

Siima Shkop



This is me on my first birthday. When I turned one, Mother asked a photographer to come over to our house and take my picture. The picture was taken in Tartu in 1921. I was born in 1920. I was named after my maternal grandmother Sima. Father loved me very much and I loved him too. Yiddish was spoken at home, so I have known my mother tongue since childhood. Estonian was my other mother tongue, as my sisters and I played with Estonian children, who were living in our yard. It was natural for us to speak Estonian. Father was also fluent in Polish and Russian. His favorite writer was the Czech comedian writer Yaroslav Gashek. At home we had his book about a brave student Sweik. The book was in Yiddish and Father liked reading it to us. Father had a nice tenor voice. There was a Jewish drama theater in Tartu. There were no professional actors there, only talented amateur actors. The operetta 'Silva' was staged in the theater. I remember Mom and Dad

often read in duet. Father had another hobby - chess. There were some nooks in the theater where people could play chess. I remember Father took me to the café, where he bought me ice-cream and I was watching how he played chess. Father was good at chess and I also started understanding the game. In fact, Father liked taking me anywhere he could. When the first movie theaters opened up, he took me there. Mother took me to the Jewish kindergarten. The teacher was the wife of the director of the Jewish school in Tartu. She taught Ivrit, and I still remember it. All classes were taught in Ivrit and Mother wanted me to learn the language and to be among children. I went to study when Father was still alive. He was getting more and more unwell, and there was a lack of money. That is why I entered Jewish elementary school.