

Gisya Rubinchik With Her Friends



This is me (on the left) with my friends. The photo was taken in 1933 when I was a 7th grade pupil in Shklov. Next to me are my friends Bella Libina and Zina Raskina. Bella survived the siege and worked at some institute. I don't know anything else about their lives. I was born in 1919 in the town of Shklov located on the Dnieper river. When I was young there was a magnificent park in this town, second after the one in Minsk in size and beauty. Shklov was a small, green, and very picturesque town. It's famous in Russian history. When it was still a village, Catherine II declared it one of her favorites. Poles lived there, Belarus and a lot of Jews, too. They were generally craftsmen. Everyone lived in peace and friendship. The doors of our house were never locked. Our parents wanted us to get an education, and we tried our best to study well. Up to the 4th grade I went to an elementary school. Later I changed to another school, where I studied up to the 8th grade. And it was in a third school that I finally completed my secondary education, the 10th grade. All schools were Soviet schools. I studied German at school, but I didn't like it. It was an ordinary Soviet school with Komsomol and pioneer organizations. I had very good teachers. My teacher of chemistry was Irina Antonovna. She was so graceful, swarthy and slim - I liked her very much. Therefore I took a great interest in chemistry. Nobody ever paid any attention to people's nationalities at school. We made friends, fell in love. My first love was called Vladimir. He was fair-haired, brown-eyed, from a Belarus family. He joined our class in the 10th grade and was a big troublemaker. I frequently fought with him. I was rowdy and always talked back to anyone. I remember a school party in the 10th grade. We were reciting poems. When somebody read verses,

I always had tears in my eyes. After the party we had a discussion about who was reading what at the time. I said that I was reading a novel by Balzac, 'Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes' [English title: A Harlot High and Low]. It turned out that Vladimir was reading the same book. And he called me by the name of one of the heroines - Esther. This is how our love affair began?. From my childhood on I was a romantic person, taking great interest in literature and poetry. And I still like to draw, mainly portraits. Even now, that I can hardly see any more, my hand reaches out for paper. I was fond of walking in the forest and always had my head in the clouds. My husband used to joke that he brought me down from the heavens onto the earth.