

Riva Smerkovicene With Her Daughter Lena And Friends



This picture was taken in Kaunas in 1945. I, Riva Smerkovicene, and my daughter Lena are in the center. My friends, colleagues from the orphanage - Riva (to the left) and Taube (to the right). Riva died. Taube is living in Haifa. I can't remember their last names.

My daughter and I stayed in Konstantinovo till December 1944. It was a long trip. Everybody had his seat on the train. In general, our way home differed from the trip when we ran away from Lithuania in 1941. When we came back to Kaunas, it turned out that my daughter and I had no place to live.

Our house in Zelyonaya Gora wasn't destroyed. It was occupied by a Lithuanian. Father got settled there and he waited for that Lithuanian to vacate it. I was offered a job, to be in charge of the Jewish kindergarten. It was established under the auspice of the Jewish orphanage. I went to work in the kindergarten and occupied a poky room on the premises with my daughter. It was hard work as I had never held an administrative job before. I had no other way out as I had no place to live. By that time our house in Zelyonaya Gora was unoccupied, but I couldn't live there as it took me too much time to get to work. We had no right to live in the kindergarten. In accordance with the law I wasn't entitled to live on the premises of the kindergarten and some commission had my daughter and me leave the place. I was in despair.

At that time I bumped into my cousin Joseph Gar, and he suggested that we should move into his place. We lived with Joseph for a couple of months. In 1945 Joseph and his wife decided to leave for Poland. Joseph and his wife, who went through the ghetto and concentration camp, couldn't forget their daughter Getele, who was born in the ghetto and died a couple of days after the liberation. They hoped to turn a new leaf in another country. I had to leave his apartment, as in accordance with the legislation if the apartment had no owner, the property was transferred to the state. So, we lived on orphanage premises again.

The kindergarten was in the same house where the Jewish orphanage was, on Kestuchio Street. The Jewish community, founded upon liberation, was also located there. The orphanage and

kindergarten were under the aegis of the Jewish community. Many Jews helped out the best way they could. There were orphans in the kindergarten, who lost parents and felt the horrors of war in early childhood. Rebelskiy, the colonel of the Soviet Army was the one who provided most of the assistance. Using his connections and acquaintances, he went to different organizations for them to provide financial assistance to our orphanage. He got food products for the children. He brought a cow, which was kept in the shed in the rear yard. So the children had milk. They loved it, their 'wet-nurse.' Rebelskiy also brought linen, mattresses, pillows, quilts to the kindergarten. Before that the children used anything they could find as bed cover. The state didn't have time and money to take care of the Jewish orphanage. We hardly got anything from our regime. Rebelskiy gave a set of linen to me. So my daughter and I had something to sleep on.