at the time since my nanny was the closest person I had.

Our family was wealthy for this period of time: my mother and father had a good education and were respectable people in the town. My father's sisters, their husbands and children often got together in our apartment to celebrate birthdays and Soviet holidays. We didn't observe any Jewish traditions or celebrate holidays. I don't remember any Jewish celebrations in my childhood. My friends were my parents' friends' children and my cousin brothers and sisters. One of my friends was Sonia, my father's friend doctor Rabinovich's daughter. My father also had a Ukrainian or Polish friend doctor Alexandrovich and his son Taras was also my friend.

We had a piano. My father never studied music, but he played by hearing. My aunt Rachil taught me music and later I had classes with teacher Vazhenin from the Music School in Poltava. He was

an old man and told me much about the last century composers whom he knew. I went to my first symphonic concert at the age of 10. Yuriy Levitin, a well known composer, was playing there. He played at the concert in the open air theater in the town park. I was amazed and took to liking music for the rest of my life. I had a dream to become a composer like Levitin. I even composed little pieces that my family listened to courteously.

In 1930 I went to the first form of a Ukrainian school. There was a Jewish school in Poltava, but my parents didn't send me there. We were an assimilated family and since there was no Russian school in the town they chose a Ukrainian school for me. By the way, the Jewish school was closed in 1937 and the pupils came to our school. I had no problems with my studies and enjoyed going to school.