

for hours. One day, when I stepped back from the hall, I noted a glass bowl containing gold ten rubel coins on the sideboard, each worth about £5 of modern money, my mother used to put them aside from her housekeeping. I helped myself to a coin and rushed to the local confectioner, demanding ten rubel's worth of candy (I was still only four years old). The proprietor realised immediately that something was not right, took off his apron and marched me back to my mother, where I was suitably chastised for my crime.

As I got older, I would play all kinds of games with the neighbours' children in the courtyard at the back. At Easter, we would play a game with walnuts similar to marbles. Sometimes we would play on the street in front of the house, military games. We would carve ourselves sabres, sling them over our shoulders and march up and down the street chanting "left right left right about turn – halt"! I was the drill sergeant. Perhaps our military games were influenced by the barracks in the right hand corner of the square, at the end of our hilly road (and by the way, a big square is ideal for snow ball fights.) One day, my father returned from one of his tours with a tricycle slung over his shoulder. I was overjoyed with this present and cycled like mad into the dining room, around and around the table, into the kitchen and back again. I could not stop, I was so delighted with my toy.

Family life continued in a similar vein. If Schura and Lisa were not practising, then my father would instruct choirs from the Forest Opera