

Matylda Wyszynska's Class Photo



I received this photo from my teacher, Olga Niementowska, when I visited her in Lwow in 60s.

I think, this photo was taken in the first or second class of primary school.

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.