

Lev Dubinski



I am 6 years old on this picture. My parents had me photographed before having my curls cut, in Studio Kreschatik in Kiev, 1923.

I was born in Kiev on 7th December 1916. I was a cute boy: I had golden curls and was called 'a little lord' in my childhood. I liked meeting with my cousins Michael, Naum, Boris and Moisey, but I spent most of the time with my friends in the street. On 1st May 1923 my sister Maria was born. She was the first baby in our family, born after my mother's brother Moisey perished and was named after him: the first letter in her name was the same as in Moisey's name. I remember that my mother was feeling ill and my father took Maria after he came from work and sang songs in

Yiddish carrying her around our roundtable covered with a nice tablecloth. My childhood memories come back to me whenever I hear Jewish tunes.

In 1924 I went to the first grade at Russian school # 33 in Gorky Street near our house. We had a wonderful teacher. Her name was Nina Badibelova, a very intelligent lady. Her father was a general. She loved children. She was strict with us, but fair and we loved her in return. She read poems by Pushkin and Shevchenko in Russian to us. After I finished the 4th grade our school was turned into a Jewish school. All it meant was that the language of teaching changed to Yiddish. Everything else was the same. I really had a poor conduct of Yiddish and I went to study in Russian school # 53. My parents decided that I had to go to a Russian school. They thought that one had to follow the rules of the country one lived in. I also understood that I had to learn Russian. My school was a grammar school for girls before the revolution. It was located in Fundukleyevskaya Street. We had very good teachers that used to teach in the former grammar school. Maxim Tkach was a wonderful teacher of Ukrainian. I began to read Ukrainian books then. At that time I began studying Ukrainian culture. I liked literature and was fond of reading, but I didn't choose it for profession. I read everything that fell upon me. Later I became fond of Dostoyevskiy. I also read Sholem Alechem and other Jewish authors in Russian. I read Ukrainian authors: Shevchenko and Lesia Ukrainka. I was growing up in the Russian culture and I do not have any preferences based on national origins. I identified myself as a Jew and I knew that my parents were Jews, that their mother tongue was Yiddish and that grandfather went to synagogue, but it had no effect on me.

I studied well and was a leader at school and in my street. My friends respected me and listened to my opinions. I didn't face any anti-Semitism. I became a pioneer at school. We wore red neckties and sang 'Rise in flames, blue nights...' - a hymn of pioneers.