

Basya Chaika



I, Basya Pan. I am two years old. The photo was made in summer 1928 in Kiev. My name is Basya. I was born in 1926 in Kiev. I was named after my grandmother - Basya Gorenstein, who died before the Revolution, that is, before 1917. I don't remember any Jewish holidays there. At home they spoke Russian. The oldest generation began to speak Yiddish only when they did not want their children to understand them. Their children did not speak Yiddish. In autumn of 1934 I went to school. I was 8 years old. From my preschool childhood I still have two vivid memories: the first one is related to the famine of 1933, when in front of my own eyes a homeless child stole the bread that my mother had just received on her bread-card. My mother began to cry, and I felt very

scared. My second memory is about our big yard, where we were friends with children of at least five or six nationalities. One child was once called a kike, so his parents filed a lawsuit against the offender. Court hearings were held, but I don't remember the end. My first contacts outside my family before school were made in my yard. I was the leader in all games (mostly active ones). My friends were usually boys. I never liked playing with dolls, but since the age of 7 I liked embroidering and sewing very much. We had forty children in our class, all of different nationalities. There were many children with purely Jewish names that had not been changed yet. Among teachers there were many Jews too, but students paid no attention to this fact: their political and human characteristics were much more important. At school, in the yard, at our shared apartment the language we spoke was Russian. We celebrated common holidays, with the exception of the first New Year, introduced in Kiev by Postyshev after it was forbidden during the Revolution. At the age of 10 I joined young pioneers, just like everybody else. By that time I had become a strong atheist and internationalist. Besides English, I also liked sports, track and field athletics, as well as gymnastics, but my mother believed that a Jewish girl from a good family should not go in for sports, and she allowed me to take dancing lessons only. We also often went to the children's Jewish theater, which was not far from our school. There were plays in Yiddish, which were translated into Russian by an actor on the stage.