

Ruvn Gitman With Friends At A School Concert



In this photo taken in Koryshkov in 1939, I am pictured (second from the left) at a school concert in the village of Koryshkov. The concert was performed by our amateur performers on the 1st of May. This photo was taken in the club. I went to school in 1931 when I was 7. I attended the Ukrainian secondary school in Koryshkov. There was a Jewish school in Kopaygorod and my grandfather Moshe wanted me to go there and live in his house. My mother told him that Jewish schools had no perspectives and that I was to study where I lived. My mother turned out to be right. I studied all subjects in Ukrainian. My Ukrainian was fluent so I had no problems in this regard. There were a few other Jewish children in my class and at school. I studied successfully. I had an excellent memory and I was fond of all subjects. I knew literature and history, physics and chemistry and algebra and zoology very well. The world was opening up to me and I tried to absorb everything I learned. We celebrated Soviet holidays at school. We had meetings in the morning where the school director and the schoolteachers greeted us. This was an official function. Then we went to the village cultural center where our parents were invited, too. We performed concerts, sang Soviet songs, danced and recited poems. We liked these holidays very much and we enjoyed the applause. While in the 3rd grade, I became a pioneer. I was eager to become a pioneer. I believed in communism and the promised happy future. Although my parents were religious people they didn't have any objections to my becoming a pioneer. My father said: 'Do it, if you have to'. At that time pioneers were called upon to struggle against religious prejudices and make their parents atheist. But I was of two minds concerning this. I listened to what I was told at school and accepted those ideas, but also enjoyed meals at Sabbath and other holidays at home. I remember coming home after school one day and saying to my father that our teacher had told us that there was no God and that it was all a false belief devised by people. He answered, 'You'll answer your teacher following her words. However, I taught you the Ten Commandments, and they will be your guidelines all your life'. I have always done as he told me. In our free time we played football and

went swimming in the summer. I read a lot. I mainly read books that glorified the Soviet power. My favorite book was *How Steel was Tempered* by Nikolay Ostrovsky. It is about dedicated Komsomol members of the post-revolutionary period. I idolized Pavel Korchagin, the main character of this book. I was eager to become a Komsomol member. I entered the Komsomol before finishing school. The synagogues in Kopaygorod - there were several of them - were open until 1936. When the struggle against religion intensified they were closed. The Christian church was also closed. In those years it was not safe to go to synagogue. There was only one synagogue left of the 300 existing in Kiev before the Revolution of 1917. The arrests during the Great Terror didn't touch our family. My father instructed me not to speak with strangers and to answer any and all questions that people asked with 'I don't know'. I was a sociable boy and my father realized that any person could be a KGB informer and that any of my revelations could work against him. I could inadvertently give away information; even saying that we celebrated religious holidays at home, or anything else might become a basis for further accusations. My father knew that people could be found guilty of espionage or anti-Soviet activities, even though they might be innocent. We didn't turn on lights at home until we secured the windows with blankets, and we spoke in whispers; even the most innocent words could be interpreted voluntarily, although my parents didn't have any anti-Soviet discussions. The school director and deputy director were arrested. We were told that they were public enemies and that they were teaching works by Soviet authors who had been declared public enemies. We were just children and believed what we were told. But we couldn't imagine how these kind, nice people could be public enemies. We kept silent and didn't comment on anything.