

Nina Khlevner At The Age Of Eleven



This is me aged 11.

The picture was taken in 1935 in the town of Slavyansk (now Ukraine). I lived there with my parents in 1933-1938.

I went to school at the age of seven in Belovodsk. It was a standard Soviet school with all studies in Russian. I changed schools very often because we moved frequently; it was connected with my father's job.

After Belovodsk I went to school in Slavyansk up to seventh grade, later in Rogachyov for half a year, then again in Slavyansk until 1939 and finally in Shepetovka. My favorite subjects at school were chemistry and literature.

I was very often favorite pupil among teachers. Only once I met a teacher with whom I could not have good relations. It was our teacher of geography and our form-master.

Maybe it meant a lot for her that I was a Jewess. She liked to make an inquiry, 'Hold up your hands those who are Russian. Those who are Ukrainian. Those who are Jewish.' She was a hidden anti-Semite.

There was no public anti-Semitism, but such a procedure involuntarily made one reflect. She very often made this experiment. She was interested in the national content.

Everybody understood that neither Russian nor Ukrainian caused special emotions. A Jew does cause such emotions. Everybody turns around to see who is a Jew. It led to national discord between children.

I myself felt uneasy. I had a very bad attitude to that teacher, so did she to me. We hated each other.

I did not have private teachers. My friends were both Russians and Jews. We did not really feel the difference as we considered ourselves Soviet above all. I loved to read, especially historic and adventurous novels.

Once I was in a summer pioneer camp and twice in a sanatorium in Slavyansk. But I spent most of the time with my parents.