

Matylda Wyszynska's School Friend



This is the photo of one of my school friends. Unfortunately I don't remember her name.

In 1929 I went to a Polish school by the St. Mary Magdalene church. It was Catholic, but it also admitted Jewish girls.

There was a priest and an altar in the corridor, but Jewish students didn't have to pray. Nor did they have to attend religion classes, and they didn't.

And the priest played with us, I have very nice memories of him, he was such a kind-hearted man, he played ring a ring o'roses with us and sleeping bear and all.

The discipline was harsh, we weren't allowed to have curly hair, and my mother was often called to the headmistress for curling my hair, and she had to swear they were curling by themselves.

In winter time you had to wear the beret straight, never at an angle. We had to wear those sailor-collar uniforms and ankle-length pleated skirts, which we pulled up after school. Brown stockings only. Brown leather shoes.

A white hat with navy-blue ribbons, which had to be starched so hard to hold firmly. In fact, they were very nice, those hats. That's how we had to dress in elementary school.

You weren't supposed to run, you were supposed to stroll. Each class had its stretch of the corridor and there you were supposed to stroll.

In the summer, each class had its tree to stroll around, you weren't allowed to run around the whole field.

When my grandfather came to throw me candy over the fence, he had to aim well so that I didn't have to run for it.

Then I went to Zofia Strzalkowska's gymnasium. There was this saying in Lwow, 'a mother had two daughters - one of them was decent, and the other one went to Zofia Strzalkowska's.'

It was a wonderful private gymnasium for girls (there were also Jewish students).

A beautiful building. It was a very good school, and a genuinely secular one.

The Polish literature teacher was wonderful. I have no accent because the eastern accent wasn't tolerated. I know Latin to this day. Each one of us had a nickname.

My friend Mela was called 'Mentecaptus' - 'Dimwit' by the Latin teacher because she didn't know the answer to some question.

I was 'Morbus' 'Disease' because I didn't know how to decline the names of diseases.

I still remember the Iliad, I still remember some things I had to learn. The teacher was very demanding. Thin, tall.

But there were parties where you were allowed to bring your boyfriend, naturally in front of the teachers and the headmistress you danced like this - decently, and afterwards like this - closer to each other.

We staged cabaret shows, I still remember some songs, poems, we had funny songs about each teacher, each subject.

I don't think there were any Jewish teachers there, but I didn't give it any thought then.

I had four friends since elementary school; we were the five of us, as close as sisters.

We were all Jewish. We also had Polish friends but not that close. One of us was called Mela Miezes.

She had those thick braids, and one night one of her brothers cut off one of those.

During the war she changed her name to Melania Mirska and retained the name afterwards.

Her husband never learned who she was, and her children aren't aware who she was either.

She argued that if she didn't tell him about her ethnic origin before the war or when she was marrying him, i.e. under the occupation in Cracow, then she was afraid to tell him afterwards.

One could think she married for protection and security. They are both dead now.

Another one was Alina Kupfer, she died. She was my closest friend. She lived next door.

I lived on Leona Sapiehy Street, corner of Gleboka, and she lived on Gleboka Street.

Her parents were Jewish pharmacists, ran their own pharmacy, and had two children, Alina, whom we called Lina, and a son, I don't remember his name, who was a great musical talent.

When my mother died and my father married again, I spent the summer vacations with them and their mother in the Eastern Beskid mountains south-west of Lwow.

Lina's parents died before the war, first her father, of a heart attack, and then her mother, of cancer. And the children were left alone, they were 15 or 16 years old.

Their mother died, they were left alone, in a large apartment, and we all met there, some boys came, a bit older than us.

As soon as the Germans entered, they took Lina's brother right from the street, to the prison on Lackiego Street, former police buildings turned into a prison; in June 1941, before their evacuation from Lwow, the Soviets murdered the majority of the Polish and Ukrainian prisoners held there.

They were alone, loved each other very much, she went to look for him and never returned. They killed her too. Their aunt later moved in the apartment.

There were also Tamara and Irka Irena Weizberg, married name Herz. They lived next door and I was virtually raised in their home. I called their mother 'mama' when my mother died.

They were three sisters and a mother. The mother was called Klara Weizberg, Tamara was called Zwerling, after her mother's first husband.

The mother attended the parents' evenings in school on their account but also on mine because Tamara was in the same class with me. Irka was younger.

I didn't know much about Jewish political life, and what I knew came from my friend Lusia Lewental.

She came from the most orthodox home [of the five of us], we never visited here at home because it was far away.

She was highly aware politically. She was a Zionist. I think her whole home was like that.

She told us about Palestine, about the political parties. But we listened with only half an ear.

We somehow weren't interested in all that. Lusia was killed immediately, didn't even go to the ghetto, such were her looks.