

Ruth Strazh And Her Family



This is our family taking a walk in the Kadriorg Park in Tallinn. From left to right: I, my mama Esther, my father Max Brodowski and my younger sister Sofia. This photo was taken in 1932. I was born in Tartu in 1925. Mama went to Tartu to have her first baby in a clinic there having been told that there were the best doctors and conditions in this clinic. Everything went well despite her concerns, and after I was born Mama and I returned to Valga. I was the first girl, born to the family after Mama's older sister Rohe-Gitl died, and so I was given the name of Ruth starting with the first letter of her name. This is an old Jewish name. My younger sister Sofia was born in Valga in 1929. Mama delivered her at home, and my father and a midwife attended to her. My sister's Jewish name is Soreh, and in her documents she had the name of Sofia. In the family we spoke Yiddish, German and Estonian. Mama also spoke fluent Russian. My sister and I already spoke three languages, when we were children. My sister and I had a nurse, but my mama's family spent a lot of time with us. My grandmother and grandfather lived quite nearby, and my sister and I often visited them. We probably spent as much time with our grandparents as we did at home. My grandmother and grandfather loved us dearly, and my childhood memories are closely attached to them. Mama's brothers also spent a lot of time with us. I also loved them dearly. I never addressed them with 'Aunt' or 'Uncle', but just by their first names. They were religious and observed Jewish traditions. I remember Grandpa putting on his tallit and tefillin to pray in the morning and in the evening. We knew that we were not allowed to disturb Grandfather, when he was praying. When he didn't, he took us out and told us stories from the Bible that were very much like fairy tales. In 1931 my parents decided to move to Tallinn. I don't know why they decided to do so. Besides medical practice, my father took to business in Tallinn. He bought a fabric store. He didn't work in this store, but he checked reports and took part in major decision making process. Mama took care of the house and the children. My father wanted us to learn languages and sent us to the Hebrew gymnasium in Tallinn. We studied all subjects in Hebrew while we didn't speak Hebrew at home. In summer our parents rented a villa at the seashore in Pirit. Our grandmother and grandfather stayed with us there, and Mama and Papa visited us at weekends. Mikhelson, our teacher at the gymnasium, also spent vacations in this town. He was Jewish and his wife was Estonian, but she

spoke better Hebrew than any Jewish person. One should listen to her! She made gefilte fish and forshmak from herring on Sabbath. My father talked to Mikhelson about teaching me Hebrew. We went to the beach where we spent three to four hours speaking Hebrew. We didn't read or write, just lay in the sun and bathed, but we never spoke a word in other languages. Before the start of the academic year I spoke as fluent Hebrew as was my Yiddish. I had no problems with Hebrew at school.