

Beila Gabis With Her Classmates



These are my classmates in Bershad. This photo was taken after finishing the 6th form in 1940. I, Beila Fainshtein, am the 2nd on the left in the upper row. The girl in front of me is Raya Donskaya, whose sister was later raped in the ghetto and their mother perished. I don't have any information about them after the war. Our teachers are in the first row: deputy director in the center and a teacher of geography is beside him on the right.

In 1933, at the age of seven and a half years I went to school, when famine began in Ukraine. I attended the second shift at school and one evening four adult men pursued me. I screamed and a pedestrian rescued me and took me home. From then on I didn't go to school. There was cannibalism: children were killed to make sausage. I was a plump and appetizing girl and those cannibals couldn't resist the temptation. My parents decided to keep me home for my sake. Therefore, I went again to the first form a year after.

There were Jewish schools, but my parents decided that, considering further perspective it was rather advantageous to go to a Ukrainian school in Piski Bershad where we lived. I studied well and became a pioneer at school. In 1938 my parents bought a small house with thatched roof in the center of the town. They were planning to remove the old stuff and build a new house on the spot. I went to another Ukrainian school near the center of the town. There were more Jewish children in this school. I had Jewish and non-Jewish friends. We didn't care about nationality. Many Ukrainians spoke Yiddish and Jews spoke Ukrainian in Bershad.

My father was recruited to the army in 1939 and participated in the campaign of annexation of some Polish regions to Ukraine and in the Finnish War. I became my mother's support and help. I had to take him to nursery school and her to kindergarten, cook dinner, buy bread and go to school. In 1940 my mother arranged for me to become a lab assistant's apprentice. She wanted me to go to work after finishing the seventh form and continue my studies at an extramural department. I liked working at the mill. I liked grain sampling and testing. Besides, I could take this little grain home that was of help. However, my dream was to study medicine and become a

doctor. After finishing school in 1941 my friend and I took our documents to a Medical School in Gaisin, a neighboring town. In the middle of July we received a letter of admission from the School. My mother opened the letter and there was much ado at home: my mother wanted me stay home. She didn't think she could manage without me. My father was in Western Ukraine. On 21 June 1941 we received his telegram where he told us that he was demobilized and was on his way home. He sent this cable from a railroad station. On Sunday 22 June 1941 I was in bed longer. I was at the prom the night before and my mother and I returned home late. My mother woke me up saying 'Daughter, the war began'. My father never reached home. He returned to his military unit.