

## Apolonia Starzec With Her Sister Irena Kirszenbaum



This photo was taken after the war, in ruined Warsaw. It's my sister, Irena Kirszenbaum (nee Ruta Bugajska), and me. My sister's name is Irena? I mean, she had a different name once. She changed her name to Irena during the war and it stayed that way. Before the war her name was Ruta. She was Ruta and I was Pola, short for Apolonia. We were the only children. In terms of looks, I was more like my father, he was dark, and my mother was a blue-eyed light blonde, typical Aryan, as they say. My sister had her looks. We were together in Warsaw Ghetto. In January I went out to the Aryan side and in April 1943 they started burning down the ghetto. I knew I had to place my sister somewhere. Myself, I often didn't know in the evening where I'd spend the night, who'd offer me shelter. Though I had the papers, I didn't have a place of my own; I didn't want to expose anyone to danger. But I had some experience in underground activities and I was calmer inside. My sister

couldn't hide the fact she was Jewish, had to be pulled out of the ghetto almost by force, she kept saying, 'I want to die with the others.' My sister was placed with a family named Skalski. Together with thirteen other Jews, all in a single concealed room. My sister met her future husband when in the hiding place in Skalski's apartment. Chil Kirszenbaum. From Minsk Mazowiecki, young like her, born in 1920. A very handsome and very talented boy. In Minsk, he experienced the anti-Jewish riots in the 1930s, attacks on Jewish stores, was beaten up, he suffered a knee injury, something that has given him a hard time since then. They never left the apartment they were hiding in. They had the so-called bad looks, were easily recognizable as Jews or had other reasons to stay put. On the first day of Warsaw Uprising I found myself in Praga? When the uprising broke out, I was living in Mariensztat, near the Old Town. Shortly before the start of the uprising on 1st August 1944 I wanted to take my sister to my place, I was already a member of the People's Army, had more friends and contacts. I knew the uprising would break out any day now, the preparations had been under way, so in the morning, at dawn, I hurried to the Skalski's apartment to take my sister to Warsaw. It was 1st August. Irena was already living with her husband. She didn't want to hear about leaving without him, he didn't want to move either. I decided to go back to Warsaw, all I had on myself was a summer dress. But the bridges had already been closed. I stayed with them. On Brzeska, with the thirteen of them. And there I spent the whole period during the uprising and afterwards until liberation. And so I was liberated and I hitchhiked to Lublin. They, my sister and her husband, stayed in Minsk Mazowiecki, where he found his family house. The family wasn't there anymore. And that's where they lived right after the war.