

Yuri Bogdanov With His Friends



That's me (first from left) with my friends Yuri Makhmutbeck and Grigoriy Robinzon. The picture was taken in Babruysk in 1937.

My school life was rather standard: joining the Oktiabryata, then the pioneers. I wasn't a brilliant student, but a rather good one. At any rate I wasn't in the lowest rank and the teachers were satisfied with me.

My elder brother Solomon should be given credit for that. He did a lot for me to like exact sciences - mathematics and physics.

I had a lot of pals at school, but there were only two bosom friends: a Jew, Grigoriy Robinson and a Caucasian, Yuri Makhmutbek. We lived close to each other and stayed friends.

The times of the Great Terror commenced. There were 'enemy of the people' trials, which were astounding for us, schoolchildren. Our idols - great military leaders, party activists - were arrested, and then in the trial reports they were charged with preposterous things even in a child's view: espionage in several countries simultaneously etc.

Portraits of most of those people were in our textbooks. Before that our class teachers used to tell us which names and which portraits should be crossed out or glued in books. I remember those terrible years from 1936 until the beginning of the Great Patriotic War.

The year 1937 was the year of general horror. My parents weren't party or governmental activists, and we had a skimpy living and there was no reason for fear. But those were the times of great tension and fear.

We were scared to say an extra word, or some phrase that might later be misinterpreted. I submitted my application for Komsomol membership that year. My brother plied me with love to books. Reading became my favorite leisure pursuit. I loved poetry.

At that time there was a lot of doggerel - just rhymed slogans and recitations of articles. I liked Pushkin, Lermontov, and Yesenin, a more modern one, the Soviet regime disapproved of. His verses were considered effete as he wrote about feelings, nature, relations between people in the epoch of global performance.

The government thought Yesenin's verses to be shallow. During the discussion of my entering the Komsomol at the class meeting, the girl I was in love with got up and said that I had recited Yesenin's verses to her and was unworthy to be a Komsomol member. I was accepted in the Komsomol only the next year.