

From the Testimony of Yaacov Schwartzberg about the Cultural Life in the Vilna Ghetto

...But from 1942 to '43, in [the] ghetto [there] was some kind of normal life as you can call it normal life. We went to school.

Q: What school?

A: Yes, I went to the first grade.

Q: That was official or hidden?

A: It was official, official school. I went to the first grade there. My grandmother, "zichrona l'vracha", she hired a "melamed", a rabbi. She worked also outside. She worked in the slaughterhouse, slave work, outside the ghetto, and she brought in food with her and she gave to this rabbi and he taught me how to read and write in Yiddish and "chumash" he taught me in the ghetto. She told me, "Maybe you'll stay alive. So you'll know." They were education conscious, those people, the grandparents.

Q: What language was this school in?

A: In Yiddish.

Q: And a lot of children were there?

A: Children came and they brought some sandwiches with them, too. You know, in school, they would steal each other's sandwiches. Some people had better food. Everybody was hungry. I was in the first grade, but we had one book for ten people. He used to give us to read, you know, a line and we used to pass the book around. No papers, no pencils, no books. One book. Everything we read, a sentence, in Yiddish. And they had a theatre, I remember theatre they had in Vilna. Where it was I remember too. And my grandmother used to give me money and I used to buy a ticket and I used to keep my ticket ahead, for six, seven weeks ahead. To me it was like a long time ahead. I used to put the ticket inside the coat which my father kept in case - a nice coat he had, a shabbas coat - that he kept, that maybe we need to sell it for food, so it hung there on the wall over the place where we slept

and I used to put the ticket inside the pocket there, the inside pocket, so it would stay in a safe place. I used to get a ticket in the last rows, where I could only stand up and see. And I learned all those little songs in the ghetto, and theatre.

Q: And people would go to this theatre?

A: The theatre was full, it was full, it was really full of people.

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