

Mesko Nikolai



This photograph was taken on the occasion of my 18th birthday. It was taken by the photographer Grüstein in Mukachevo.

In 1946 I changed my name. In the unit that I served in there were many, very many Jews. Almost all the higher officers - lieutenant colonels, colonels, changed their names. For example, Litkovsky had originally been Lichtenstein. At that time in Russia they had passed a law that enabled you to change your surname, your patronymic [father's name] and given name [in the former Soviet Union people were given three names, name, surname and patronymic: the interviewee was named Nikolai Mesko and his father's name had been Salamon. His entire name was therefore:

Nikolai Mesko Salamonovic - Editor's note]. You only had to submit one request to the Bezpeke [submit a request to the security institution that belonged under the KGB - Editor's note]. Not even a month went by. I had been born in Ruthenia, as my grandfather had been. They researched not only my grandfather, but also his father as well. Of course I got permission to change my name. They checked what my original name was, because many people were concealing their names - for example those that had committed some crimes. I got a new surname, they wrote up that it was according to what law, who passed the law, and so on. The law had been passed by Stalin. The others said to me: 'Miklos, you don't look like a Jew. See, we've done it too. You're a proper young man, pick out a name that you want.' So from Mermelstein I became Mesko, and from Nusn, Nikolai. I didn't want to change my patronymic, though. They asked me:

'Why Salamon, when it's a Jewish name?'

'Let it remain as a mememto. I'm not changing my father's name!'

'In that case it's not worth doing.'

'But I'm not concealing that I'm a Jew.' And so I kept his name. So that why, in 1946, I became Nikolai Mesko Salamonovic. In Hungarian Mesko Miklos, because there they don't have a patronymic. To this day I still use the Jewish name of Nusn, because when they call me to the Torah, they call me Nusn ben Shloime. Because my father's Jewish name was Shloime.