

Riva Smerkovicene With Her Husband Gutman Smerkovicius And Daughter Lena



This is my daughter Lena and I, Riva Smerkovicene, with my husband Gutman in the assembly hall of the Jewish kindergarten in Kaunas, where Lena used to go. The picture was taken against the background of a child statue of Lenin in 1947.

The kindergarten was in the same house where the Jewish orphanage was, on Kestuchio Street. The Jewish community, founded upon liberation, was also located there. The orphanage and kindergarten were under the aegis of the Jewish community. Many Jews helped out the best way they could. There were orphans in the kindergarten, who lost parents and felt the horrors of war in early childhood. Rebelskiy, the colonel of the Soviet Army was the one who provided most of the assistance. Using his connections and acquaintances, he went to different organizations for them to provide financial assistance to our orphanage. He got food products for the children. He brought a cow, which was kept in the shed in the rear yard. So the children had milk. They loved it, their 'wet-nurse.' Rebelskiy also brought linen, mattresses, pillows, quilts to the kindergarten. Before that the children used anything they could find as bed cover. The state didn't have time and money to take care of the Jewish orphanage. We hardly got anything from our regime. Rebelskiy gave a set of linen to me. So my daughter and I had something to sleep on.

In early 1946 my husband Gutman was demobilized. I was so happy to see him again. Towards the end of the war he served in the summer unit of the Lithuanian division, which was located in the Romanian town of Constanta. Gutman was involved in technical maintenance of aircraft. Upon arrival in Kaunas, Gutman found out that his loved ones had perished in occupation. His mother

Leya was executed during the first big action in Kaunas ghetto. His sister Riva, not having found her daughters Rozele and Gitele, who were taken away during the action against children, surrendered for an execution. My husband's favorite brother, Itshak, a talented Jewish poet, lived to see the liberation. He was very exhausted and famished. On the first day when he ate a lot of food, he died from volvulus. Gutman took the death of his kin really hard. My daughter and I were the only joy he had.