

Chasya Mussel With Her Classmates



This is my elder sister Chasya's graduation school class. She sits in the front row, fifth from the left. Zinovi Aronovich Kisselgof, the headmaster, sits fourth from the right in the center of the photo. The teacher of history, Mark Davidovich Domnich, is to his right. The man with a beard to the right of my sister is Lev Markovich Iokhilchuk, also a teacher.

I studied at the national Jewish school #14. Later it became #11. In 1938 all national schools were abolished. Our school remained as it had been: the staff of teachers and pupils did not change; however, teaching in Yiddish was abandoned. Yiddish remained a separate subject; we also had written Yiddish and literature in Yiddish. The school became a common Russian school #30. We had a very friendly atmosphere at school. There was a preparatory grade and grades from one to seven. Little by little the school became an eight-year school, then a nine-year school. Finally it was turned into a standard ten-year school.

Our teachers were very highly qualified specialists; most of them had university education, some even obtained their education at foreign universities. The headmaster, Zinovi Aronovich Kisselgof, was a wonderful man, an excellent teacher and a musician. Besides he taught Mathematics very well. He was one of the tutors of Yasha Kheifitz, the famous violinist. His wife, Guta Grigoryevna Kisselgof, also taught Mathematics in elementary school. Kisselgof also managed the children's home, which was attached to our school.

The construction of the school building was sponsored by Baron Ginsburg before the Revolution. Jewish children's home was accommodated there. Later a Jewish school was organized in the same building, and the school was attended by children from the children's home as well as others. Children from Ukraine and Belarus were brought to the children's home, when the famine started in those countries. Children were brought without their parents, by railroad. Some children came from Leningrad, from poor families or from unwed mothers. The atmosphere at school was very good, the attitude was kind and children were brought up very well. The children from the children's

home were always given priorities, since everything was done in order to somehow raise them. This happened because they were completely lonely and we lived with our parents.

I do remember my teachers: preparatory grade – Rosa Lvovna Soloveychik; first grade – Anna Lazarevna Alperovich. I also remember our class teacher, Yevgeniya Zakharovna Ioffe, our teacher of history, Mark Davydovich Domnich; head of studies Lev Markovich Iokhilchuk. All of them had a wonderful attitude to each of us. We were taught very well. Our school was considered one of the best in the city and always won the first place in the district. Most students after finishing our school entered institutes and universities. Some children, who arrived from Ukraine and Belarus, spoke Russian very poorly. At school they were able to learn the language perfectly. They had a certain advantage over us when it came to foreign languages. They learned the German language very well, since Yiddish and German are very close.

We had a Russian theatrical club at school. We had no Jewish clubs. Children staged a ‘Boris Godunov’ performance. We had very good art directors. Our musical studies were wonderful. The head of the administrative office was a pianist. She taught us music, told us about opera: how an opera was conceived, what an overture was, etc. She played the piano during her lessons. This formed our understanding of music.

I remember Zinoviy Aronovich Kisselgof appearing on stage at our memorable evenings at school. He played the concertino, a small harmonica. He played very well and was a very talented man. He took part in expeditions arranged for the collection of Jewish folklore and recorded Jewish songs during those travels. Those records were kept for a long time on phonograph wax rollers. Later they were forwarded from Leningrad to Kiev and were destroyed there. It happened after the war, at the beginning of the 1950s, when bad actions towards Jews started. Of course it was a very serious loss for the Jewish culture. It contained a lot of Jewish songs.

Yasha Kheifiz, the violinist, came from America to Leningrad in 1934 to visit his teacher. Maybe the encounter with a foreigner was one of the reasons for the repression, which started against Zinoviy Aronovich. He was arrested in 1939 and tortured in the ‘Kresty’ prison. He did not betray or slander anyone. He was a wonderful person. He died soon after he was released.