

Semyon Vilenskiy



This is me. This photo was taken in 1931, in a photo studio in Moscow. I am 3 years old here.

Papa and mama met in Moscow. Papa was a friend of mama's brother Grigoriy. Grigoriy was a financial officer during the Soviet period. Papa visited Grigoriy at his home. They got married in 1919. After my parents got married my father received two rooms in a 4-bedroom communal apartment in the center of Moscow. The building was constructed in 1914. It's still their, an old house. There was a sculpture of a knight at the entrance. I was born here in 1928. Mama was a real Jewish mama. I grew up healthy thanks to mama. She was a great housewife. She was very fond of music, and she raised me to love songs and literature. She was a good friend.

I went to the Russian gymnasium across the street from our home. My sister studied in this gymnasium. Later it became a Russian school. There were very good teachers in it. I studied well

and didn't have to work hard for it. I was fond of Russian literature and read a lot of Russian classical books. I became a young Octobrist, and a pioneer at school. In summer my parents usually rented a dacha [countryside cottage] near Moscow where my mother, my sister and I enjoyed the quietude, the birds singing, fresh cow milk that peasant women from a neighboring village brought, and each other's company. Many other people from Moscow also rented dachas and we socialized with them. We usually made new friends in summer. We got together to play the lotto, to party. My father joined us at weekends. He brought food with him. We rode bicycles, bathed in the river and got suntanned by the end of summer. I had many friends at school. We went to the cinema and theaters, played with a ball at the school stadium and nothing betokened the gloomy years to come. Like all other children of my age I was careless and had no premonition of the upcoming war.