

Liya Kaplan



This is me in a pageant costume. I won the first prize among the visitors of the resort Haapsala, on the coast of the Baltic Sea in Estonia, in 1939. A beautiful Chinese vase was my prize. In 1939, the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was signed and the first Soviet military bases were established in Estonia. Soviet troops came. In 1940, the communists came to power with the help of Soviet troops. There were demonstrations of the workers, accompanied by Soviet tanks. The government resigned and the parliament was dissolved and preterm elections were announced. The communists won the elections by a majority vote. The Estonian Soviet Republic was established right away and Soviet

Estonia officially became one of the Soviet republics. That was how all the Baltic countries were occupied. We immediately felt that a new regime had come to power. Our house was nationalized; it was needed by the Soviet regime that decided to make a hospital there. We, the former bourgeois, had to leave there at once. My father found a small house in a beautiful suburb of Tallinn, called Nõmme, so we moved there. I met my husband-to-be, Marcus Kaplan, in the last but one grade at school. I went to see my relatives in Tartu. Whilst there I met a Jewish girl named Berta, who had graduated from the Estonian Philology Department of Tartu University and taught Estonian at Tartu Jewish school. Berta and I had a frank conversation and it wasn't long before we both felt like we had been friends for ages. Berta suggested showing me Tartu. On our way we called on her brother Marcus, who owned a small store downtown. Berta introduced me to him and said that we were on the way to a café and asked if he'd join us, if he'd like to. Berta and I went to a café and after a couple of minutes Marcus came in. We spent some time together and then Berta tactfully left, leaving Marcus and I to spend the whole day together. We started seeing each other after that. Marcus came to Tallinn, and I made trips to Tartu. Both of my parents liked Marcus and things were evolving, so I was to marry him after leaving school.