

Anna Mass' Father's Apprentices M. Elzur, Berek Rainer And Adam Waksman



‘As souvenir for our boss’ daughter - M. Elzur, B. Rainer and A. Waksman’: this is an inscription on the back of this photo. They are boys who worked with my father, in his shop at Pijarska Street in Lublin.

Berek Rainer was my boyfriend. When he started working for my father, he was 20, and I was 13. At first he treated me as the boss' daughter, but then, slowly, slowly, we became a couple. He never proposed to me, never said he'd marry, but everyone laughed Szwarc was rearing himself a son-in-law. And shortly before the war within three months that boy lost both his parents. He had three younger siblings and had to take care of them. And he stayed in Lublin.

The war broke out and everything ended. My father was rather sickly, and my mother was terribly worried that if they took him - they were taking men as hostages - he wouldn't survive. And it was my mother who forced my father to flee from Lublin. Eastwards, beyond the Bug [1939 - 1942 the border river between Germany and USSR]. My father went with a group of friends and vanished. Others were sending letters, my father was sending nothing.

My boyfriend ran the watchmaker's shop and German soldiers were coming to us. One was telling me poor Jews had nothing to fear because Hitler was only interested in the rich ones. He didn't know himself what he was talking about. And one day it was so: it's after curfew, and there's a knocking on the door. A soldier. He must have his watch because tomorrow he goes to the front. And the keys are with my boyfriend in the Jewish quarter at the other side of town. We tell him it's after curfew. He'll accompany me. So my mother begs him to then escort me back, because what, I'll have to sleep at the shop? And so we're walking, in the night, through the town, there are guards everywhere, with dogs, German soldiers, and time after time they stop us. Those dogs were trained: the dog stands in front of you, sideways, so that you can't pass. When the guard had been through - he talked only to the soldier, not me - he patted the dog, the dog stepped back. When we got close to the Jewish quarter, there was no ghetto yet, it was really swarming with them. They were staging pogroms, all kinds of things. I went into the alley where my boyfriend lived. I started calling him in Jewish. Finally someone answers me. Who am I? I introduce myself with my full name and say I want to talk to Berek. 'Just a moment.' A gate opens, they let me in. I say, 'You have to go with me.' He told the others he might have to spend the night at my place, and off we went. He put that watch together, and the soldier saw me off. He refused to see Berek off, though. 'What, I'll be walking like that the whole night?' he said. So Berek spent the night with us.