

Nina Polubelova



This is me when I was in the 9th grade. One of my classmates took my picture after lessons. The picture was taken in Riga in 1952. Upon our return from evacuation we hoped for a better life. When we returned to Riga, my father came home, too. He had been demobilized from the army. He started working as a driver. My mother worked in a pharmacy. I went to the third grade of a Russian school. It used to be a Lettish school before the war and the teachers spoke poor Russian. Half of the children in my class were from Latvia, and half the newcomers from the USSR. It was of no importance for us. Maybe it would be harder for adults to get along, but the children were more flexible. All of us were pioneers, and then Komsomol members. In other words, we were Soviet children. Though, people let me feel that I was a Jew. Teachers treated me well, anti-Semitism was displayed among children, but I never felt it coming from Lettish children. Offensive words were spoken by children who came to Latvia from the USSR. I was fond of chemistry in school. I liked that subject from the first class, and it became more interesting when we started organic chemistry. I got excellent marks in chemistry and before finishing school I firmly knew that I would

like to become an organic chemist, but my mother wanted me to become a doctor and insisted that I should enter a medical institute. Maybe during my entrance exams for the first time in my life I felt that I was different from anybody else. I can't say that the examiners tried to lower my grade, but I felt that the attention was focused on me and that I was tested by other criteria, not only knowledge. I entered the dentistry department of the Medical Institute in Riga and found out soon that my mother, who had worked in medicine for a long time and knew a lot of doctors, pleaded with her acquaintance doctors for me in the board. Probably my mother could understand things were unperceivable for me at that time, and that there would be no chance for me to enter. I finished two terms at the Medical Institute and understood that it wasn't my cup of tea. I wasn't willing to work as a doctor all my life. I was lucky to transfer to the second course of the Chemistry Department of Riga Polytechnic Institute. I did well. I had excellent marks during the entire period of studies. I didn't feel anti-Semitism. Both teachers and students treated me fairly.