

Anna Gliena



I am at the age of 4. This photo was made in Kharkov in 1921.

I was born in 1917 in Kharkov. My mother was very weak and sickly and had migraines. She hired a nanny to look after me. My nanny's name was Anna Grigorenko. She was a Ukrainian woman. She spoke beautiful Ukrainian and sang Ukrainian songs. My mother and father spoke Yiddish. I picked up Yiddish and Ukrainian. Since Russian is spoken much in Kharkov I picked up Russian, too.

Our life was very hard and at times we had no food at home. I remember sitting on the porch waiting for my mother and father coming back from the market. I was very happy when they brought something for me. Once they brought me a little dress and I was so happy.

I went to school in 1924. On the first day I went there by myself. I was a brave girl. At that time it was common for Russian children to study in Russian schools, Ukrainian children went to Ukrainian schools and Jewish children went to Jewish schools. Thus, I went to a Jewish school. There were four Jewish schools in Kharkov. We studied Yiddish, Russian, mathematics, physics and drawing. We studied in Yiddish and had Jewish teachers. I don't remember their names, but I remember that they were nice and cheerful. I was elected a head girl in my class. I became a young Octobrist in the first or second grade. We had badges with a portrait of young Lenin and were called 'Lenin's grandchildren'. Later we became pioneers. My parents were proud that their daughter was taking such active part in public activities. I organized gathering of metal scrap at school. We picked waste casseroles and samovars and felt proud that we could make our contribution in manufacture of new tractors and locomotives for our country.

My childhood dream was to become an actress. I went to a ballet class at the age of 10. My brother was working in the opera comedy theater and he arranged for me to take classes with their prima ballerina Klavochka. There were two other girls in her class. We began to come out onto the stage when required. Then one day my brother came home and said 'That's it for you. I am to be the only actor in our family'. It turned out that he noted one ballerina of indecent conduct and forbade me to continue my studies. I didn't mind. I was fond of skating. Skating stretches one's muscle's while in ballet they need to be strained. I had many friends at school.