

Efim Pisarenko And His Friend



This is a picture of me and a friend on the 'virgin land' in Northern Kazakhstan, where I worked for a year before I entered university. The photo was taken in 1957. . I tried to enter the university in Chernovtsy, although I knew what rector Leutskiy had said, 'There will be as many Jews at university as on the virgin lands'. [Editor's note: The rector was referring to the virgin lands in Kazakhstan, where historically there were no Jews.] At that time the Soviet power started another utopian project - the development of the virgin lands of Kazakhstan, although this was saline land and nothing could grow there if there was no irrigation. At my entrance exams I got a '5' for composition, but a '3' in history, although history was my favorite subject and this was evidently a prejudiced attitude. I failed to enter university, and I couldn't depend on my mother any longer, so I went to the virgin lands. I worked there for a year. Then I decided to try again in Vologda. In 1955 my brother Abram lived there. Anti-Semitism in the far-away land wasn't as pronounced as in Ukraine, probably because there were fewer Jews there. I entered the Department of Physics at Vologda University. I studied well. Money was always a problem. I always passed my exams in winter in advance so that I'd be able to work at the wood cutting site. It was hard but well-paid work. My earnings for a month or a month and a half lasted me until summer. I went to Chernovtsy in summer. I worked at the children's summer camp where I had meals and earned some money. And I could see my mother, my father and my friends. After university I got a job assignment in a Moldavian village and worked there for two years as a teacher of physics. Afterwards I returned to Chernovtsy. It was hard to get a job there - my Jewish nationality was a problem. I got a part-time job first and then became a full-time teacher of physics.