

Naum Kravets And His Schoolmates



In this photo there are pupils of three classes of the secondary school where I studied. Our form master Anna is in the 2nd row in the center. I am the 2nd to the right in the 3rd row. I don't remember the rest. So many years have passed...

The picture was taken in Moscow in 1935.

I was born on 4th January 1925. When I turned six, I went to the pre-school of the seven-year Russian school. It was the first time when I came across anti-Semitism on a social level.

It was a suburb, Cherkizovo, so there were less educated people, more peasants. Children weren't brought up very well. I was the smallest kid in the class and didn't know how to fight. The other boys often teased me and cried out, 'Yid.' It was very offensive.

There were other Jews in our class, but I was the only one who was teased. In two years the church that was close to our house was demolished, and a Russian ten-year compulsory school was built instead.

I was transferred to that school. I made friends with boys of different nationalities. Russians, Ukrainians and Jews were among my friends. There was even one Latvian boy. I kept in touch with one of my school friends, David Akselbant, in the lines and after the war. He was a lawyer. He is deceased now.

I wasn't a very good student. To begin with, I was lazy, besides my health was poor. I got sick pretty often in childhood, I was a bad trencherman and Mother suffered a lot because of that. I missed classes because when I got sick, then I had to catch up. In spite of that I wasn't a poor student, medium I would say.

I was a young Octobrist, then a pioneer, and then a Komsomol member. Like most children back in that time I was very politically motivated.

Political classes were held on a regular basis as well as lectures on international events. We knew that all capitalist countries were enemies of the USSR. That is why when repressions commenced in 1936, we took them as divulgement of enemies of the Soviets, who wanted to undermine the Soviet regime. I remember how at the classes we were painting over the portraits of the state and military leaders who turned out to be enemies of the people.

Probably there were children of the repressed in our class, but we didn't know about it. There were no meetings in our school where children of the repressed were stigmatized because they didn't recognize the enemies in their parents.

There were such types of meetings in other schools. I think that the director of our school, a Jew named Mikhail Goldstein, deliberately created a benevolent atmosphere in our school.

My parents must have discussed such arrests at home, when they spoke in sotto or began speaking Yiddish all of a sudden. They never discussed it with us.