

Dimitri Kamyshan With His Neighbors



My neighbors and I in the yard of our house in 1931 in Kharkov. We were all friends.

I remember the two-storied mansion in the center of Kharkov, where we lived, and our cozy shady yard. My parents and I lived in a separate apartment in the same building, but I stayed with my grandmother most of the time. My parents went to work and didn't have time to look after me. I spent a lot of time walking and playing in the yard. There were German, Jewish, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian and Ukrainian families in the surrounding buildings. All neighbors got along well and spoke Russian. Nationality was of no significance at that time. My friends were Ira Chapanskaya and Bronia Chapanskaya, Valei Ledler, a German girl called Bella Bart and her brother Boris, among the Jews, the Yakshlis, who were Lithuanians, the Askovskis, a Polish family, and Vera and Lyonchik Kirilenko, Ukrainians. We played hide-and-seek, football, and so on.

I began to study at a Russian secondary school when I was 7. My aunts dressed me up and took me to school on the first day. There were children of different nationalities at school. When I was asked about my nationality I said, 'I'm a Ukrainian Jew' or 'I'm a Jewish Ukrainian'. My class tutor used to laugh at this and said, 'Your name is Zilberberg, and this means you are a Jew'. 'But my mother is Ukrainian', I said. 'Yes, but you have your father's last name. This means you are a Jew, and that's the nationality I'll put down in my register', he replied. I said, 'I don't care what nationality you put down in your register'. My classmates were: Benia Goldwasser and Izia Belenkiy, who were Jews, Gleb Kashyrin, a Russian, Lena Sidorenko and Galia Shkolnik, Ukrainians, and many more. Almost all of our teachers were Jews. Noah, our history teacher, Rebecca, our biology teacher, Esther, our geography teacher, Abram, the director of the school, and so on. We had Ukrainian teachers in mathematics and Ukrainian language. There was a Jewish Technical College near our school, and its name was written in Yiddish. Nobody in our family spoke, wrote or read in Yiddish.

We became a Young Octobrists in the 1st grade. In 1937, when I was in the 3rd grade, we became pioneers. I was very proud of it and had my coat unbuttoned on my way home for people to see my

red necktie. The six best pupils in the class were admitted to the Pioneer League first, the rest of the class was to join it later. We were very happy and sang on our way home, 'We are pioneers, the children of working people; the happy future is on its way, and the motto of pioneers is to be ready'. My grandmother made delicacies for me and laid my small table saying, 'It's your holiday today!', although she herself felt rather skeptical about the pioneer thing.