

Chaya Sakhartova In The First Grade Of High School



This picture was taken on 1st September 1928, when I went to the first grade of high school in the town of Roslavl. We were lined up in front of the wooden school building. I am standing in the upper row, seventh from the right, wearing a dark pinafore dress; I have a short haircut. All children are dressed very poorly, I am dressed better than the rest, since my mother could sew well. I don't remember my classmates unfortunately, nor the teacher.

I went to school, already capable of reading and writing. When time came for me to go to school, I was tested on my knowledge of Yiddish and other languages, but I knew nothing except for Russian and that is why I wasn't accepted in cheder. I studied at a common Russian high school.

In my opinion the school was very good, we had wonderful teachers. Our teacher of mathematics, Aron Grigoryevich Karchmar, was a very good teacher. When I was finishing school, he told me that I would never pass the math exam, but I got an excellent mark. We also studied German, it was taught by an old woman. She was a bad teacher: she knew German poorly and she couldn't establish discipline in the classroom, all pupils always yelled in her lessons. I remember her nickname – 'Bobka.' When I finished school I didn't know the German language, so at university I began to learn English, which I don't know now either. We had a very good teacher of Russian, Markelova, who taught us as follows: she liked to read and she read a lot to us during lessons. Later, when we were in the eighth grade, her husband had to continue our education. And we turned out to be completely illiterate, because Markelova hadn't taught us how to spell the words. But we adored her! And from the eighth grade up until our graduation he tried very hard to make us literate [there were nine-year schools in the USSR at that time]. I loved reading most of all. Then we had this teacher, who I was really in love with, and because of whom I chose to study at the Faculty of Biology and Soils – Maria Grigoryevna Shtyrkina, an old and very intellectual Russian woman. She taught us biology. We all loved her very much, I did in particular. When I was later advised to enter the Faculty of Biology and Soils, I did so without any hesitation. After school almost all the kids from our grade entered some sort of university.

One third of my classmates were Jews. We had a very united class: after World War II my classmate, Yakov Roubin, got everybody, who had survived, together and every five years we met in Roslavl. People came not only from the Soviet Union, but also from abroad, as many were assigned to military service, for instance, in Hungary, but they all came. There were many of us and we always had fun. It was all very nice because one of our classmates was the manager of a boarding school in Roslavl and he arranged the reception. We were very comfortable and had a good time there.

There was no anti-Semitism at all, either at school or in Roslavl in general. I had no friends outside of school; my best friends were Raya Shirman and Raya Ioffe. I had both Jews and Russians as friends; their nationality never mattered to me.