

Elkhonen Saks With His Sister Ite Saks And Their Nurse Zelma



This is a picture of my sister Ite Saks, me and our nurse and servant Zelma. The photo was taken at the entrance of the house in Valga where we rented an apartment for many years. At the end of 1921 my sister Ite was born. My mother was frequently sick, so she was helped around the house by an elderly Latvian lady, Zelma. Zelma was illiterate, but very kind and nice. I was born in 1927. My birth, I think, was the reason for my mother's death. She died when I was only 7 days old. My sister told me that when mother was alive all Jewish traditions were observed in the house. She tried to cook kosher meals only, observed Sabbath and celebrated all Jewish holidays. After her death all the housework was done by Zelma. As a boy I believed that Zelma was my mother,

because she looked after me. The first language I started to speak was Latvian. At the same time my sister and my father taught me Yiddish and I knew it perfectly well by the time I turned 3. In the family we used several languages, Yiddish always being the main one. Yiddish was also spoken in the families of our friends, and so I learnt the language very well communicating with Jewish children and their parents. Since then I write in all questionnaires that my native language is Yiddish, although I speak several other languages fluently. I believe I do that, because Yiddish is the language of my childhood. Zelma tried to stick to the order my mother had established, but, certainly, we didn't have a real Jewish life any more. My sister Ite and I became independent early, because from 1936 to 1941 we lived in Valga alone. Since then our father lived in Tallinn, received a good salary and visited us in Valga a few times a month. He used to spend holidays with us or just came for two or three days. His job implied constant travelling, that's why he thought we would be better off in Valga, although he did plan to take us to Tallinn some time in the future. Of course, Zelma stayed with us taking care of the household, and for me she was both a nurse and a mother.