

Rifca Segal At The Elementary School



This is me, Rifca Segal, sitting at the front row desk, the third from right to left. Look how quiet I was! The picture was taken in my classroom in Sulita. I think I was in the third or fourth grade of elementary school. The teacher to the right is Balter, the first from left to right is Goldenberg, our schoolmaster, the one next to him is Nuta Schwartz – Nathan Schwartz –, and the one wearing a hat taught Yiddish at the cheder – his name was Motas. Balter and Schwartz were in charge of parallel classes – I only studied with Goldenberg, who taught the regular subjects, and with Zinger, who taught Ivrit. But the latter is not in this picture.

I do my own praising: I was a very good pupil. As long as my parents lived in Sulita, I graduated 4 grades of primary school at the Jewish school. There was a Jewish school in Sulita, but we had to pass an exam at the end of each school year, which validated our graduating that year. There were 2 schools in Sulita, “Andreescu” and “Scurtu,” I passed my exams at “Scurtu.” It is as if I see before my eyes the building where the Jewish school was housed: you entered a long corridor along which there were 2 classrooms on either side, a teachers’ room, and I don’t know what else. The classes were mixed, made up of boys and girls. Goldenberg was my teacher from 1st grade until 4th grade, he taught all subject matters, only Ivrit did I study with a certain Zinger. I remember there were 2 other teachers, Nuta Schwartz – Nathan Schwartz – and a certain Balter, but they taught different classes. After I graduated 4 grades of primary school, I went to high school in Botosani. I graduated the 1st and 2nd year of high school at a high school for girls called “Carmen Silva.” And I rented a room from someone, for my parents could not afford to pay for that. After 1941, I was no longer able to study at the Romanian school, and I skipped a year. All Jews were expelled from schools. After the Jewish High School was founded, I studied there. But I skipped a year, until this high school was founded. And then I sat for an exam to graduate the year – those of us who had skipped a year were allowed to graduate 2 years in a single one. And I studied for an entire summer. The Jewish High School was founded in 1942. Be that as it may, Antonescu approved the founding of the Jewish High School. There was a rabbi in Bucharest, his name was Filderman, who had influence over him. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Filderman] Filderman spoke Romanian so well...

we'd all be glad to speak it as well as he did. And he intervened around Antonescu for the foundation of a Jewish high school. And I entered the Jewish High School, and I graduated 3rd and 4th grade. But girls weren't allowed to study at this high school. They enlisted us, but they kept separate rolls. And there was an inspection once – I will never forget this scene –, and the principal stormed inside the classroom: "All the girls must run out of here immediately, for there is an inspection!" Well, we ran and we returned afterwards. You can imagine the situation we were in. That's how I studied.

Classes were held in the rooms of the synagogue. Carol Mizes was the principal. He was a tall, handsome man, I believe his profession was that of a lawyer, and he couldn't work anymore – lawyers were disbarred as well. And I had Jewish teachers. Biology and zoology was taught by a pharmacist, our teacher of mathematics was actually a former teacher who was fired from the "Laurian" High School or from the "Carmen Silva" High School, which were high schools in Botosani. Our drawing teacher was very likeable, his name was Isaia. For I didn't like drawing. And this drawing teacher saw that I wasn't good at drawing, and he treated me very nicely. I couldn't draw a straight line.

We studied Hebrew at the Jewish High School. And there were very few children, especially among those from Botosani, who had attended the cheder. And when we had to pass the trimestrial exam, they wanted to be seated close to me, so that they could copy from my paper. Our Hebrew teacher was a rabbi, his name was Motal Frenkel. He was very likeable, I liked him very much. I was thinking: "This one isn't married. I will marry him." I give you my word of honor. But I was still in school, he was older than me. And he was very fond of me, for I knew this – since I attended the cheder in Sulita. And I wanted to marry Motal. But that's what I was thinking back then. He was a very handsome man. And he didn't wear a beard, in spite of the fact that he was a rabbi. And I was thinking: "How so? Shouldn't rabbies wear a beard?" He went to Israel after the war, and I heard that he grew a beard in Israel, all the way down to the ground. Why, if he wore a beard I wouldn't even have looked at him.

And then, starting with the fall of 1944, we were allowed to attend the Romanian high school. The Jewish High School was recognized – there were school rolls, and everything else –, and I didn't lose the years during which I studied there. I sat for my baccalaureate exam in 1946.