

Pupils Of The 5th Form Of The Hebrew School



This photograph was taken in Riga in 1932. It shows the pupils of my form at the Jewish Hebrew school. The photograph was taken by our school photographer. It happened early in spring, when there was already no snow and many pupils came to school by bicycle. At the left side of the photograph you can see a bicycle leaned against the wall.

I went to school when I was seven. I started from the second form at Jewish Hebrew school. At that time it was common to skip the first grade, if you were well prepared. I studied perfectly well. Everything was interesting for me, I can not name my favorite subject, I liked them all, except history. In history I also had my excellent mark, but it was the most laborious one. At school there were outstanding teachers. They not only knew their subjects perfectly well, but also had various talents. For example, our teacher Korz was very talented for music. Under his guidance we played Haydn symphony using pipes and penny whistles. He did his best to invent something unusual for each holiday. In the second form we made very interesting performance Alphabet. I was the shortest, and he gave me Yud, because it was the smallest one. But at the same time I was explained that words Jew and Israel began with that very letter. [Yud is the tenth letter in the Hebrew alphabet, in its written form it is only a small line. In Hebrew both Yehudi (Jew) and Israel start with Yud.] I was very proud to get that remarkable letter.

So many years have passed, but I still remember surnames of almost all our teachers. Our first teacher: Madame Meerson, teacher of natural history Mr. Pintsov... Certainly, at this sort of school there were no Anti-Semitic manifestations (and it had no possibility to exist there). By the way, the teacher of Latvian language, Madame Frei (a Latvian) used to say that she liked Jewish children very much and preferred to work with them. Our school was a six-year one. We finished it in 1939. All school graduates received badges, with an inscription in Lettish but with Hebrew letters 'The main city of Riga, Jewish school no.9, 1939'. Almost all my schoolmates perished during the war. After finishing that school I entered Hebrew gymnasium.

This gymnasium suggested very extensive program. In the beginning of school year it was necessary to bring an application form from parents where they indicated, what language they wanted their child to study. In the next form they added one language more, and so forth. After five years of education they graduated young people knowing five languages. From the very beginning I chose Latin, because I was going to become a doctor. The gymnasium practiced co-education (boys and girls studied together, but in classes they sat in different rows). In 1940 in Latvia Soviet power was established [occupation of the Baltic Republics] [3](#). Hebrew was immediately declared hostile and Zionistic language, and our Hebrew gymnasium was turned into Yiddish school. A lot of my schoolmates left for other schools, but I did not, because I did not want to part with my favorite teachers. Unfortunately, it was my bitter mistake: soon the best teachers were fired; both children and adults were spied on. We took cover in the cloakroom to talk in Hebrew: it was absolutely forbidden. The school lost its former prestige.

Both at school and in gymnasium they taught us bases of Judaism. But religion was not among the main subjects. It was rather a tribute to Tradition. I remember well our teacher of religion from the fifth form, but unfortunately my memory did not keep his name. I know for sure that he perished during the war.