

## Zhenia Kriss With Her Friends



My friends and I, Zhenia Kriss, in the 10th grade. Olia Sukhinina is standing. From left to right sitting are Olia Gorenshtein, Nelia Solovkina, I and Alla Shumova when we finished school. The photo was taken in Kiev in 1937 on the occasion of finishing school. After finishing school with honors in 1937, I entered the Faculty of Chemistry at Kiev State University without taking exams. When I was a first-year student I became a member of the Komsomol committee of the university. I was responsible for cultural and social activities. I arranged lectures, issued a wall newspaper and had lots of errands to do. I had a nice group of friends. We got together at my friend Ida's place. Most of us were Jewish. I especially liked one of them - Isaac Gragerov, a third-year student. We were fond of theater. Our favorites were the Red Army Theater and the Ivan Franko Ukrainian Drama Theater. There were Soviet performances glorifying the Soviet way of life and communism. Sometimes there were classical performances, but they also had a touch of Soviet propaganda against capitalist society. We also went to the cinema. Of course, those films and performances

were of patriotic subjects, but the actors were very good. I liked reading most of all. We had a neighbor that worked at the Lukianovskaya prison. His name was Nikolay Bereg. He arranged a permit to the library of Lukianovskaya prison for me. It turned out to be a very good library. I borrowed great books from there: books by Russian and foreign writers and many historical books. I found it strange that the prison had such a wonderful library, because the inmates weren't even allowed to read. We [Komsomol members] were educated people and had information about fascism and about the war, which was a real threat to European countries. We were aware of Hitler's views and saw the film Professor Mamlock. But I got really frightened when the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was signed. Although the official propaganda stated that it was an assurance against Hitler's aggression, I thought it was very dangerous to come to any agreement with fascists and that the signing of this pact was a precursor of war in itself. In 1939 a one-year course for reserve nurses was established at the university. I was secretary of the Komsomol organization and was responsible for enrollment to this course. The best way was to be the first to enroll and I did so, although I was scared of everything related to medicine: injections, blood or dissection rooms. All girls in our group followed into my footsteps. I was very good at theory, and at training classes my friends were giving injections and applying bandages for me. After finishing this course we received certificates that said we were reserve nurses. We also had civil defense training at which we were taught to use gas masks and put out firebombs. In general, the country was preparing for a war.