

Olga Bernstein With Her Schoolmates



This is a photo of me (in the center below) with my schoolmates in the 8-year Jewish school in Kiev. This photo was taken on the occasion of finishing school. Kiev, year 1936.

I was born in 1920. Everybody called me a 'little pretty girl Olen'ka' 'myzynka', which means 'little one' and dearest. I went to the Jewish kindergarten and then I went to a Jewish school in 1928. The subject curriculum in this school was no different from Russian or Ukrainian schools, but we studied all subjects in Yiddish. When I was in the first grade my brother was in the 7th. I often ran to my brother's class. I liked staying with them a little.

Our school was near the synagogue in Stalinka. My mother and father always went to the synagogue on holiday. My mother wore a kerchief and sat upstairs and my father sat downstairs. An academic year started in September and there were all Jewish holidays at this period and we always dropped by the synagogue when we knew that father and mother were there. We actually always passed by the synagogue going home from school. Then we went home with our parents. I don't know whether my parents were very religious. Nobody taught us, kids, to pray or get involved in any rituals. However, we liked holidays when there were delicious things to eat. My mother and father spoke Russian and Yiddish to one another and to us.

We had a hard life. We had lots of fun getting together on birthdays, singing songs: they were mostly Soviet songs... We were a poor family since only mother was working. My mother liked all relatives. However little space we had there were always some relatives staying with us. My brother's friends often visited us and there were always lots of people. I went to do my homework with a friend of mine. There was a record player playing and my brother and sister's friends dancing and singing at our home. After doing my homework I came home and counted galoshes to know how many guests we were having. They used to dance with me to master their dancing skills and so I learned to dance with them. They used to say about our apartment: 'They are poor, but they always have so much fun!'

I studied well at school and got along well with my schoolmates. I finished the 8th grade of my Jewish school. There was no 10-year Jewish school, but I wanted to continue my education. I went to a Ukrainian 10-year school. In 1939 I entered the Geography Faculty of Kiev Pedagogical College. I finished two years before the Great Patriotic War. I was the only one in our family who received a higher education.