

Isaac Rozenfain



This is me. This photo was taken in Kishinev in 1940. In 1937 I entered the construction technical school on the corner of Zhukovskaya and Lyovskaya Streets. My sad experience changed my attitude towards my studies and I became one of the best students in the technical school. This school was owned by a priest. Architect Merz, a German, was the best teacher. The recruitment age to the Romanian army was 20 and I didn't have to go to the army before 1940. I was born the same year as the son of Karl II, Mihay. This was supposed to release me from the army service, and also, I guess the month and the date had to coincide. I also remember the rumors that Mihay wounded his father's lover and that she was a Jew. The situation for Jews got much worse then. I remember the New Year [Christian] celebration when Antonescu was the ruler. There was the threat of pogroms and the celebration was very quiet. I don't know how serious this threat really was, but the feeling of fear prevailed. I don't remember whether they introduced any anti-Jewish

laws in Romania at that time, but there was this kind of spirit in the air. Perhaps for this reason we welcomed the Soviet forces, entering the town on 29th June 1940. People were waiting for them all night long. I stood on the corner of Armianskaya and Alexandrovskaya Streets. There were crowds of people around. At 4am the first tanks entered the town. The tank men stopped their tanks and came out hugging people. When the Soviet rule was established, teaching at the technical school continued, only the priest stopped being its owner. Our teachers stayed. They knew Russian very well and started teaching us in Russian. A few other boys and I repaired two rooms in a building to house the district Komsomol committee. We plastered and whitewashed the walls. I joined the Komsomol sincerely and with all my heart. I liked the meetings, discussions and Subbotniks, when we planted trees. Then wealthier people began to be deported from Kishinev. The parents of one of my mates were deported, but he was allowed to stay in the town and continue his studies. The Stalin principle of children not being responsible for their fathers was in force. Once, this student whose Russian was poor asked me to help him write a request to Stalin to release his parents. We were sitting in the classroom writing this letter, when the secretary of the Komsomol unit came in and asked what we were doing. I explained and he left the classroom without saying a word. Some time later I was summoned to the Komsomol committee and expelled from the Komsomol at a Komsomol meeting. Then there was the town Komsomol committee meeting that I still remember at which I was expelled. I couldn't understand why they expelled me, when I was just willing to help someone. 'How could you help an enemy of the people?' I had tears in my eyes. I sincerely wanted to help a person and they shut the door in my face.