

Israel Gliazer



This is me, Israel Gliazer, wearing a costume of a Ukrainian kozak at a Purim celebration in Podgaitsy in 1930s.

I was a spoiled boy being the youngest in the family. I had my whims: one time I wanted to have better clothes than we could afford or toys that children from wealthier families had. I didn't understand that one had to work hard to earn one's living. I went to cheder at the age of 5 and I studied two years. Then I went to a state lower secondary school. There was no Jewish school in Pogdaytsy. There were Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish children in our school. There wasn't any national segregation in those years. We studied Polish and Ukrainian literature and language.

Children attended religious classes according to their faith. Jewish children were in class of rabbi Levental.

I enjoy recalling the years of my youth. When I turned 13 I had a bar mitzvah ritual. Long time before my coming of age my parents bought me a tefillin and taught me to wind it on my right hand and head, but of course, I did it after I had bar mitzvah ritual. During bar mitzvah I recited prayers in Hebrew. There was a party at home. Of course, I wasn't a deep believer like my parents, but I tried to be loyal to hem and attended the synagogue as required. I finished school in 1933 went to work at the printing house where Velvel was working.

The situation in the country was uncertain in the 1930s. There was a number of Zionist organizations in Poland and there was also a socialist and a communist party in Poland. I joined the Zionist organization of young Jewish people Hashomer Hatzair, that means a 'young guard'. It was a left-wing social democratic direction preparing Jewish young people to life in the Jewish state and its protection from enemies. It was something like a scout organization: we did physical training, wore uniforms and ties and learned contemporary weapons. However, our organization did not call us to armed struggle for the establishment of a Jewish state that was different from followers of Zhabotinskiy. We didn't have armed struggle in our plans. Each organization had a club where young people had classes and observed Jewish holidays. I remember Purim in 1934 when my sister Sarra and I attended a celebration in our club wearing our costumes.

However, peaceful life was not long. Hitler came to power in Germany and we were aware of his attitude toward Jews. In 1938 followers of fascists made their appearance in German neighborhoods, in Poland. The idea of National Socialism had many followers and reached our town gradually. There were fights between the various national groups, Polish and Ukrainian, but at times they united to fight with Jews: their idea was that Jews were to blame for all their troubles and Hitler exterminated them for a reason. Once we were also attacked by a group of Polish teenagers when we were coming out of our club, but there was no dramatic outcome that time, it was just one of these fighting's and cursing.