

Lazar Sherishevskiy With His Friends



This is our literature association in Kiev. This photo was taken in Kiev in 1940. I am standing the first from the left. My friend Naum Korzhavin, who became a famous poet, is beside me. Sitting: the first from the right is Boria Komskiy, he lives with his mother in Lvov, Grisha Shurmin, he lives near Moscow, he's a writer, standing beside him is Arkadiy Gurevich who lives in Israel now - these are all I remember. Recently this photo was published in Israel media. My friend sent me this photo from Lvov in 1965, he has two copies while mine was lost in evacuation.

I studied well at school and was fond of literature and poetry and wrote poems. I went to a Russian school: we spoke Russian at home and I didn't know Yiddish. Besides, my parents wanted me to continue education after school, and this was only provided in Russian, which was the state language. My school friend became a world-known poet: he was Emmanuel Mandel. Later he had a literature pseudonym of Naum Korzhavin [Naum Korzhavin, born in Kiev in 1925, a poet and playwright. In 1947 was arrested for poems against Stalin and his regime. 1947 - 1952 was in exile in Siberia. In 1973 was expelled from the Union of writers and emigrated from the USSR and now lives in the USA]. We were friends and attended a literature club at school. We are still friends. He visits here and then we meet. He is an old, severely ill man now. In his memoirs he writes that his grandmother and grandfather had a good knowledge of the Jewish history and rituals. His grandfather was a Jewish theologian [the interviewee probably means a learned man], a tzaddik. Some of his ancestors traveled to Palestine before the revolution, so he knew about Jewry better than I did. Here was also a Jewish theater in Kiev, a Jewish music ensemble led by Zinoviy Shulman, a former cantor, a Jewish singer. There were two wonderful Jewish singers: Naum Epelbaum and Zinoviy Shulman. However, my parents didn't take me to the Jewish theater or Jewish concerts. They took me to the Russian theaters to see operas. I learned to play the piano for about two years, when my father could pay for it. Later, in the GULAG, I benefited from this ability by playing in the prisoners' theater.

In 1938 during the period of arrests, my father was arrested and executed. I got to know that he was executed only 50 years later. At that time I only knew that my father had problems at work

and that he was arrested. I wished I could believe this was a mistake, they would find out and my father would return home. My father's arrest brought me a lot of pain, but besides all, my schoolmates and I started thinking about life. I used to be a common pioneer before, but then my friends and I started thinking and I began to write poems. I believed my father and neighbors to be innocent people as well as many other people who were disappearing at the time. We discussed this with my friends and somebody must have reported on us. As a result, Emmanuel Korzhavin was expelled from school and so was I. We were accused of criminal thoughts. The school principal was particularly emphasizing that I was the son of an enemy of people and was politically unreliable. My mother managed to make arrangements for Emmanuel and me to go to another school, when the war began. My father's arrest had an impact on my further life. When they were going to put me in prison, they wrote in their papers: 'Was malicious about the Soviet power for his father's arrest'.

In summer 1941 mama wanted to send me to a pioneer camp. He told me she had made all arrangements, but then the war began. We evacuated with my mother's enterprise: mama, grandma, Aunt Maria and I.