

Alfred Liberman And His Classmates At The Kiev Institute Of Construction Engineers



This is a class photo of the second year students of industrial and civilian construction at the Kiev Institute of Construction Engineers, taken in January 1937. I am in the first row, first on the right. From my schooldays I wanted to become a construction engineer, but due to the fact that my father was a 'specialist' [that is, a specialist with a university degree who was an office worker], I could not enroll in the construction department. Things were very difficult, because the Soviet authorities at that time recommended that all institutions give educational priority to the children of workers and peasants ? and my father was a lawyer. I could only enter a self-supporting school, so I enrolled in a textile technical college, where students had to pay for their education. As far as I remember, our tuition was 25 or 30 rubles a month, which was a lot. I did not finish my studies at that college, because I enrolled there only out of necessity. My goal remained to be a builder. In order to open the way for me to go to the right school, my father took special courses and became what was called a 'technical specialist.' The Soviet authorities had much more respect for 'technical specialists' than for simply 'specialists.' Children of 'technical specialists' had a chance to enter university. But I also had to have a proletarian job to do so. So I spent almost half a year working as a stamp operator in a workshop. I was around 15 years old then. My job was to make metal rivets for knives with wooden handles. I worked there for four months. Since I was qualified to enter the university in every other way, I asked for a certificate that said that I was a worker. Now I had a 'technical' father and my own 'proletarian' experience, tiny though it was. This helped me enter the Kiev Institute of Construction Engineers in 1932. I also got some help from the Institute's legal consultant, Isaac Grigoryevich Bek, who was an acquaintance of my father. But I took the entrance exams just like everybody else. I have wonderful memories of my Institute. The standards of both teachers and students were high. One of our foremost teachers was Nikolay Vasilyevich Karnaukhov, a Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. He always treated us with respect. Most of us (23 out of 26) were Jewish. We had absolutely no 'national' problems with other teachers or students. I graduated from the Institute with honors and was given the diploma of a construction engineer. Even though we spent a lot of time studying, we still had time for fun. We

were young. We dated girls, watched movies, went to theaters. I took classes at a dance school.