

Margarita Kamiyenskaya



This is me as a student of the Tallinn German Lyceum. I'm dressed in the lyceum uniform. This picture was taken in Tallinn in 1927. I had been bilingual since childhood. My father always spoke German to me and my mother spoke Russian. So, it's hard for me to say which of these languages I consider to be my native. Both of those languages were my first. Of course, soon I became fluent in Estonian living in an Estonian environment and playing with Estonian children. Nobody spoke Yiddish at home. When I turned eight, my parents sent me to the German girls' lyceum. It was considered to be the best in Tallinn in terms of education. Not only children of Germans went there, but also many Estonians and Jews. The tuition fee was rather high. It was mandatory to wear the

uniform consisting of a navy blue jacket, skirt, and beret with three white stripes. We also wore a lyceum badge on the chest. Teaching was in German. It wasn't hard for me as I had been speaking German with my father since childhood. Estonian, English and French were taught at the lyceum. We were taught so well that even when I went on vacation to Paris for a couple of weeks and told people that I had to be off to work, they thought that I was about to leave France to go on vacation, they didn't believe that I wasn't French. I was the only Jew in my class. I was friends with a Jewish girl, Anita, who studied in the parallel group. My other friends were two Estonian girls and one Swedish girl. I wasn't friends with the Germans. Even though I went to a German lyceum, my class teacher always used to tell me on the eve of the Jewish holidays that I could stay home on the occasion of the holiday. On Yom Kippur, Anita and I went to the synagogue for half a day and then we strolled along the city. We stopped by the show windows of confectionary stores and enjoyed looking at deserts, knowing that we couldn't eat them. The next day we weren't willing to eat them either.