

Henrich Kurizkes



This is me when I turned 13. This photo was taken in Tallinn in 1937. I was born in 1924, and I was the only child in the family. My parents were moderately religious. Of course, all Jewish traditions were well observed in our household. Mama followed kashrut. She only bought meat from a Jewish butcher. She also bought hens at the market to take them to the shochet. When I was six I went to the private Russian gymnasium. After I studied for four years in the Russian school, Estonian authorities issued an order directing all non-Estonian children to study either in their own language, or in an Estonian school. So I had to quit my Russian school and my parents sent me to a private English college. It was expensive, but they wanted to give me a good education. I was a member of the Jewish organization for young people, Hashomer Hatzair: "The Young Watchman." We had meetings every week. We were told about the history of the Jewish people, and we also had

quizzes, tests and various games. We always had a good time there. Besides, from 1937, every Saturday night, all Jewish children who didn't go to the Jewish school, visited Doctor Aba Gomer, the Rabbi of Tallinn, and he taught us Jewish history and traditions. I was to turn 13 in 1937. Don Shatz, my father's good friend and a very religious man, who went to the synagogue twice a day, started preparing me for my bar mitzvah. I had classes with him at his home every day. I learned a piece from the Torah, but I had to chant it when I had no voice or ear for singing. So I was allowed to recite it. I would say, I had a bar mitzvah and a concert that day. Misha Alexandrovich, a wonderful singer and cantor, conducted the service at the synagogue. He had studied singing in Austria and the cantor of Riga paid for his studies. In the evening we had a celebration for my bar mitzvah. Our apartment was small so we got together at my uncle Iosif's home. He lived in a big apartment near the central park in Tallinn.