

Maks Schiff



This is my father Rene-Maks-Aleksander-Johann Schiff, took his picture shortly after he entered Tartu university. The picture was made in Tartu in 1920s, unfortunately the original was not preserved. This is the copy of my father's picture.

My father Max Schiff was born in Valga on 30 November 1903. His full name was Rene-Maks-Aleksander-Johann. I would not say that the family of father's parents was rich, but they were well off rather. They did not have their own lodging in Tallinn, so they rented a big apartment in the center of Tallinn. In spite of the fact that grandmother had big hearing problems, they had two grand-pianos and she could play the piano very well. She took care children and of the household, while grandfather earned money. Grandfather kept had a small cafe in Tallinn in Chernogolov club (there was an aristocratic club).

Father and his brother studied at lyceum in Tallinn. Having finished lyceum father entered Tartu University. I do not know what department he entered. When he was a little over 20, being in the third year, it turned out that he had tuberculosis, at that time it was fraught with lethality. At that time almost all TB patients died. Father quitted studies. My great grandmother from Vienna interfered. She was a very wealth woman and sent father to the sanatorium in Alps having covered all expenses. Tuberculosis was treated there ,but they only took patients with healthy heart and stomach. The treatment cost a lot of money though it was without any medicine. The sanatorium was in the mountains. No matter how cold it was outside the patients had to stay outside all the time, wrapped up in the quilts. They inhaled mountain air and that the treatment. Another important constituent was nutrition. They had to eat a lot, even if people were not hungry, they

were made to eat. There were stables by the sanatorium, where horses were milked for koumys. Apart from food, each patient had to drink one liter of koumis per day. People really got cured. My father had stayed there for half a year until full convalescence. After that he never had problems with his lungs. Though, in sanatorium he got in habit to eat a lot and his good appetite was always there.

After sanatorium father had spent one year in Vienna as great grandmother insisted. He liked Vienna very much. When he was back home, he started looking for a bride among Jewish girls. My father met mother by chance. Mother told me that during the shopping father came up to her and asked her why she had such accent when speaking Estonian. Mother lied to dad saying that she was from Russia. This is how they met and started seeing each other. My parents did not date for a long time before father proposed to her. At that time father decided that his children should be the Jews, but he was baptized himself. Father went through giur and took Judaism along with circumcision. When father told his kin that he was going to marry, they were strongly against it. Mother was a poor uneducated Jewish girl. Grandmother did not think her to be the perfect match. Grandmother even offered my mom money for her to turn down father's proposal. Of course, mother took no money. Father's younger brother was a member of Estonian fascist party. When he found out that father turned to Jewry, he started instigating grandparent even more, but my father had always been mulish and persistent. Then there were incessant scandals at home, he just left the house without taking nothing home. My parents got married in 1930.