

Kurt Kotouc In Elementary School



This is a picture of my class in the elementary school in Brno. It was taken in 1939. I am the one in center in the second row, the one with the curls.

The school was on Mendlovo Square. A significant part of the school was made up of the sons of the proletariat. School attendance was, of course, mandatory. The parents of Roma or circus performers got around the attendance law by sending their kids to school at the end of the school year, so that their child would receive a report card. Perhaps they were getting 5 or they failed but on paper it was proof of attendance. I remember a grotesque scene where a circus performer came to school and he chased the teacher with a whip because the teacher didn't want to give his son a report card.

At school, there were very few Jews. We were an exception; we didn't have to go to the religious classes with everyone else. I remember in the fourth or fifth grade, there was a young and elegant Catholic religion teacher. Once he called me and asked me to come to his place for a visit. He lived in a Jesuit convent; it was a real experience for me because the Jesuits were a very wealthy order. Upon entering the convent I walked through halls with high carpets and then I knocked on the teacher's door. In the room there were beautiful glass windows, a bed and a small table; everything was very elegant. And then he said, 'Listen, don't you have any books in Hebrew at home?' I answered that I didn't know. He said that he would be very interested, that he would like to read one. I came home and told my mom and she said that we didn't have any books in Hebrew. I said that I needed them for the teacher, so then I guess my mom found the book that I later took to the teacher, at my grandma's place.