

Maria Feheri's Class Photo



This is a formal end-of-the-year class photo from my 4th year at elementary school. The picture was taken in Budapest in 1940/41. I went to elementary school in Szemere Street. I knew I was of Jewish origin and that we wanted to go to America because of this, and perhaps the schoolmistress knew as well, because when it was a Jewish holiday she said to me, 'You can also stay at home if you want'. She didn't understand that my father didn't insist on me being half-Jewish. The schoolmistress took it that we were doing it to save our lives, but that we surely wanted to keep the holidays. I think I made friends mostly with Jewish girls in school. But it wasn't just because they were Jews, but because the social classes were very sharply divided: most of the Christian girls were wretched little proles. I had a very good girlfriend who was Christian; her family was very decent and they even made friends with my parents. It didn't bother me that I didn't go to Jewish religion classes, while my Jewish girlfriends did. This wasn't a matter of discussion between the children. I remember instead that it was unpleasant that they were always wealthier because dad had already lost his [good] job, he could already only be an assistant doctor. But merchants and lawyers somehow earned more in the 1930s, and I always had lesser things: I wasn't bought a bicycle, I didn't have such good dresses at parties. I think there wasn't a children's party at our apartment during my school years because my mother was always afraid that we wouldn't have enough money.