

Ruth Strazh With Her Mother Esther Brodowski And Sister Sofia Popova



From left to right: my younger sister Sofia, I and our mother Esther Brodowski. This photo was taken in Tallinn in 1935. 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

Pirita. 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. I learned the alphabet in the first grade. We had very skilled teachers. Many of them, including Samuil Gurin, our director, were Polish Jews that had moved to Estonia. There were four girls and twelve boys in my class. We had nice uniforms: dark blue gowns with white collars and black aprons. Girls wore dark blue berets, and there were diagonal stripes of silvery bands on the side. The number of stripes indicated the grade the girl was in. There was also a gymnasium emblem and the name of our Jewish gymnasium. On holidays we wore large white silk collars with flounces. Boys wore dark blue suits, shirts and ties. There were a few children's and young people's Jewish organizations, both leftist and rightist ones. My friends joined some and I also wanted to join one. When I mentioned this at home in my father's presence, he said I had to study instead of going into politics. So I never joined Betar, or Hashomer Hatzair. My father had nothing against my attending children's centers, etc., as long as they had nothing to do with leftist or rightist Zionist organizations. This was strictly forbidden. I attended a Maccabi gym going in for gymnastics. I also had two Russian and two English classes per week besides school. I also took music classes twice a week and also, practiced playing at home. I was learning to play the piano. My parents bought a piano. Mama played the piano well, and listened to my playing, when I practiced at home.