

Sarina Chelibakova In The Schoolyard Of The 'Kiril Nektariev' School



Here you can see me with my schoolmates in the schoolyard of the 'Kiril Nektariev' school in Plovdiv. In the middle is our teacher of all subjects, Mr. Bozhilov. I am in the center. There is an inscription on the back in black ink: 14th June 1947, Plovdiv. This is the end of the school year of the fourth grade of the school. There is no seal of a photographic studio.

My mother was a very ambitious woman.. She was against my studying in a Jewish school. She wanted me and my brother to rise in society. We were educated not to stand out from the crowd, rather to do the same as everyone else, but to do it better. That's why we didn't speak Ladino at home, only Bulgarian. She didn't allow us to go to the Jewish school, which she disapproved of. She enrolled us in the elite junior high school 'Kiril and Methodii' and then we graduated from the elite junior high school 'Carnegie', which my aunts and uncles had gone to.

I was always chosen as a model student at school. My high school literature teacher used to say, 'Look at Sarina, she's not Bulgarian, but she knows Bulgarian better than you: its pronunciation, its spelling and literature, and you, Bulgarians, are bad both in grammar and literature.'

I was an excellent student in both junior high school and high school. My favorite subject was literature. I wanted to study Bulgarian Philology, but after 9th September 1944, the day of the communist takeover in Bulgaria, my parents fell into poverty and couldn't afford to support my studies in Sofia.

I was the only Jew in junior high school. In high school I was in one class with the Jewish girls Beka Benaroyo and Kleri Madjar. Being a Jew didn't make me feel different in either school. No one said anything insulting about my Jewish origins in my presence. They may have talked about it behind my back, but it never reached me. Moreover, I am not a mistrustful person and I quickly forget bad words.