

Senior Class Of The Hebrew School



This photograph was taken at my school in Riga in 1939. It was taken by our school photographer. None of the children from this photograph survived the Holocaust, except for me.

I went to school when I was seven. I started from the second form at Jewish Hebrew school. At that time it was common to skip the first grade, if you were well prepared. I studied perfectly well. Everything was interesting for me, I can not name my favorite subject, I liked them all, except history. In history I also had my excellent mark, but it was the most laborious one. At school there were outstanding teachers. They not only knew their subjects perfectly well, but also had various talents. For example, our teacher Korz was very talented for music. Under his guidance we played Haydn symphony using pipes and penny whistles. He did his best to invent something unusual for each holiday. In the second form we made very interesting performance Alphabet. I was the shortest, and he gave me Yud, because it was the smallest one. But at the same time I was explained that words Jew and Israel began with that very letter. [Yud is the tenth letter in the Hebrew alphabet, in its written form it is only a small line. In Hebrew both Yehudi (Jew) and Israel start with Yud.] I was very proud to get that remarkable letter.

So many years have passed, but I still remember surnames of almost all our teachers. Our first teacher: Madame Meerson, teacher of natural history Mr. Pintsov... Certainly, at this sort of school there were no Anti-Semitic manifestations (and it had no possibility to exist there). By the way, the teacher of Latvian language, Madame Frei (a Latvian) used to say that she liked Jewish children very much and preferred to work with them. Our school was a six-year one. We finished it in 1939. All school graduates received badges, with an inscription in Lettish but with Hebrew letters 'The main city of Riga, Jewish school no.9, 1939'. Almost all my schoolmates perished during the war. After finishing that school I entered Hebrew gymnasium.

This gymnasium suggested very extensive program. In the beginning of school year it was necessary to bring an application form from parents where they indicated, what language they wanted their child to study. In the next form they added one language more, and so forth. After five years of education they graduated young people knowing five languages. From the very

beginning I chose Latin, because I was going to become a doctor. The gymnasium practiced co-education (boys and girls studied together, but in classes they sat in different rows). In 1940 in Latvia Soviet power was established [occupation of the Baltic Republics] [3](#). Hebrew was immediately declared hostile and Zionistic language, and our Hebrew gymnasium was turned into Yiddish school. A lot of my schoolmates left for other schools, but I did not, because I did not want to part with my favorite teachers. Unfortunately, it was my bitter mistake: soon the best teachers were fired; both children and adults were spied on. We took cover in the cloakroom to talk in Hebrew: it was absolutely forbidden. The school lost its former prestige.

During my school years my friends were Jews for the most part. Mum did not allow us to go for a walk in our court yard: she was afraid that we could become 'street children', so we had friends only at school. Later, when we grew up, Mum realized that we would not fall under bad influence and permitted us to go for a walk. And we made new friends in our court yard: we played together, went for a walk round the city and to the Daugava river.

I can not remember anything special I was great interested in, my main passion always was reading. No public organizations attracted my attention, I never was a member of clubs or associations. On days off we went to the park, to the Zoo, to the cinema. Daddy worked all days long, even on Saturdays. Mum accompanied us, and when we grew up, she let us go alone. On days off we visited our relatives, received them at ours. In summer we never went to children's camps and never spent vacations without our parents.