

Eta Gurvich



This is me when I just turned one year and one month. The picture was made in Kaunas photo studio Modern (Nikolayevskiy avenue), the 15th of August 1912.

My parents got married in 1909. In 1910 my elder sister Anna was born and in 1913 - brother Jacob, named after grandfather Jacob Gurvich. I, the youngest, was born on the 20th of April 1920. I was named Eta. The newly-weds went to Kaunas, where they settled in the house of grandfather Jacob. In 1910 my elder sister Anna was born and in 1913 - brother Jacob, named after grandfather Jacob Gurvich. I, the youngest, was born on the 20th of April 1920. I was named Eta.

I barely remember my early childhood, by the age of seven. These were years of happiness, when my parents were with me. I remember happy times, when father came home from work, hugged mother and played with me. I was the little one as elder siblings went to lyceum at that time. Mother ran the house. There was a lady Teresa to help mother with the chores. Polish Teresa was a grown-up woman, a widow. Her husband died shortly before she came to work for us. Teresa, who occupied a small room partitioned from the kitchen, became a kind angel for our house. She spoke Yiddish fluently, cooked Jewish dishes under mother's supervision and soon became a good cook. Our four-room apartment was immaculately clean. In spring 1927 our mother died. Now sister Anna was in charge of the household. She turned 17, when mother died. She finished Yiddish lyceum. Sister only formally ran the household. Our loyal Teresa practically ran everything. Of course, she did not manage to do everything the way mother did.

When I turned six, I went to that lyceum. Mother was still alive. I think it was mother's wish for her children to study in Hebrew lyceum. I finished two or three junior grades. Then father transferred

me to a newly opened Yiddish lyceum. First that lyceum was named after Sholom-Aleichem. It was an amazing school. My studies at lyceum were probably the brightest years in my life. The studies were not free of charge. Usually children of well-off parents studied here, but there were children of poor Jews as well. Their tuition was paid by a special fund, where donations were made by wealthy people. All subjects were taught in Yiddish. Jewish holidays were marked in lyceum. The most hilarious was Purim, when the pageant was organized and everybody treated each other to shelakmones. Teresa made a pageant costume for me. She was the one who cooked shelakmones as well. There was a democratic air in lyceum. We were taught Tanach like one of the religious subjects, but it was rather formal. Nobody demanded profound knowledge of religion from children. Modern sciences were taught at a very serious level. We had wonderful teachers, real devotees, carried away by their work. Most of all we liked the teacher of Lithuanian language Zimanis. He was the youngest teacher, only 10 years older than we. Apart from teaching Lithuanian, Zimanis also taught biology, arranged hiking trips in the closest vicinity, told us amazing stories. We also loved geography teacher Itsikson and many others. Liberal arts appealed to me more. I liked literature, music and dancing. We also had extra-curriculum classes- we were taught how to play the piano. Father bought me the piano. I was fond of dancing, so I attended choreography studio. I dreamt to become a ballet-dancer. I had a lot of friends among boys and girls. We sauntered along Kaunas broad way, had tea and coffee, bought tidbits- in many cafes and confectionaries. I took an interest in theatre. There were two Jewish theatres in Kaunas. I liked to attend musical and drama performances.