

Rosa Linger And Her Mother Ester Kagan



These are my mother Ester Kagan and I. The picture was made in Liepaja in 1924.

In late 1919 my future parents got married. Mother started her own business after getting married. Her two sisters Hanna and Mina became housewives when married, mother's elder sister Musya and mother were owners of kosher meat stores. Both of them were very clever, energetic and entrepreneurial women and they probably felt bored at home. In general, mother's family was involved in business of selling kosher meat. Apart from mother and Musya, all mother's brothers owned stores of kosher meat. Father had his own business- he dealt with wholesale trade of products and had contracts with Germany and England. Our family belonged to middle class. We were neither poor nor rich.

I was the eldest child. I was born in 1921 and called Rosa. My Jewish name is Rohl-Leya. My middle sister Hinda was born in 1924 and younger, Sarah - in 1930. Parents ran business, so we always had maids at home- to cook food and watch children. Since childhood I could see from my parents how hard people should work in order to achieve anything in their life. They got up at 5 a.m. While mother was cooking breakfast, father prayed. Mother fed father and I and went to the store. She had to open the store by 7 a.m.- the time when the hostesses and maids from rich houses came to buy meat for lunch. Mother had a lot of clients as Jewish ladies saw that we were a righteous Jewish family, observing Jewish traditions, so mother was trusted. Certainly, mother would not be able to cope with all that work herself, so she had an assistant working for her in the store.

The first words spoken by me were in Russian. People spoke Russian to me at home until I turned the age of three. Since most population of Liepaja spoke German, I went to private German

kindergarten to learn German. At home parents spoke Yiddish between themselves and I was well up in that language pretty soon. In pre-school age I spoke three languages fluently. Besides, father was fluent in Polish as village Borovka was on the border with Poland, and many Borovka dwellers spoke Polish.

All members of our family were pious. On Fridays parents finished work earlier and went to mikvah. When they came back, mother lit candles and prayed over them. Then everybody sat at the table. Father said kidush over bread and everybody started festive dinner. On Saturday parents went to the synagogue obligatorily. None of my parents did work about the house on Saturdays. Father had a very beautiful voice so she worked part-time as a chazzan in Hasidic synagogue. When father came back from the synagogue, he read torah, and then all of us went to see some of our relatives.

Parents wanted my sisters and I to be educated. Before I went to school, parents bought piano and music teacher came to us to give classes. I went to private Jewish school at the age of 6 with German teaching. Major subjects taught were German. We also studied there Ivrit and tanach. There were no classes at school on Saturdays and Jewish holidays. I liked to study. I was an excellent student in spite of the fact that I was the youngest in the class. I probably did well because since childhood I had seen how hard my parents worked, so I understood that I could achieve good results only if I were industrious. I loved reading. When I went to bed, I took a book and read it at night. Parent's bedroom was next to mine. Sometimes father noticed at night that the light was on in my room. When I heard his steps, I switched off light and pretended that I was sleeping. Then again I took a book.