

Peter Rubinshtein



This is a picture of my father, Peter Rubinshtein, as a student at the grammar school in Uman in 1902. My father was the youngest child and the only son in the family. He was born in 1889. He studied at cheder. He didn't enjoy studying. He missed classes and misbehaved during lessons asking the melamed all kinds of questions. His teacher used to tell my father to take off his shoes to keep him from running away. My father escaped barefoot. He never accepted religion, not even in his childhood. He said he didn't learn one single prayer by heart although he had a good memory. He wasn't interested in religious books, but he read a lot of fiction. My father attended cheder until he turned 13. He had a bar mitzvah, and his parents arranged a party at home on this occasion. My father's parents celebrated Jewish holidays. My father said that he always managed to get the food that my grandmother made for the festive dinner at the end of fasting on Yom Kippur and ate as much as he could. His parents told him off but he was stubborn. I don't know whether my grandparents celebrated Sabbath. I believe they did. My father was eager to study. At the age of 13 he went to the 1st grade of the Russian grammar school in Uman. He studied so well that he passed his exams for the first two years of school without even attending the 2nd year. He finished

8 years of grammar school in 3 years at the age of 16. He finished it with honors. It enabled him to enter any higher educational institution in tsarist Russia without entrance exams. He entered the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Psychology at Novorossiysk University [1,200 km from Kiev in the south of Russia]. At that time the percentage of Jews at higher educational institutions wasn't to exceed five percent of the total number of students. My father graduated from both faculties in 1911. He had only one 'good' mark in Russian literature and 'excellent' in all other subjects at both faculties. My father was one of the best students at the university and he was offered a job as a lecturer. The only condition was for him to accept Christian faith and get baptized. My father refused and got a job in Vilnius, where he could become a lecturer without getting baptized. He lectured on philosophy at the grammar school in Vilnius. He worked in Vilnius until 1915.