

Hesse Tsivian



This photograph shows my mother, Hesse Tsivian, nee Heiman. It was taken in Tallinn in 1935. My parents decided that their future clients lived in the capital and moved to Tallinn in 1919. They rented a small flat there and opened a corset workshop. At first my mother worked there alone, but later, as orders flowed in, she hired several workers. My mother was an excellent expert, she always followed the European fashion. Moreover, she was an extremely charming and friendly woman. She was proficient in Yiddish, Estonian, and Russian, and could speak some German, too. Her business was thriving. After I was born in 1929 my parents rented a larger apartment in the

center of the city. I recall that the largest room contained six sewing machines, mannequins with finished products on them, and lots of fashion magazines lying around. For celebrations all this was pushed against the wall and the room turned into a living room. In 1935 my parents rented yet larger premises in which they opened a corset shop. It was called 'Madame Tsivian.' Apart from my mother, it employed eight more workers. They produced corsets, brassieres, abdominal supports for pregnant women and for women after childbirth. At that time it was the most fashionable corset shop in Tallinn. Among the shop's numerous clients were wives of the highest Estonian state officials including the president's wife. In the 1930s our family was quite wealthy and the basis for our prosperity was earned by my mother's hands. Certainly, my father worked as well. He helped my mother by setting up the workshops, purchasing equipment and fabrics, maintained financial affairs, and then, in the middle of the 1930s, he opened a furniture shop of his own. They both built and sold furniture there.