Simon Gutman

This is a photo of me, taken in Dvinsk in 1925.

We returned to Riga in September 1923 the three of us - mum, my brother and I. We arrived in Riga and stayed some time with my Uncle Solomon Israeltan, and then moved to Dvinsk. Our cinema was still there, but it appeared that the premises were already occupied. Mum tried to earn some money. We managed to make ends meet somehow, with mum borrowing some money sometimes.

The cinema attracted me and my brother. We were known in Dvinsk as the family of Gutman - the former director of Grand Electro - so they let us into the cinema free of charge. Once a mechanic at

Appolo cinema entrusted me with turning the handle of the manual film projector; his elder brother worked for my father in Grand Electro. Now they don't do it anymore! And there was a problem: when I thought the film was about to finish, I started to turn slowly, and the spectators were indignant! Wow! That's how I let myself down - and I stopped to go to the cinema from that moment on! It was really embarrassing!

We studied in a secondary Jewish school in Dvinsk. All subjects were taught in the Russian language. Of course we had to pay for the school. My brother and I participated in the Komsomol movement in school. The Komsomol had a very strong influence in Latgalia. The Komsomol organization was underground. Only the youth clubs were legal; we attended those as well. I wasn't the most active member, but I was in prison for some time, nonetheless! I was in Riga's Central prison, in the solitary cell, but only for one month. In Daugavpils [formerly called Dvinsk] I served a short term, too. I had close connections with one comrade; we rented a room together. And when the members of our central committee were arrested, they were searching apartments and I was also put under arrest. They finally released me, but I remained under the supervision of the police. Later I was acquitted! In Riga, when I started to work, I had no links with the Komsomol any more. But the police knew me. I was always shadowed.