

Magdolna Palmai In Her Youth



This a picture from my maidenhood, it was taken around 1940-1941 in the Perp Studio in Pest. I sent the picture to America. It is written on it: 'To Uncle Simon with much love from Magda.' So this came back from America. Because at home in Nyiregyhaza I didn't find any pictures. Either the descendants of the Silbers sent it or I got it back from my sister's inheritance. I spent my free time at home or we danced and talked at my friends'. But I liked to read very much. Aunt Eszti was angry with me because of this, she said, 'You don't do anything, but only chase the flies away from

your leg, instead of doing some work.' Reading wasn't important to her and that's why she was angry with me for reading so much. I really read a lot, and I kept this habit later, too. I liked Jokai and Mikszath, the classics, the philosophers, Kant, Spinoza, and theology. I remember a book, the last name of the author was Gyarfas perhaps. I don't remember exactly the contents, but it was about something like how to learn to pray in a Jewish way, and how to attain faith. At some stage I wanted to be a philosopher. Besides Henrik Sztraky I had another very good teacher, a young rabbi, who taught at high school. This teacher held presentations at the study circle for those young people who were interested in philosophy in the building of the high school; he gave private lessons, as you would say today. He spoke about Kant, Spinoza, and he acquainted us with other philosophers, too. He told us to learn German, because Kant could only be read in the original. In this period I was going to middle school and I wasn't 14 yet, but in former times children were more mature than the 20-year-olds nowadays. Later, I must have been around 18-19, I learned English with another company in Nyiregyhaza. In that time one could only learn English and French at high school or at the school of the Congregatio Jesu, only in the school system. It was 1939, and the numerus clausus had also been applied, so we could only learn foreign languages as autodidacts. An engineer took on to teach us. He had emigrated earlier, but he came back to Hungary. At that time one couldn't immigrate to the USA anymore, because there was a quota, and this man thought that he could help us if we learned English from him somehow. He kept telling us that the future was going to be emigration. He taught us for free in the building of the Jewish elementary school, so mainly Jews participated in these classes.