

Avi Dobrysh With His Parents Miriam And Isaac Dobrysh



From left to right: my father Isaac Dobrysh, my mother Miriam Dobrysh and I. The picture was taken in Tartu in 1939.

I was born on 14th December 1934. My parents named me Avi. I am an only child.

My first words were in German. My mother finished a German lyceum. She knew only German baby songs and fairy-tales and so she sang songs and told me children's stories in German. I learned Estonian by playing with kids in the yard. My father's mother tongue was Russian. Of course, he was fluent in Estonian, but he wasn't very good at writing in it. He sent me postcards from the front in Estonian and there were mistakes in them.

At home, my parents spoke Russian, especially when they were trying to hide something from me. In time I started understanding their conversations. Once, in my presence they talked about going to the cinema without me. I couldn't speak Russian at that time, but could understand everything. I told them in Estonian that I wouldn't stay home by myself and would go to the cinema with them. They laughed at me, but still didn't take me to the cinema with them. Then I gradually learned how to speak Russian. So, my third language was Russian. Yiddish wasn't spoken at home.

Before the war, our family had a good life. First, Father was the only bread-winner. Mother was a housewife. I even had a baby-sitter. Then my mother was probably very bored and also started working. We weren't rich, but lived comfortably. We had a large apartment. There was enough

money for good food and all the necessary clothes. We couldn't afford expensive things. I remember when Father bought his first Philips radio. It cost a fortune. I think my parents won at a lottery at some Jewish event. In general, they could afford pretty much everything at a reasonable price.

Jewish traditions were observed in the family. Of course, my parents weren't as religious as my grandparents, but still we stuck to traditions. It has always been like that. Mother cooked dishes of the Jewish cuisine. We marked Jewish holidays at home. On holidays Father went to the synagogue. Unfortunately, I don't remember the details of the holiday. I remember that there was a whole box of matzah on Pesach. When I was a baby, I stealthily crawled into that box and ate matzah.