

Rachil Lemberg With Her Schoolmates



This is our school choir where I used to sing. I am the first from the right standing with my schoolmates. This photo was taken in Ananiev in 1938.

I was born in Ananiev in 1921. I was named Rachil after my maternal grandmother.

I went to the Jewish 7-year school in 1928. It was a common Soviet lower secondary school. We studied all subjects in Yiddish. I knew Yiddish since childhood. I studied well at school. I liked mathematic and physics. At school I was called Rusia and since then I was called with this affectionate name. I enjoyed studying at school. I liked singing. I had a good voice and a good pitch. I attended a vocal club and took part in school concerts singing in a quartet. We sang folk songs in Yiddish and Russian. I became a young Octobrist and then a pioneer at school. Our pioneer activities involved gathering of scrap metal and waste paper. There was competition between classes and those who gathered the biggest quantities gained the first place. Once a week we had political classes and pupils made reports about political events in the USSR and across the world. We were raised with the conviction that the USSR was the best country in the world and that Soviet children were the happiest in the world and that we owed this to our leaders Lenin and Stalin. We were even taught to say 'Granfather Lenin' and 'Granfather Stalin'. There were their portraits in each classroom and this was a mandatory attribute of our life.

After I finished the 7th grade I went to the 8th grade of a Ukrainian secondary school. Two of my classmates went to school with me and the others were concerned about their poor Ukrainian and didn't continue their education. I did very well at school. I was number three in my class by the end of the 8th grade. In the 8th grade I joined Komsomol. I was very proud of it, though actually it didn't change anything. All I remember about my Komsomol membership was mandatory attendance of dull meetings.

After finishing school I wanted to continue my studies in the Construction College in Odessa, 470 km from Kiev. This was a big town and it wasn't too far from Ananiev. However, my mother was against it. She thought Odessa was not a good idea for a girl to live there alone. She said there were loose morals in big towns and it would be hard for me to get adjusted to them. My mother insisted that I went to Poltava to her sister Esther. My sister Bella and her husband also lived there.

I passed my entrance exams with all excellent marks and was admitted to the Faculty of Civil and Industrial Construction. I could live in a hostel. But my aunt Esther insisted that I lived with them. I studied well and took part in the amateur art club and choir. I spent my winter and summer vacations with my parents in Ananiev. Of course, I missed home a lot. We received small stipends. It was too little to make a living and my mother sent us money and food with every occasion she could get.