

Albert Eskenazi's Jewish Elementary School Class



My class III b in the Jewish elementary school. The photo was taken in Zagreb, 1937. Our teacher was Greta Vajs, who was killed by Nazis in 1941. We had Croatia-Serbian language, math, writing, Hebrew language and catechism. Clergyman was Martin Mozes, taken to concentration camp Jasenovac (Croatia) in 1941.

Some of my classmates survived the Holocaust and continued to live outside of Yugoslavia after the war. Some of them are still in Israel. My best friend was Zlata Brener. In our 20's we were in love. She was born in Zagreb in 1928 and lives in Jerusalem now. During the Holocaust she was in camps with her parents and sister in Italy and Switzerland.

I started to go to school in Zagreb when I was six years old. I went to the Jewish school, which at the time was well known and experimental. All the Jewish children went to this school. It was called the Jewish Elementary School. The school had four grades, then there were four grades of lower gymnasium and four upper grades.

In the Jewish elementary school we had religious studies and Hebrew lessons-- not in the first and second year but in the third and fourth year. The teachers were named Martin Mozes and Greta Vajs. So that I started to learn my first letters and words in Hebrew back in the school. I did not know that I would live so many years in Israel and that I would teach and translate Hebrew one day, but that is when I started.

In the class picture are these people on the top row: Aleksandar Kikinis, Slavko Ungar, Simon Vajs, Julijus Vajs, Branko Vajs, Zdravko Vajs, Oto Mozes, Sara Mozes, Vera Alt, Rut Fridman, Rut Slezinger, Durdica Grinbaum, Erika Gros, Regina Danilovic.

I remember when the teacher used to call us in alphabetical order: Alt, Brener, Danilovic, Danon Ester, Eskenazi Albert. I am looking at them in the picture, Hirs! Zeljko, Edita Vajs, Edita Oblak, Fani Kadman, we were all in love with her, she was the prettiest in the grade, Nela First. Some of them

were on kibbutz in Israel, like Edo Kon, Grinbaum. There are Klara Pardo, Duro Vajntraub. They were refugees from Germany and so he changed his name from Vajntraub to Vernic. I sat with them on the same bench, until we fought, and he beat me up. When I grabbed my head he hit me with his hat and in his hat there was a steel lid for ink. How it got inside is not clear to any of us. He did not know that the ink was inside. My hand was cut and I still have a scar from it. Blood started to flow, my teacher took me to the clinic where I was treated, the wound was wrapped and closed and I was taken home. When my mother saw me with my head wrapped up she almost died from shock. The teacher told her that the children were playing. I napped in the afternoon to regain strength and the boy's father came with his elder sister. I was scared for him to come because I thought my mother might attack him. They brought me a new suit because the old one had been stained from blood, a new shirt and a box of sweets. They apologized. When the harassment began that family fled in the same directions we did but they were captured somewhere along the way. They saw immediately that they did not know the language well and they were executed. Zlata Brenner remained alive, Vera Alt earlier left for Palestine, as well as Estera Danon, Nela Firc, Edo Kon, Simon Vajs, they all survived and most likely still live in Israel today. Half of the group was killed. The teacher, Greta Vajs, there was no male teacher because this was the third grade and not the fourth, she was executed in '41, and he was taken to the camp. Rut Slezinger lived in Australia until she died, Erika Gros survived and I do not know where she lived afterwards, Vera Alt is alive today as is Dina Maestro, Rit Fridman survived. Deki Hajon also survived the war but someone killed him in Zagreb after liberation, there was a party and he was killed accidentally. Kikinis went to the gymnasium with me after the war, Hari Donar lives in Israel, Ungar survived, Zlatko Singer survived, we met frequently in the Zagreb community, Edo Kon is in Israel, Simon Vajs is an officer in the Israeli army, Grinbaum survived, Ruza Vider was saved, she lived in Australia until her death, Sara Mozes I do not know, and the beautiful Fani Kadmon survived, but I did not see her after liberation, Nela Firsi is on kibbutz Merhavija in Israel, Zlata Brenner lives in Jerusalem, Lea Gorja and Edita Oblat survived. For the others, which I did not mention probably did not survive maybe two or three did. Vajs Branko survived the rest did not.