

Ferdinand Chernovich



This is a photo of me. The picture was taken in Moscow in 1938 for our family album when I turned 15.

In 1931 I went to the first grade of Russian secondary school. It was the school in the closest vicinity to our house. It took me 15 minutes to walk to school. I was the only Jew in my class, and of course I felt anti-Semitism in every day life. I was teased and hurt.

When I managed to stand up for myself, teasing and hurting stopped. I could not feel anti-Semitism from teachers, moreover I felt their support and assistance. Our teachers were very good. Most of them came from intelligentsia.

I liked learning at school. I was an excellent student since the 1st grade and I finished school with excellent marks in my certificate. I did not learn things by rote. I had a good memory and it was easy for me to learn things. Chemistry was my favorite subject in senior grades. I also studied chemistry in extra-curriculum classes.

I was confident that I would continue my education in the chemistry department of Moscow University. It was a realizable dream:

Anti-Semitism was felt on social level, but it was not displayed on the state level before war. Jews were accepted in institutions of higher education and employed without a problem.

I was a young Octobrist in the first grade. Then I became a Pioneer, joined Komsomol. I did not even admit a thought that it was possible not to join Komsomol.

I joined Komsomol in 1939 at the age of 16. I was never interested in social life, and I kept away from all kinds of social events. I loved reading and playing football with the guys at the stadium.

During the weekend my mother and I used to ski during winter and in summer time we took long strolls and went to the forest to gather berries and mushrooms.

At that time I did not understand what was going on in the country. Even older and more experienced people did not understand what was happening.

When in the year of 1937 repressions and Great Terror started. I did not doubt that those people were guilty. I could not get one thing -- how come there were so many peoples' enemies? I did not question anything else.

With the outbreak of WW2 in 1939 people were perturbed. However, there were no assumptions that Germany might attack USSR as we were constantly convinced that our army was invincible and nobody would dare to attack us.

Even if it happened, the war would not last long and our valorous army would fight the enemy on his territory. Of course, we believed in that.

Though, in 1940 the drafting age was 19 and since 1939 it was changed to 18. Thus, lads after finishing 10-year school were not able to enter the institute without serving in the army.

When I was in the 10th grade I got a document from the military enlistment office stating that I would be drafted in the army in autumn 1941.

I had to postpone entering the institute for two years. Even if I had entered the institute right after finishing school, I would have studied only for two months and drafted in the army anyway.

In spring 1941 I passed my final exams. I did not make any plans for summer. On Sunday, July 22, 1941 I was at home by myself. Mother went out somewhere.

My neighbor knocked on the door. She told me to turn radio on. Molotov was finishing his speech on outbreak of war. I was able to hear his last words: "Our cause is just. The enemy will be defeated.

We will gain the victory."