

Tobiash Starozum



I am photographed on my 3rd birthday in Lodz, Poland, in 1918. It was tradition at that time that parents often took their children wearing fancy clothes to be photographed on their birthday. .It was customary in our family to give such photographs to all relatives (uncles and aunts).

I was my parents' first baby. I was born on 9 July 1915. We rented a 3-room apartment on the third floor of a 3-storied building. Our landlord was a Jewish man. We had two big rooms and a kitchen. One room served as my father's shop and another room was a bedroom. My mother did her cooking on a brick stove stoked with coal. My grandmother Laya lived in the third room that was very small. When my grandmother died nobody else lived in this room.

There was a market not far from our house. I enjoyed going to the market with mother. We went there once a week. There were Jewish and Polish vendors at the market. Clients spoke Polish to Polish vendors and Yiddish to Jewish sellers. We bought kosher meat from Jewish sellers. We, children, spent most of our time in the yard with not a single tree or bush. When the weather was bad we got together at the stairway. We didn't have any toys and played with whatever we found at home or in the yard. I remember how we valued fragments of stained glass, pieces of metal and little stones. Sometimes we played with walnuts.

Our neighbors were textile workers. When breadwinners of a family lost their jobs or fell ill their families moved out. The rent in our apartment building was high due to the running water that we had. All our neighbors were Jews and we only spoke Yiddish. We hardly ever played with Polish boys in the street. They didn't harm us, but we felt that they were from a different world. Or family was better off than our neighbors. My father had a permanent source of income and my mother was a perfect housekeeper.

We celebrated Jewish holidays. My mother always made a fancy dinner and we cleaned up our home for a holiday. We didn't go to the synagogue and nobody said a prayer in our family. My parents didn't work during holidays. At Pesach we celebrated 2 days, worked 4 days and the following 2 days were days off: "chalema" (Editor's note: half holiday). All I remember about holidays is that I knew about them when there was a general cleanup of the apartment and my mother bought and cooked special and festive food.

There was a cheder on the same floor as our apartment. I have been there, but I didn't attend it. My father said that I "didn't need any of this nonsense". I felt sorry for these boys with payots and thick books that spent their days reciting something melodiously. After they left we came to this room through an open door and played under the benches. There were only benches and tables in this room. At Yom Kippur people used to pray in this room and we left our home to not interfere with those people and went to our relatives to my father's or mother's sisters or brothers to enjoy the holidays. They didn't pray or fast and didn't go to synagogue.