

Henrich Kurizkes



This is me photographed after finishing 9th grade. This photo was taken in Tallinn in June 1941. All of my school friends were Jewish. Of course, some of my friends were Estonian. We used to play football with Estonian boys, our neighbors. However, we never visited them at home. My real close friends were Jewish. I don't know how it happened to be this way. All I can say is that my parents never put any pressure on me in this respect. This was my choice. This was the way it happened to be. I was a member of the Jewish organization for young people, Hashomer Hatzair: "The Young Watchman." We had meetings every week. We were told about the history of the Jewish people, and we also had quizzes, tests and various games. We always had a good time there. Besides, from 1937, every Saturday night, all Jewish children who didn't go to the Jewish school, visited Doctor

Aba Gomer, the Rabbi of Tallinn, and he taught us Jewish history and traditions. In 1940 the Soviet power established in Estonia dropped an iron curtain around Estonia. It actually existed in the USSR from the moment of its appearance. Boats and planes to Finland were canceled. It was not allowed to communicate with relatives living in other countries. However natural it might have been for Soviet residents, we found it strange. Struggle against religion began. Religious classes at schools were canceled and we were not allowed to celebrate religious holidays. Nationalization of banks and commercial and industrial enterprises began. My college was closed in 1940. I had finished nine grades by then. All schoolchildren went to the secondary school located in the building of the gymnasium. My other Jewish friend and I didn't want to go to this school. We went to the former private Russian school, which was also turned into a state-run school. We could speak and read Russian, but we knew no grammar and couldn't write in Russian. My friend's father taught us during the summer and we happened to be well-prepared for school. In June 1941 we finished 10th grade. We were to study one more year. I went to work as a pioneer leader in a pioneer camp during the summer. The camp was located about 15 kilometers from Tallinn. I was to start on 15th June. We had just settled down, when on Sunday night of 22nd June 1941 we heard the roar of the artillery cannonade. It never occurred to us that it was a war. We thought it was another military training exercise. Then at noon, on 22nd June, we heard the Molotov speech on the radio, and he said that Hitler's armies had attacked the USSR. We returned to Tallinn where evacuation began and my parents decided to evacuate. Thank God, they didn't delay.