

Rebecca Sevirov



This is my mother Rebecca Schiff. This passport picture was made in Tallinn in 1949.

My mother was born on 1 February 1906. Mother had worked since childhood. First she helped grandmother about the house. When she grew up a little bit she sold the berries and fruit in the resort area of Narva. Mother went to dachas and offered berries for sale. Once, mother came to one dacha and the hostess wanted to buy the whole punnet from her. Mother honestly warned her that the berries on the top were nice and a little bit stamped at the bottom. The hostess, a very sweet lady, praised my mother for honesty and said to revert to her when she needed work later on in Tallinn and gave her address. When the family moved to Tallinn, mother came up to her and that lady helped her get a job of the manicurist apprentice. Nobody trained her, mother was just a maid. She cleaned the workshop and at home, was a baby-sitter for her children. When mother cleaned in the salon, she watched how the manicurist worked and gradually she learned this profession so well that the hostess offered her a job as a manicurist. With time, mother became one of the best manicurists in the city.

At that time it was customary in Jewish families for women to be housewives. Husbands were supposed to be bread-winners. After getting married, mother decided to keep working. It was the right choice. Being one of the best manicurists in town, she had good clientele. Besides, she considered that lady should be independent in anyway. If she had no money, nor profession she was dependent. She did not want to be dependent of father. Of course, she did not work for some time after I was born. My grandmother Gita later started taking care of me and mother came back to work in the salon. I was born on 27 July 1931.

We did not observe Jewish very strictly. Of course, on Sabbath mother lit candles and made a festive dinner. Jewish holidays were also marked in accordance with all traditions. Parents went to the synagogue on holidays. While we were in Nomme, father did not take me with him. There was a

synagogue in Tallinn, and parents thought it was too long of a trip to me. As soon as we moved in Tallinn in 1940 I began going to the synagogue with father. At times grandmother took me there. On holidays mother cooked traditional Jewish dishes. She had Pascal dishes, which were used once a year. In other times we did not observe kashrut. Of course, we did not eat pork, but we did not have separate dishes for milk and meat. Mother said that rabbi came in our place one. He even did not want to have a cup of tea when he saw that mother did not have kosher dishes. She had to treat him to the cake that he brought to us as he refused from eating anything else.

Upon our return from evacuation my mother started working as a manicurist in the salon. My father died in the hospital on 19 December 1944. In 1946 mother got married. Her second husband Arthur Kartner was Estonian. I do not know how they met. All I know is that Arthur's first wife was also a Jew, who perished during the war. He was a dictator, a very obstinate man, but faithful. He was really reliable and honest. Arthur never prevaricated. He was very decent man, but there were very few women who could live with him. He even washed dishes himself as it seemed to him that mother did it worse. He liked to put things in order in mother's purse.