

Nikolay Schwartz



This is me during my studies in the industrial school in Moravska Ostrava, Czechoslovakia. I sent one of these photos to my family in Sevlyush for the memory. I had this photograph with me, when I was in a Hungarian work battalion. Even when I was in the camps for prisoners-of-war in Usman and then in Voronezh, they didn't take it away from me. This photo was taken in Moravska Ostrava in 1935.

I was born in 1918, before Subcarpathia was annexed to Czechoslovakia. I had the name of Miklos written in my Hungarian birth certificate, and my Jewish name was Moishe. My family called me Miki affectionately. When receiving my passport in 1946 I changed my name Miklos to Nikolay. At

the age of 5 I went to cheder. I don't know how it happened that since my childhood I was critical about the Jewish religion and traditions. I was raised in a religious family. My sisters took everything for granted while I looked down on it, as if those were the games adults played. Most boys in the cheder had long payes. My father insisted that I had payes, but I was crying and yelling that I didn't want payes. I was particularly against it, when I went to a Ruthenian school. at the age of 8. I made non-Jewish friends. I saw that other boys teased their fellow pupils who had long payes pulling them by their payes. I didn't want to be teased, so I secretly cut my payes to make them unnoticed. After finishing the fourth grade in my Ruthenian school I went to a Czech school. My parents thought that I had to know the state language living in Czechoslovakia. We spoke Hungarian at home, and there was no other place where I could learn Czech. I had bar mitzvah when I turned 13. Everybody greeted me and I felt myself like an adult.

There were few Zionist organizations in Vinogradovo. I was attracted by the Beytar. It was called a fascist organization by members of other Zionist organizations, since Beytar members believed that they had to defend Palestine with weapons rather than look for diplomatic ways to establish peace on this land. When I turned 13, I joined the Beytar. Each Saturday we had gatherings in the Beytar building. They were always interesting. The leader told us about what was happening in the world and spoke about the goals and tasks of Beytar. We had fencing classes in the gym, but we fenced with sticks. We had brown uniforms and military type caps.

I finished school in 1935 and didn't quite know what to do next. It was difficult to find a job and I was happy, when our leader mentioned to me that there was an opportunity to enter the Ashtar industrial school in Moravska Ostrava in Moravia. Studying in this school was free. I agreed right away: I was eager to get a profession as soon as possible and start earning money. I was to take two written exams: in mathematic, and another one was a psychological test. Then we had to demonstrate how we could do manual work to show our coordination movements. My examiners asked me whether I intended to become a mechanic, turner, electrician or modeler. I said I wanted to be a turner. I was lucky. I passed all exams and got 92 points of 100. The passing point was 90. Those two other guys from Vinogradovo failed their exams and had to go back home. 10% of applicants were admitted to school. In my group of 30 students I was the only Beytar member.

The plant paid me some money, and now I could have meals at the canteen. It was inexpensive and the food was very good. The Beytar bought me coupons for three meals per day. There were no obstacles to my studies and I began to have all excellent marks. I liked studying there. It was a huge plant with 30 thousand employees. There was state-of-the-art equipment at the plant. I gave up religion and Jewish traditions. I believed it all to be the vestige of middle ages. I studied in the industrial school for 3 years. Then I had one year of industrial training at the plant. We worked 8 hours instead of 3 hours, when we studied at school. When our training was over, we received the industrial school diplomas.