

Irene Shein



This is a picture of me, taken during my visit to my maternal grandparents' place in Riga in 1939.

I was born on 17th August 1932. I was named Irene. I barely saw Father in my childhood. He left early in the morning and came back late at night, when I was sleeping. He didn't have a car. He took the horse cart. Village roads were earthed roads and after rain they turned into bog. It was hard to ride on those roads. Father came home worn out. I remember there was a gadget to take off our boots. Rarely did Father have a day off and if so he was just lying on the couch almost all day long, trying to recoup.

Though we were rather well-heeled, my parents raised me rather rigidly. I couldn't choose dishes at the table. I was supposed to eat what was laid on the table. If I didn't like it, I could choose not to eat and stay hungry. I remember when I was about two years old, I said that I 'wanted' some dish and Father told me to leave the table. I was supposed to say 'I would like.' I was not allowed to be finical.

My parents paid a lot of attention to my education. First, I had a baby-sitter, then they hired a governess. During my childhood, my parents and governess spoke only German with me. I easily learned German and Estonian, which was spoken by our maid, who was Estonian. That good woman was very kind and let me away with all kinds of pranks, which I wouldn't have with my mother.

Later, Mother started speaking Russian with me for me to learn that language. I spoke broken Russian. It was hard for me to pronounce certain sounds. I had a Russian tutor who came to our

house. Finally I had a good command of Russian. When I turned five, there was a ballet stand made and I was taught ballet dancing. Before I went to school, Mother took me to a French teacher.