

Asta Pekker With Her Co-Students At Kiev University



Me, Asta Pekker (sitting) with my co-students at Kiev University (I have no information about them). The picture was made in Kiev, 1954.

I am Asta Grigorievna Pekker. I'm 72 years old. I was born in Berlin, in June 1929. I lived there for four and a half years. My parents and my grandfather and grandmother were Soviet citizens. With

Hitler coming in 1933 the Soviet government called our family to Moscow at the end of the year.

I became fully aware of my being Jewish during my stay in Alma-Ata in the evacuation. I heard the word "zhyd" for the first time in Moscow on 28 June 1941, but then I, almost a twelve year old girl, didn't know what it meant. I heard it from a Russian worker, who called me this way, so I immediately ran to my grandmother to ask her what it meant and who I was. Grandfather and grandmother explained to me that zhyd was a very bad word and that this was the word that they called people of certain nationality - Jewish, and that we were Jewish.

In 1941, before the war, when I was twelve, I still lived a life in books (we had lots of books at our home in Kiev), records, a record-player and a wireless that we had brought from Germany (this was a rarity), and in the music that was constantly played at home.

In 1945 I got ill with tuberculosis all of a sudden. It interrupted my school for a year. I finished school in 1948 with silver medal and submitted documents to the Department of Journalism in University. Of course, I wasn't accepted. It was either because of Item 5 in my passport or the place of birth - Berlin. My father, who was Dean of the Orchestra Department in the Conservatory, had a discussion with Chairman of Entrance Commission. But before this misunderstanding was cleared up I decided to go to the Philosophy Department following my grandfather's advice who said that to become a good writer one had to be a good philosopher and psychologist. That's how I found myself a student of psychology section, Philosophy Department at Kiev University.

Upon graduation from the University I did not quite come to terms with science as I was attracted by literature. My eagerness and Papa's acquaintances allowed me to get a job in the art and literature publishing house "Mystetstvo" ("Art"). There I was also learning the real Ukrainian language. I learned it so well that after working there for many years I was fired in 1965 or 66 for Ukrainian bourgeois nationalism. It's interesting that they couldn't fire me even for this by the Soviet law. By then I had two children. So they just asked me to leave. It was Director of this publishing house who asked me. He told me how difficult things were for him because of me. I felt sorry for him and wrote a letter of resignation. In four years, when I returned to polygraphy he gave me best recommendations. Of course he did! As after me there was only one Jew left in the publishing house "Mystetstvo" before 1967!