Simon Gutman With His Mother And Sister

This is a picture of me, my mother, Berta Gutnomen-Gutman, nee Aronovich, and my sister Anna Gutman. The photo was taken in Stropy, near the remarkable Stropy Lake, in 1931.

My elder sister Nyuta, born Anna Israelevna in 1903, had a sick leg. Mum took her to Berlin for medical treatment. She was eleven years old then, and on the eve of the war mum took her to Switzerland, and my sister stayed there. She learned German and French in Switzerland. Daddy helped her financially. When the West was cut off completely, my sister helped there working in mountain sanatoriums around Lausanne. She worked as much as she could to justify her stay in the sanatorium. She returned to Riga, to our uncle's place, via Finland in 1921. We only met in 1923.

when I arrived in Riga in 1928, my sister helped me to get a job with the Jewish theatre on 6 School Street. Every inch is familiar to me there. I'm the only living employee of that Jewish theater. All the rest are dead by now! Michael Io - his stage name was Io, but his full name was Ioffe - was the chief artist of the theatre. There were many actors, I made sketches of them all. What wonderful acquaintances we had! From America, from Poland, from different countries! In the first season I worked in a workshop. I thought, let them think there, in Dvinsk, 'Wow, Simka is an actor in a theatre!' And in fact it was like this: take a brush and do the wall-painter's job!

In 1931 I got acquainted with my future wife, Ida Ruvimovna Kvasnik, born in 1917. I met her in Stropy. The remarkable Stropy Lake! She was sitting there on a bench near a kiosk for the holiday-makers, and I approached her and started a conversation. I'm of a deleterious character to women! I liked to fall in love back then. I had affairs with women disregarding age. That's why I had two infarcts. Back then it was a country-side romance - I took her on boat trips, though I could hardly row at that time.