

Matilda Levi As A Fourth Grader



You have probably seen many pictures of this kind - the whole class gathered together. In this case we are in the fourth grade, in 1930. We still lived in Karnobat. We moved to Sofia a couple of years later. I'm in the rear line, next to the man in the suit, fourth from left.

I went to the Jewish school. There were only two rooms in the Jewish school: the first and second grade studied in the same room. The result was that when I was studying in the first grade I listened to the second grade lessons as well. So officially we finished the first grade but in fact we 'finished' the second as well.

My first teacher in the Jewish school was very good: a Bulgarian, but I believe she was of Greek origin. In Karnobat there were Greeks, but they didn't recognize themselves as Greeks, but as Bulgarians. She was a little plump; she was very nice and was married. When somebody couldn't answer some question, I answered and then she sent me out of the classroom. It happened often and one day I felt cold and went back home.

I loved all the subjects but I was especially biased towards literature. I didn't carry my textbooks back home; I knew everything by heart, so I left them at school. I just didn't know what it was like to study at home. When at the end of the year they gave the certificates to us they even said I had the best results: 'Here you are, Mati, it's six [the highest grade]. But if there was a mark ten, I would give it to you.' In the third and fourth grades, we began studying history and biology. We learned Hebrew. It was hard, the language was difficult. I coped with that too, but without any pleasure because it was difficult and it had nothing in common with Ladino. Ladino is a European language as it has some things in common with Spanish. I knew the Hebrew alphabet a little from Ladino; I could read but not easily. There was no one who could help me.

There were very good and nice teachers in the Jewish school. They came from Kazanlak: one taught us in Hebrew and the other in Bulgarian. At the end of the course, we had to have an exam. A commission from the Bulgarian school came to see what our preparation was and whether we were able to move to the junior high school. Some of us didn't succeed; there were some really

dumb pupils. There was a girl called Roza. The teachers asked me to help her but she didn't even learn the alphabet. We finished the fourth grade with this exam and moved to the Bulgarian junior high school. So I studied Hebrew until the fourth grade, and it wasn't very systematic. We had a teacher from Yambol; I always laughed at him and told at home what funny pompous words he had said in class. He always sent me out of the room, only for hinting.