

Rifca Segal As A Girl



This is me, Rifca Segal. I must have been 10 at the time, I was a pupil. So this picture was taken around 1938 in Sulita.

My parents got married in 1927, and I, Rifca Segal, was born in 1928 in Sulita. Officially, my name is Rifca, they named me after a great-grandmother, the mother of my grandmother from my mother's side. But people call me Rica, as Sulita's county chief - his name was Hotupasu - had a daughter whose name was Rica. And my parents were very good friends with the county chief.

I went to the cheder in Sulita, since I was 3 and a half, 4 years old, until I was 7, until I started going to school. I went there with other small boys, around 2 hours a day. But there weren't many girls there. My grandmother, my father's mother, was a very religious person, and she spied on me to see that I attended the cheder. And I actually liked it. I had a Lehrer – Lehrer means teacher, his name was Motas. And he used to say: "Odapam, odapam!", meaning "Once more, once more!" [Editor's note: "Od pam" means 'again' in Hebrew.] He taught Yiddish, not Ivrit. That's why I can write and speak Yiddish. The letters are the same as in the Hebrew alphabet. But the words are different, and you write differently. I learned Yiddish only at the cheder, and afterwards I wrote and read Yiddish by myself, and I didn't forget it. There was a bookstore in Botosani, where they sold books written both in Yiddish, and in Ivrit, and in Romanian as well. You could buy them, and I had at home books written in Yiddish, in Ivrit. But I kind of destroyed them under communism, I was afraid. I still have a few dictionaries and a few books in Ivrit, but that's nothing compared to what I had.

In principle, synagogues are all equally nice. And the one in Sulita had a place for keeping the Holy Scrolls, with plush curtains, with historical paintings on the walls. The one in Sulita had a balcony for women. Here, in Botosani, there is a separate room for women. There is also a balcony – you reach it by means of a circular staircase –, but it is out of use. In Sulita, you could go there every day, even in the middle of the day. Oh my, how I liked to go to the synagogue when I was little!

My mother had separate dishes for milk and meat. My paternal grandmother was there, to see to it... of my, did she see to it! She was quite something, poor thing. When I grew up, I offered my opinion myself [on Jewish traditions]. But my oh my, my grandmother observed... Was I allowed to speak my mind in these matters? Do you know how she called me? 'Bolshevik.' For she knew Bolsheviks didn't observe religion.