

Sima Libman With Her Mother Sofia Rogovski



This photo is of my mother, Sofia Rogovski and I. I was five years old. The picture was taken in Tallin in 1929.

When I was four and a half years old, my parents hired a German governess for me so that I could learn German. This was the trend in Estonia at that time. She would come around noon and take me for a walk: we read books and played while speaking German only. At night she put me to bed and left. I forgot my Russian and started speaking German well: it's always easier when you're a child. Later, I studied German in school, and I can still speak, read, and write German. When I was five years old, I was sent to a Jewish kindergarten. I was there from 9am to 2pm when my governess would pick me up. During breakfast the children took turns helping in the dining-room by setting out the dishes and cleaning up afterwards. Our teacher, Madame Dubovski, who my parents became friends with later, used to recall how I would refuse to do the dining room duty and explained to everyone in German that I would have servants do this for me when I grew up.

I started going to school early, at the age of six and a half years: this was what I wanted. It happened in 1930. The Jewish school I went to was nearby. My class was small: we were taught all the subjects in Yiddish. Classes where subjects were taught in Hebrew were much more numerous. Base Schneeberg was the name of the teacher who taught us from first to fourth grade. From fifth grade onwards we studied languages: Estonian, German, and Hebrew. We were not too serious about Hebrew. We had a few lessons and we had no great desire to study it anyway. Influenced by our Yiddishist parents we considered Yiddish the true Jewish language. Students who were taught in Hebrew didn't want to study Yiddish. Of course, there were families where both Russian and German were spoken. The school used a unified national curriculum, but our textbooks were in Yiddish. They were printed in Vilno in Poland.

My mother was an energetic person, she loved being around people and participated in all kinds of events. While I was still in elementary school, my mother was always elected for the school's governing committee where she worked very hard. In our school we had a small lunchroom, and during lunch break we could buy things like pastries, biscuits, or lemonade there. There was a long table in the hallway on the second floor where tea was sold from a samovar. Some ladies from the governing committee were always on duty in the lunchroom and kept order. My mother was often on duty. Both my parents were active members of the Byalik Society: a Tallinn Jewish Society for Culture and Education. It was a secular organization: a kind of club. My father was a board member there.