

Siima Shkop And Her Family



This is our family. From left to right: my father Jacob Shkop, my mother Rosa Shkop. I am next to them. My sister Masha is behind me. My eldest sister Rachel is sitting to the right from me. The picture was made in Tartu in 1926. I do not know where my parents met. All I know is that they had a true Jewish wedding in Tartu with the rabbi and chuppah. Soon after the wedding, Father found a job in Sweden and left there with Mom. Father did not work there for a long time and decided to immigrate to America. He got in touch with his pals, who were living there, and they talked him out of it. At that time there was an unemployment crisis in America and his pals wrote that it would be hard for him to find a job there. Mother was pregnant and wanted to give birth in Tartu, so they decided to come back. In 1909 my elder sister Rachel was born. She was called Rika in the family. When she was one year old, Father found a job in Warsaw, Poland. He was fluent in Polish and welcomed the chance to work there. They did not stay there for long. The house, where Father's workshop was, burned down, and my parents came back to Tartu again. There were four people in the family now. In 1911 my sister Masha was born in Warsaw. She was named after our paternal grandfather, Moishe Shkop. They rented an apartment in Tartu and Father had his workshop there. During World War I, Father was drafted into the army, and he was in the lines for four years. He was contused, when he was in Manchuria. Father had serious heart trouble when he came back to Tartu after war. He had a great workshop in Tartu and was a famous tailor there. Mother was a housewife at that time and took care of children. When she got pregnant again, Father was sure that he would have a son. He was agog to see a son, but I was born in 1920. I was named after my maternal grandmother Sima. I do not know whether Father was disappointed that I was born, instead of a long-awaited son, but still he loved me very much and I loved him too. In spite of being busy, he paid attention to his children. Yiddish was spoken at home, so I have known my mother tongue since childhood. Estonian was my other mother tongue, as my sisters and I played with Estonian children, who were living in our yard. It was natural for us to speak Estonian. Father was also fluent in Polish and Russian. His favorite writer was the Czech comedian writer Jaroslav Gashek. At home we had his book about a brave student Sweik. The book was in Yiddish and Father liked reading it to us. Father had a nice tenor voice. There was a Jewish drama theater in Tartu. There were no professional actors there, only talented amateur actors. The operetta 'Silva' was

staged in the theater. I remember Mom and Dad often read in duet. Father had another hobby - chess. There were some nooks in the theater where people could play chess. I remember Father took me to the café, where he bought me ice-cream and I was watching how he played chess. Father was good at chess and I also started understanding the game. In fact, Father liked taking me anywhere he could. When the first movie theaters opened up, he took me there. Father loved reading and plied me with that since childhood. We had a very good library at home and Father also took me to the Jewish library in Tartu. We enjoyed getting together in the evening and read. Then we discussed the books and shared our opinion. My parents were very sociable. Father had many friends. His best pals were those who were in the lines with him. My parents often went for a visit and we also received guests in our house. We kept the door open for people.