

Mikhail Gauzner With His Schoolmates



This is me (in the center) with my schoolmates, members of the Komsomol bureau of the 9th grade, during 1st May celebration. We wear the bands across our chests with the slogan 'Peace to the world'. The photo was taken in Odessa in 1950. In 1949, when we returned to Odessa, I entered the 7th grade of a school near my home. It was a boys' school then. I studied with great interest and was engrossed in Komsomol activities. I was also a leading character, just like my father. I could be youthfully irreconcilable, which I regretted later on. I was the Komsomol organizer of my class and a member of the school Komsomol committee. I organized all the cultural work. While in the 8th grade, I was recommended to the post of the school Komsomol leader. It was then that my Jewish friends said to me for the first time, 'Mikhail, don't you meddle with this. You won't be approved by the district committee.' And, at that point, I recalled my father's past experience. I had a feeling that anti-Semitism only existed in adult life and that we, youngsters, were spared of it. I wasn't elected, of course. In those years I was on friendly terms with Mark Voloshin, a Jew, son of the very well-known surgeon in Odessa; Garik Divinskiy, also a Jew, and Garry Lorber, a Jew who got fascinated with religion and, after trying all known religions, dwelt upon Russian Orthodox Christianity. My other friends were: Felix Kogan, Yura Feldshtein and Mosya Vergilis, who had survived in the Odessa ghetto. I made friends with Russians, too: Oleg Malikov, Vitya Lutsenko and Alik Chaika. Among us one was valued for his human qualities and not for his nationality. I finished school with a golden medal in 1953. I dreamed of becoming a doctor. Yakov Voloshin, my friend Mark's father, more than once caught me in the act of looking through the medical books in his study, and, being aware of my dream, would talk me out of this and told me the great secret - the words of Ivan Deineka, the late rector of Odessa Medical Institute, 'I will have as many Jews at my institute as there are employed in the underground works in the mines of my native Donetsk. [Editor's note: Mining was not a typically Jewish profession in the USSR.] Mark also finished school with a golden medal and entered the Medical Institute. But Yakov Voloshin, the leading Odessa surgeon, had to go to be received by Deineka and ask humbly for his son. Hence I decided to follow into my father's footsteps and entered Odessa Polytechnic Institute - without exams because I had a golden medal.