

Lazar Gurfinkel With His Older Brother Moisey Gurfinkel



This is a picture of me as a pupil of the 3rd grade of the Romanian elementary school and my older brother, Moisey Gurfinkel. The photo was taken in Khotin in 1931 when my brother, a student at the Pharmaceutical Faculty of the Bucharest University, came home on vacation. Neither my brother nor I went to cheder or a Jewish school. There were two Jewish schools in Khotin: a private one and a state-funded one. In the state-funded school pupils studied in Yiddish and Romanian. The other school was a Talmud-Torah, a religious school where children studied the Torah and Hebrew. It was funded by the Jewish community and Jewish organizations. According to the Romanian constitution the children of ethnic minorities could study at a national school. We studied at the Romanian elementary school. My father wanted us to continue our education and believed that we would be better off if we started our studies in Romanian. Our primary education was free of charge, but when we went to grammar school our parents paid a set amount for each year. Students wore uniforms. Poor people couldn't afford to pay for their education, but for the middle class it was affordable. My brother and sister went to a lyceum after elementary school. After that they entered the Pharmaceutical Faculty of Bucharest University. They both wanted to follow into my father's footsteps. I went to the state elementary school when I turned 7. I faced anti-Semitism from the first days of school. There were only two Jewish pupils among the 40 of us in class. There were Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian pupils. They called me 'zhyd, zhydiura' [kike]. Sometimes I fought with them, sometimes I kept silent. Our teachers didn't encourage anti-Semitism and didn't demonstrate any. After finishing elementary school I went to the Romanian grammar school. In 1937 my brother graduated from university and came back home. He began to work at my father's pharmacy. My father was the manager of the pharmacy, and my brother joined two other pharmacists to do everyday work.