

Grigoriy Fihtman At The Age Of Five



This is me, Grigoriy Fihtman at the age of five. This photo was taken in Zhmerinka in 1930. This was the first time I was photographed in a photo shop in the central street. I remember staring at the photograph as if he were a miracle. Before evacuating from Zhmerinka I grabbed this photo that was on the table and put it in my pocket. I had this photo during the whole time of evacuation. It is very dear to me. I show it to my grand children.

I was born in 1926 in Zhmerinka. Zhmerinka of my childhood was a small town. There were one-story building with few two-story houses in the center. There was a nice park founded by a landlord named Belinskiy and this park was named after Belinskiy. On Soviet holidays and

weekends people enjoyed walking in this park. Zhmerinka was a big railroad junction and had one of the best railroad stations in the south of Ukraine: it was a big and beautiful stone structure and there were few platforms. There was an underground passage leading to one platform.

I went to a Ukrainian school at the age of 8 in 1934. Children went to school at the age of 8 then. Since my father was a railroad worker I went to the railroad school that was prestigious in the town. It was located near the railway station. There were best teachers and classrooms were better equipped in this school. There was electricity at school and I liked coming there. There was light at school! I liked literature, history and geography. I had all excellent marks in these subjects. I didn't do so well at physics or mathematic. There were many Jewish children at school and there were also Russian and Ukrainian children.

Two of my close friends - Volodia, Ukrainian, and Shulim, a Jew, lived in my neighborhood. We were good friends. We went to different schools. Although Volodia's father was a railroad man his parents sent him to a Russian school. Shulim also went to the Russian school. We played 'hide-and-seek, played with a ball and a wheel. I gave them books on their birthdays. Their parents offered us tea, cookies and jam on their birthday parties. My friends also came to my birthday parties. Both of my friends perished at the front during the Great Patriotic War.

I became a pioneer in the 3rd grade at the age of 10. I was an active pioneer. It was so interesting! This red necktie! Silk ties were the best. Not everybody could afford one. We didn't tie them round our necks, but there was a special clip. There were three flames on a clip - very beautiful. I loved pioneer meetings. I especially liked dance, sing, or recite at school concerts. On 1 May or on October revolution Day someone from the town house of culture attended our school concert and I got an invitation to perform in the town amateur club. I was also a young correspondent of the all-Union newspaper 'Pionerskaya Pravda' (Pioneer Truth) and Ukrainian newspaper 'Yuny Leninets' (Young Leninist). In the 6th and 7th grades I wrote articles about school life. I corresponded with editorial offices. Of course, these letters were gone when we evacuated. I also liked drawing. Our neighbor taught me to draw portrait copies of Stalin, for example.

I don't know how many synagogues there were in Zhmerinka. I remember one located nearby. My parents went to the synagogue and when I grew older they took me several times for a minyan. I felt honored to be invited to the synagogue. However, I had to go in and out of there unnoticed since I was an active pioneer. I found everything interesting: a nicely decorated rostrum, an ark containing the Torah with a beautiful velvet curtain. Everything looked festive. There was a balcony for women on the second floor. Men sat in the pits, speaking theatrical language. Women were in kerchiefs and men wore their yarmulkes or hats. I've never tried on a yarmulka. I had a tubeteika cap. Actually, most people wore headpieces at the time. Boys like colorful embroidered tubeteika caps. It was allowed to wear it to the synagogue.