

Gherda Kagan In The Second Grade



This is me, Gherda Kagan, (by the bust of Stalin) in the second grade. This photo was made in Odessa in 1941. Our form was gathered in the school -hall when the school-year was over. At five I learned to read well, but my writing was poor. They didn't want to admit me to school at the age of 7, but when I turned 8, I took an exam and admitted me to the second grade. I felt very hurt. First grade schoolchildren were greeted with an orchestra and flowers and when I came to school nobody paid any attention to me. There were only two marks at school: 'good' and 'excellent'. My first mark was 'good' in behavior. I came home very proud, but my mother told me off so seriously that I understood that I was not allowed to chat in class. Before the war I didn't understand the difference between Jews and Russian. I believed that since I was born in Leningrad in the USSR I automatically became Russian. My parents never told me that I was a Jew. I saw all children with painted eggs at Easter while I never had one. When I asked my mother she said: 'All right, next time you will have one' and I calmed down. In spring 1941, probably under the influence of conversations that I heard I had a dream that Germans came and grabbed me by my plaits and pushed me down to the flame on a primus stove. I woke up from horror. On 22 June, on Sunday, I was having a music class in our neighbor's room since there was no space for a piano in our room. As a rule, my mother sat there with me, but this time she sent me to practice alone. An hour later the hostess said to me: 'Your mother is looking out of the window. She wants you to come home'. They told me at home that a war began. From the first days a public garden near the railway station was full of refugees from Bessarabia. Tenants of our house went to dig shelters under the supervision of our house maintenance manager. We, children, delivered water in cans.