

Mariasha Vasserman



This is me at the age of four. The picture was taken in Tallinn in 1932. In 1915 my parents had their first-born. My brother was named Perets after Grandfather. My sister was born in 1919. She was called Sore-Reyze. I was born in 1928, and I was named Mariasha. My parents were very busy at the store, and couldn't pay me a lot of attention, so my governess taught me everything. Owing to her I learnt German and French. She tried to teach me Russian, but for some reason Russian was too complicated for me. My parents spoke Yiddish with each other and German with the children. German was my native language. My first words were spoken in German. I learnt Estonian by

natural method, communicating with children in the yard. Our family knew Estonian. It went without saying for us: since we were living in Estonia, we were supposed to know the language of the country. All of us went to the Jewish lyceum on Karu Street. At present that building belongs to the Estonian Jewish community. At that time there were two private Jewish lyceums. One of them, where we went to, had the teaching in Ivrit, the other one in Yiddish. When Perets was in the junior grades of that lyceum, some subjects there were taught in Russian; when my sister went there, all subjects were taught only in Ivrit. Ivrit wasn't spoken at home. One year before lyceum, I went to the kindergarten, where children were taught Ivrit. We had a wonderful teacher called Anna Klas, the daughter of the chazzan of the largest Tallinn synagogue, Gourevich. Then she became a pianist. Her son Erie Klas is the conductor of the Tallinn symphonic orchestra. Anna didn't only teach us music; she also taught us the rudiments of Ivrit. Children perceive things quickly and after kindergarten we were ready to study all lyceum subjects in Ivrit. We stayed in the kindergarten from morning until noon. Probably it was not very different from modern kindergartens. We played different games, learned how to sing, draw, went for strolls. Many children, with whom I made friends in the kindergarten, were enrolled in the same grade in lyceum. All my friends from childhood were Jews. Most of them were my school friends. Some of them were children of my parents' friends.