

Teofila Silberring



This is me in 1945. At this time I was living with the Korczaks, my parent's friends who took me home. The photo was probably taken for my school ID, because there is a stamp on it.

When I returned from the war, they gave me the house back at once, through the courts, because there was no-one, I was the only heiress. They just ordered me to pay the charges for six years. A German had taken the money and run, not given it up to the local authority or wherever the service charges went during the war. And I got bills for the whole occupation. I had a hearing and I thought I would go through the roof. I didn't have enough for an attorney, and apparently I defended myself marvelously in that courtroom. I said, 'What for? Isn't it enough that I lost everything, I'm barefoot, naked, and now I have to pay for my stay in the camps?!' It was dismissed, but I had to pay something in installments.

I was given six houses back; I sold five. I ate lunch in the Ermitaz restaurant with my girlfriends for Grandma's house. And I thought what my father would have said to my selling it just like that. But if he'd come and we hadn't had anything to eat, he'd have sold it too. In any case, after the camps nothing was important apart from life. I did well to sell it; I haven't got anything to regret today. I lost everything, so at least I ate a dinner. Year after year I'd dreamed, as you did dream in the camps, of a loaf of bread. A whole one! When I get out of the camp, that's how much I'll buy myself! A whole one! I'll eat a whole one at once! But that wasn't true, because you couldn't after the camp, unfortunately, because your stomach had shrunk. It was impossible. But I thank God anyway, because I came out healthy. My friends had problems with their lungs, and other complaints. There was nothing wrong with me. And I was in six camps, and never once even had a cold. That was the luck I had. I wasn't ill; well, I was in that experimental block, but that was the only thing.

Hardly had I got back than I wanted to enroll in school, so much had Father instilled in me that 'you must learn.' I enrolled in school on Oleandry Street, but because I was too old to start from the beginning, I did two years in one year. You see when I got back I was 20, and it was a bit too late to start from the first grade of gymnasium. I caught up somehow. After that I sold another house and then another, got myself a few clothes. I already had some friends at school. When I finished school I started studying chemistry at the Jagiellonian University.