

Fania Brantsovskaya With Her Schoolmates



This is a photo of the chemistry class of my school. I am standing on the right, my friend Pesia Shneerson is sitting on my right. The picture was taken in Vilnius in 1938. I was born on 22 May 1922. I was named Feige, but since my early childhood everybody called me Fania, which is a Russian name. There were a number of schools and gymnasiums for Jewish children in Vilnius. They were schools in Hebrew and Yiddish or in Polish. There were 7 and 8-years schools. There was a number of Yiddish schools: Gurewich, Shimon Fruk, Zeire Kuperstein schools. They were named after their sponsors and founders. The humanitarian Realschule and the Sophia Gurwich gymnasium were the best. I went to the Sophia Gurewich gymnasium. We celebrated Jewish holidays at school. We had a masquerade on Purim. We wore costumes. I remember wearing a Chinese costume once. We also brought shelakhmones to school. We put everything we brought from home into a big basket and everyone could take a treat from it. In this way poor children could also enjoy better shelakhmones. The gymnasium charged fees. My father paid 50 percent of my tuition fees as he was a member of the teachers' association. However, it happened sometimes that I wasn't allowed to come into the classroom when my father didn't pay my fees on time. We particularly liked the event we celebrated on 1st March - the School Day. We had a banner made of all kinds of geometric figures: quadrates, triangles and rhombi that we took outside. There was a meeting and Sophia Gurewich made a speech. In 1933 the gymnasium was closed. I went to the Realschule. The fee was lower there and they focused on natural sciences. I was good at those subjects: mathematic, physics, etc. We were taught in Yiddish. We also studied Jewish history and literature. Our teachers also lectured at Vilnius University. There was a wonderful library at school where I spent much time. Our teacher Malka Heimson, who was also the tutor at our literature club, perished in the ghetto in 1942.