

Fania Brantsovskaya With Her Schoolmates



This is the 1st grade of Sophia Gurewich's school where I studied. I am the 5th on the right, my friend Pesia Shneerson is the 4th on the right. Teacher Stephania Shabat is in the center between the banners, which say in Yiddish: We can all read and write. This photo was taken in Vilnius in 1929. I was born on 22nd May 1922 in Kaunas. I was named Feige, but since my early childhood everybody called me Fania, which is a Russian name. There were a number of schools and gymnasiums for Jewish children in Vilnius. They were schools where the teaching was in Hebrew and Yiddish or in Polish. There were 7 and 8-year schools. There were a number of Yiddish schools: Gurewich, Shimon Fruk, Zeire Kuperstein schools. They were named after their sponsors and founders. There was a Tiksin school for retarded children, named after its founder Tiksin. The humanitarian Realschule and the Sophia Gurwich gymnasium were the best. I went to the Sophia Gurewich gymnasium. Doctor Shabath's wife was my teacher. This Jewish doctor was a very nice person. There were legends about his professionalism and kindness towards the poor. The teachers were extremely skilled. Our teachers had high goals to educate and teach Jewish children and make them well-cultured people. They taught us real things. I remember our teacher once brought milk to the class. It got sour and after that we knew how sour cream and butter were made. We wrote compositions and in senior grades we discussed literary characters. We also celebrated Jewish holidays at school. We had a masquerade on Purim. We wore costumes. I remember wearing a Chinese costume once. We also brought shelakhmones to school. We put everything we brought from home into a big basket and everyone could take a treat from it. In this way poor children could also enjoy better shelakhmones. The gymnasium charged fees. My father paid 50 percent of my tuition fees as he was a member of the teachers' association. However, it happened sometimes that I wasn't allowed to come into the classroom when my father didn't pay my fees on time. We particularly liked the event we celebrated on 1st March - the School Day. We had a banner made of all kinds of geometric figures: quadrates, triangles and rhombi that we took outside. There was a meeting and Sophia Gurewich made a speech. In 1933 the gymnasium was closed. I know that Sophia Gurewich starved to death while in evacuation in a town in Russia.