

## Sima Libman In The Kindergarten.



The photograph shows the class in the Jewish kindergarten which I joined when I was five years old. I'm the fourth one from the left standing in the second row.

When I was four and a half years old, my parents hired a German governess for me so that I could learn German. This was the trend in Estonia at that time. She would come around noon and take me for a walk: we read books and played while speaking German only. At night she put me to bed and left. I forgot my Russian and started speaking German well: it's always easier when you're a child. Later, I studied German in school, and I can still speak, read, and write German. When I was five years old, I was sent to a Jewish kindergarten. I was there from 9am to 2pm when my governess would pick me up. During breakfast the children took turns helping in the dining-room by setting out the dishes and cleaning up afterwards. Our teacher, Madame Dubovski, who my parents became friends with later, used to recall how I would refuse to do the dining room duty and explained to everyone in German that I would have servants do this for me when I grew up.

Yiddish was the language spoken in my kindergarten. There were Hebrew kindergartens as well, but my father acknowledged only Yiddish: he was a hard-line Yiddishist. From a very young age, since my kindergarten years, I loved performing: I recited poems, sang, and acted in plays. There were plenty of chances to perform in school: end of school year, special parent nights, and various celebrations. The Jewish holidays which our school always celebrated were Purim and Chanukkah. For Purim we had fancy-dress balls, and for Chanukkah we did concerts, where I always performed. Other holidays were celebrated at home. Our school was secular. We knew all religious traditions, but there was no religious trend. The Hebrew classes had Tannakh lessons, but we didn't. There was a cheder at the school. Some boys, who wanted to study the Torah, remained in school after lessons, and a rabbi conducted their lessons. There was no yeshivah in Estonia.