

Miriam Patova



This is me, wearing the school uniform, when I was a pupil of the Estonian school. This photo was taken in Rakvere in 1938.

I went to the Estonian school. We studied all the subjects in Estonian. We also had German classes every day. The school was accommodated in a small wooden house. There was one teacher for two classes. I was the only Jewish student in my class, but in all those years I can't remember one single incident of unkind attitude towards me or any emphasis on my origin. When the rest of the class had a religious class, my teacher didn't force me to study the Orthodox religion. She gave me a Bible, a thick book with pictures, and I looked at the pictures. Every morning there was a prayer before our classes started, but I was allowed to go to school after the prayer. On the eve of Jewish holidays my teacher told me that I could stay at home. This respectful attitude to a different religion during the period of the first Estonian independence was absolutely natural for us.

Our uniform was a dark blue dress with a little white collar and an apron. On holidays we wore a bigger white collar, which we tied in a bow, and no apron. We were raised in strictness. I liked running along the streets, and when I saw a policeman, I slowed down and greeted him making a curtsy before him. This was the rule considering that he guarded the nation. If a boy and a girl walked together, the boy was to let her pass before he went through the door. We were taught this in our childhood: this was the way things should have been. Later, after the Soviet occupation, when Estonia was annexed to the Soviet Union in 1940, our school was closed, and all the schoolchildren were sent to the Municipal Estonian school. I never faced any anti-Semitism in my old or new school. This subject was never discussed at home either. I had Jewish and Estonian friends. They visited me at home, and my mother always treated them nicely.