

Sidonia Illes With Her Cousins



This is a photo taken in 1930, and you can see me in it: I am the first from right, in the back row, with the white dress. Next to me there is my cousin, Iolanda Freund, and the girl next to her is the daughter of my mother, Bella Katz's, oldest brother. Another cousin is the daughter of an aunt in the front row, and in the middle there is my mother's younger sister, Rozsi. I don't remember who the other girls are. I was born in the town of Satu Mare, in 1919. I first went to school when I was six or seven. I couldn't go to a Jewish school, for there were only Romanian schools in Satu Mare. I had a Romanian teacher, but I forgot her name. I also had Hungarian classmates, as people were very mixed up there. I couldn't say there was any anti-Semitism at school while I was a pupil. And if there was, I didn't notice it. I went to that school for seven years. I remember I was a good pupil and that I liked to study a lot. Of course, I have always enjoyed literature, since the days I could barely read. My father didn't help me with my homework, as there was no need for that. Certain rules in our family were so strict, that we didn't even talk about them. This was the Jewish law. There were no uniforms back then in school, but one wasn't allowed to wear low-cut dresses that might show the cleavage or short sleeves. We didn't study religion, either at school or separately. At least, I don't recall any religion classes while I was in school. Religious education came from the family, not from school. Saturday was a holiday; I didn't study anything with my father on that day. We seldom saw my mother's relatives. When we did, this usually happened at my grandmother's. We only paid visits to the ones who lived closer. Blanka didn't live far, but all the others were married and had moved to other places. I never went to Czechoslovakia or to Dej. Nevertheless, all brothers and sisters would come to my grandmother's to see one another every year. They arranged to be there when others from other places would be too, so that they could meet. We were a beautiful family and we cared about these things. I know that my mother's sisters, my aunts, paid visits to one another. The grandchildren who came to my grandmother's would sleep in one of the three rooms. The children would not come all at the same time, as we lived in different places, so there was enough room.