

Joha Zaks And Her Friend



This is the only existing photo of my family. There is my sister Joha Zaks (left) and her friend. Joha and our parents were in the ghetto in Riga. They were killed in the forest near Rumbula in 1941. This photo was taken in Riga in 1934. My brother Todres, the oldest of all children, was born in 1921. The next was my sister Joha, born in 1926. My brother Haim-Shleime was born in 1929. I was born in 1931 and was the last child. Our family was a typical Jewish family. We lived a Jewish life.

We lived in the Jewish environment, and the Jewish religion and Jewish traditions constituted a natural element of our life. We followed strictly all traditions, and it never occurred to anyone to skip any of them. We only spoke Yiddish at home. This was the only language I knew, when a child. Later I learned Latvian. I don't remember how I managed to learn Latvian. We lived in the Jewish environment and went to a Jewish school. We even had the Yevreyskaya Street, Zidu Yela, in our neighborhood. There were two Jewish schools in our neighborhood: 'Zidas skola' and 'Ebrais skola'. Zidas skola was a six-year general education Jewish school. All subjects were taught in Yiddish. We also had Hebrew and religious classes. Ebrais skola was a Hebrew school. All subjects were taught in Hebrew, and children studied the Torah and the Talmud. We went to Zidas skola. In June 1941 my brother and I were in a pioneer camp and we were evacuated together with camp. When my parents got to know about the war, they prepared for evacuation. They packed their luggage onto the cart and were ready to leave, but they couldn't get to the opposite bank of the Daugava River. German planes were bombing the bridge, and our family had to go back. They stayed in Riga. A few days later German forces came to Riga. The Moscovskiy forstadt area was fenced with barbed wire to make a Jewish ghetto [Riga ghetto]. At first Jews from Riga were taken to the ghetto, and then Jews from other towns followed. The first prisoners were those families, who lived in this neighborhood. In late November 1941 shootings of prisoners began. November in Latvia is frosty, and there is usually snow on the ground. Prisoners were convoyed to Rumbula forest, about 15 km from the ghetto where they were killed. My father, mother, grandmother and my older sister Joha perished in the Rumbula.