

Zhenia Kriss With Her Friends



My classmates and I on the last day of school in the 7th grade. I'm sitting on the very right, next to me is Alla Shumova, our pioneer tutor Boris Kimerfeld, Tania Sukhotina and Nelia Solovkina. The photo was taken in Kiev in 1934. I started school when I was seven. It was a Russian lower secondary school - seven years of studies - that soon became a higher secondary school with ten years of studies. There were Jewish schools in Kiev, but my parents believed that I would avoid language problems in my further education if I went to a Russian school. I had a few Jewish classmates. The other children in my class were of various nationalities. We were all friends and our teachers were nice to us. I enjoyed studying and finished school with honors. I was an active pioneer and, later, a Komsomol member. I was secretary of our school Komsomol unit. I conducted Komsomol meetings, arranged competitions between different classes, worked on improvement in studies and arranged the collection of waste paper and scrap. I took part in district and town Olympiads in chemistry, physics and mathematics. In 1937 my portrait was on the Board of Honor for the most advanced people in our neighborhood. I was very proud of it. This board was located in the park planted by pupils of our school, in front of the Rus cinema. We celebrated 1st of May and the Day of October Revolution Day at school and attended parades. We enjoyed singing Soviet songs. We didn't celebrate Soviet holidays at home. However, my friends liked to get together at my home after parades where my mother treated them to delicious pies that she was the best at making. Only my mother's cooking skills helped us to survive the famine of 1932-33 [famine in Ukraine]. By that time we were living in a one-bedroom apartment in a two-storied building. We had moved there in 1930, after our house was pulled down to create a construction site for the Arsenal Plant [the biggest military plant in Ukraine]. There was a kitchen and one room in our new apartment. The toilet was in the yard. There was a stove in the kitchen for heating the room, which my mother also used for cooking. During the famine my mother made pancakes from potato peels, and we also had sunflower seed wastes. Once my mother bought some cutlets at the Lukianovskiy market near our house. She bought them for our father, who needed some meat to be strong enough to work. My father had them and afterwards heard rumors that those cutlets were made of human flesh. He was sick for a whole week after he heard this. We sometimes got buns and small

pies at school. They were brought to school from the Arsenal Plant and the cable plant that were supporting our school. Several times a military unit, located near our school, invited us to their canteen where we had delicious soup. It was so great to have a bowl of soup at that time.