

Sarra Shylman With Her Co-Students



Me among my co-students of Kiev Technological College of Silicates. Middle row, 2nd on the left is my friend Vera Zinder. When we were 1st-year students we were photographed with our group. Kiev, 1940.

I went to a Jewish lower secondary school in 1929. It was a policy then that children were to study in their national schools. Admission to my school required that I passed an interview. I knew Yiddish and my admission was positively resolved. I remember the subjects that we learned at school: Yiddish, Russian, Russian literature, mathematics, geography and history. I don't think we studied Ukrainian. We read books by Jewish authors in Yiddish: Sholem Alechem and others. I can still read in Yiddish. We had a library at school. At the end of each academic year we passed exams. When we became pioneers we often had meetings and I was a secretary at meetings.

After we finished this lower secondary school our teachers advised our parents to allow us to continue our education in the Jewish high school, but I didn't want to go there. I was 15 years old. I took my documents and submitted them to Russian school #15 in Pushkinskaya Street. I was fluent in Russian and it wasn't a problem for me to study in a Russian school. I was successful at school and got along well with my classmates and teachers.

I was a favorite daughter. I was interested in everything and I studied well. In 1939 after finishing school I entered Kiev technological College of Silicates. Before the Great Patriotic War our situation improved and my parents bought me a desk, a wardrobe and a sewing machine. My college was an affiliate of the Polytechnic College. I entered there without any problems. Jewish origin was no obstacle at admission. I liked mathematics and had a good knowledge of it. I got along well with our teachers and students regardless of my name Sarra [Jewish names were targets of mockery, vulgar jokes and often exclusion at the time.]. I had excellent marks in my college: I had an excellent knowledge of chemistry, physics and mathematic. I wasn't a Komsomol member, but I was an activist and I lectured to students. I remember I prepared a lecture 'Physical occurrences from the point of view of electronic theory' to our students.

In 1939 Hitler started a war in Europe. Before the war we heard rumors about the virulent anti-Semitism in Germany. but radio broadcasts were convincing us that Germans would not dare to attack the USSR. My father also said that there would be no war. 22nd June 1941 was Sunday and I was preparing to an exam. We had a radio at home when all of a sudden we heard Molotov's speech: the war began.