

Isaac Rozenfain



This is me before entering the technical school. This photo was taken in 1937 in Kishinev. I was born on 28th October 1921 in Kishinev. My father was the director of the Jewish elementary school of the Society of Sale Clerks for Cooperation on Irinopolskaya Street. Mama worked as an assistant doctor in a private clinic. I went to the Jewish school where my father was director. We studied most subjects in Romanian, but we also studied Hebrew and Jewish history in Hebrew. Regretfully, I don't remember any Hebrew. After successfully finishing elementary school, I entered the Aleku Russo boys' gymnasium. This building on the corner of Pushkin and Pirogov Streets houses one of the university faculties now. This was the only gymnasium in Kishinev, which exercised the five percent quota for Jewish students. However, my father decided I should only go there - that's how good it was. Our Jewish neighbors' son, who was about three years older than me, studied there and my parents decided I should try. There were Romanian and Russian boys in my class, but only three Jewish boys: Kryuk, Balter and I. We had very good teachers. I remember Skodigora, our teacher of mathematics. His brother taught us natural sciences. Our Romanian teacher was Usatiuk, a member of the Iron Guard. There were fascists in Romania at that time. Usatiuk gave me a '9' - we had marks from 1 [worst] to 10 [best] - for the Romanian language in the 2nd or 3rd grade, and this was a high mark, and he hardly ever gave such a high mark to anybody else. This was quite a surprise for me. I had moderate success at the gymnasium, but I was fond of sports like everybody else. I went to play ping-pong at the gym of the Jewish sports society Maccabi on Harlampievskaya Street. I also played volley-ball for the team of our gymnasium. There were competitions between the town gymnasiums for boys. I loved cinema and wanted to become a film director. I often went to the Orpheum on the corner of Alexandrovskaya and Pushkin Streets, the Coliseum on Podolskaya Street, and the Odeon cinema. I didn't want to miss a single movie. However, this was a problem. We weren't really wealthy and a ticket cost 16 Lei, which was rather sufficient for a gymnasium student. I remember movies with Gary Cooper, Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo. I particularly liked step dance and never missed one movie with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The gymnasium students liked walking along Alexandrovskaya Street, the Broadway of our town. We walked from Gogol to Sinadinovskaya Street, on the right side of the railway station. We made acquaintances, walked and talked. This love of walking played an evil trick on me. One afternoon, when I was supposed to be in class, I was noticed by a gymnasium tutor, who was to watch over the students. I was walking with a girl and I was smoking a cigarette. I was 15 or 16 years. I was immediately expelled from the gymnasium, and my father's attempts to restore me there failed. The family council decided that I should go to a technical school. I entered the construction technical school on the corner of Zhukovskaya and Lyovskaya Streets.