

Chasia Spanerflig With Her Schoolmates



This is our school company. All of us took part in the performance 'Tevye the milkman' by Sholem Aleichem, and we had our picture taken after the performance. Our teacher Steinhaus is sitting the third to the left in the second row. He perished in the ghetto. He was shot along with the patients of the Jewish hospital. I am the third from the left in the top row. Next to me is my friend Masha Nemze, the 2nd to the left is my fellow student Izya (Israel) Katz. During the war he was in evacuation. Then he went to Israel, where he died in the 1990s. I do not remember the rest. We studied in different classes and met only in the drama studio. The picture was taken in Vilnius in 1935.

Generally, children of wealthy people went to my lyceum and I took a split roll with me to conceal my poverty and to show that there was something in it, thought at times there wasn't even butter inside the roll. Children who knew about my poverty treated me very well. When the class was going on an excursion which wasn't free of charge, one of the rich children paid for me so I could go with everybody. They didn't do it to show off, but stealthily, for me even not to know about it.

I had friends. My bosom friend was Mikhail Brantsovskiy. He was my classmate. His parents were wealthy people – Mikhail's father was involved in manufacturing. I was friends with Mikhail's cousin, Chaya Kushnir, who came from the province and lived in Brantsovskiy's house. Mikhail's mother, Dina Brantsovskaya, was a very kind woman. Her house was always open for her son's friends. There were times when a large company of friends came to Mikhail's and stayed in the house until late. I often went there by myself. Aunt Dina always made sure that I was fed. She understood that I was undernourished. Sometimes I stayed overnight, not to walk around in the street at a late hour.

Masha Nemze was also my friend. Her parents owned a large fur store in the heart of the city. They had a dacha and they invited me to come over there for a couple of weeks during vacation. On Jewish holidays, the lyceum was closed and I went to my home town. I spent summer holidays at home as well. I didn't want to go home as I was afraid of my parents' tiffs, which became more frequent with the years. But still, I loved my town, my school friends and I enjoyed spending time with them.