

Bajla Beitner



This is a studio portrait of my mother Bajla Beitner, taken before the war, in the 1930s, in Katowice.

Mother's name was Bala, but officially, in documents - Bajla, I think. But she'd also sign her name Balbina. 'Balcia,' I remember that's how my father called Mom.

Mother was born in Bedzin. She was about as old as Dad, even, I think, a year older. She was pretty, a brunette, I think. She had short hair, somehow tied, but it wasn't a bun.

She wasn't tall, she wasn't plump. She was calm, kind. They loved each other, Father and Mother, yes, I remember this. They were very gentle with each other. But Mother felt that Father wasn't energetic enough with us, or with the work he was doing.

Mother dressed very modestly. She may have had one better dress, for outings. I remember Mom's shoes, laced up, with heels, narrow, gray. Sometimes my parents would go to Bytom to buy clothing.

That's where the border was and there were Germans there. You could buy something a lot cheaper, but the Germans didn't permit for anything to be taken out of the country.

So I would leave my worn out shoes in a trash can and put the new ones on. But I remember that once my parents bought some oranges and it was forbidden to take those oranges to Poland and Father was so angry that he smashed them into a wall.

I remember that Mom was always busy with work. And she wasn't that strong. She had some health problems, she couldn't sleep. I think she went to Naleczow once.

I don't think it was a longer stay, because that would have been too expensive. Mother took care of the house, there were four children, so there was a lot of work.

Once every week or two the bed linen had to be changed, the washing would be done in a tub and the servant did the washing on a washboard, the wet things would be dried up in the attic. Everything was washed at home, we never took anything to a laundry.

Everything was so primitive, simple. I didn't help with the cleaning and cooking. I was studying, taking care of my younger sisters: taking them for walks, playing, reading to them. There was no nanny or governess. There were no luxuries.