

Pupils And Professors Of The Hebrew School In Mielnica Podolska



This is a photo of the teachers and pupils of my Hebrew Elementary School. The photo was taken in Mielnica Podolska in the 1910's. I don't know who took it.

My earliest memories are from school. I went to a cheder first. But the memory is rather hazy. It's hard to recount anything. I was maybe three, maybe four years old. And besides, I didn't stay there too long, maybe I didn't even completed it. The cheder was located in a small, unkempt house. There was this old man, Jankel, right. He was alone, a widower. And so he taught us the letters. He pointed with a little stick, 'That's aleph, that's...' It was very monotonous. I don't think I stayed there long. The old man Jankel, the rebe who taught there died soon. Afterwards they sent me to another cheder. There were more cheders in the town, right. It was, I guess, that depending on family's financial situation the children were send to a better cheder, a wealthier one. Anyway, my family was not poor.

I can still read in Hebrew but I learned it at a Hebrew school, not at the cheder. The school was called Tarbut. It was a communal school. I think the Jewish community council had some supervision over it. But studying was not free, you had to pay. My sister and I went to that school, to different classes, naturally. I remember I used to go there for four, maybe five years. Well, I guess I started studying there when I was in second or third grade of elementary school. Parents wanted me to learn Hebrew. I guess there were Zionist sympathies in the family. But it didn't necessarily have anything to do with Zionism, right, or religion. The school building was earlier the Jewish Communal Hall, right. The school was in the back, at the backyard. The yard was big, neighbored by two farms. There was a huge hall on the ground floor of the building where all the meetings took place, and the classes were upstairs. There were four, maybe five classes, lots of students anyway. I know there was also an affiliated kindergarten. I used to go to that school till I was 12, or 13.

All the students were Jewish. The teachers were also Jewish. The lecturing language was Hebrew. They didn't teach us the Torah or basic religious knowledge, we were learning to read, write, sing. First of all we studied Hebrew language and grammar, Jewish history. It was all on adolescent level, right. We also had singing classes. We sang popular Hebrew songs. I can't recall exactly if they also taught us geography, maths, and other subjects. I don't remember. Personally, I liked singing, I was interested in reading and writing as well. I managed to grasp it during those four years. And not just me, maybe me the least, but after the four years we all could beautifully speak, write, and sing in Hebrew. I was surely doing better at the Hebrew school than at the Polish one.