

Valeria Boguslavskaya With Schoolmates



This is a class portrait from the 1st grade at school in Barnaul in 1946. I am the second on the right in the second row. Our teacher Valentina Belichenko is in the center. My best friend Sofa Galanternik is beside her. As a result of scarlet fever during evacuation in World War II, I had complications in my joints and couldn't walk for a long time. Later I went to kindergarten, but children got very little food there. I remember our teachers and nurses having full plates of food while we received just a little bit. We were always hungry. My sister picked me up after she got bread by cards and I asked her to give me a piece of bread because I wasn't in the condition to walk home. She had to pull me behind her as I couldn't walk properly. After we received a room from the plant I was sent to the kindergarten of the plant. The children got plenty of food there. I guess military enterprises had special supplies. It was a very good kindergarten. We even went to the countryside in summer. Once I came home from kindergarten and asked my mother, 'Who are Jews? Are we worse than the others?' She replied, 'No, we are just like anybody else. There are Russians, Ukrainians, Germans and Jews. You are a Jew and so am I'. This was the first time I questioned my nationality. In 1946 my whole kindergarten group went to the first grade of a Russian school. I faced anti-Semitism in Lubny, where we moved to in 1947. I went to the Russian school, located far from home, because I didn't know Ukrainian. When I was passing the Ukrainian school in the darkness the boys were shouting, 'Ah, Sarah!' [this Jewish name was used to abuse] beating me on the head with their school-bags. I told them that they were violating the constitution and that all people were equal in our country. Later my mother organized a group of the most incorrigible 'hooligans' that studied in our school and they escorted me home. I recited poems to them and told them of books that I had read.