

Zsuzsanna G. At Age Fourteen



A studio photo of me at the age of fourteen. It must have been taken in autumn because I don't have my ponytail anymore.

I don't remember any childhood conflicts with my parents. I was a good kid in the sense that my conscience could be influenced. If I didn't get an 'A' in school, my mother said, 'Zsuzsikam, your father will be so sad.' And then I sobbed. Later I found out, that my father wasn't interested at all. All he was interested in, was that I was brave, and I dared to climb everything, and dared to sit on a horse. Until I was about thirteen, I was an expressly good kid. Then I started puberty, and as much as you could contradict your parents, I contradicted them and that lasted a long time. Others had already grown up, when I was still an adolescent spirit. My poor father just became a work serviceman [forced labor] then. The greatest compliment I could say about my parents is that they could stand my horrible teenage period, when I had my own opinion about everything that I could opposed them about. Not only that they could bear it, but well, I became like that in their surroundings. That stayed with me, that one of the most important things in life is my sovereignty, a kind of 'uncompromisingness'.

When I was born, we lived in Bakats Street, and I went to the Bakats Square grammar (school) for the first two grades. It was a community school [Both community and state schools got their financial funding for functioning from the central budget, but while the community school chairman was chosen by the community, the education director of state schools was chosen by the state school board of directors.] We moved into the VII. District [of Budapest], to Garay Street in 1936 and then I wound up in the Bethlen Square Jewish school. That only happened because when we

moved there in May, they had enrolled me in Muranyi Street, in the local grammar [school] where I learned very ugly words in less than a minute, so that my parents immediately decided that this wasn't the atmosphere [for me]. Well, anyway, this was 'Chicago'. [Chicago: slang for a part of the VII. District of Budapest, named for the speed that it was built, as Chicago had been famous for at the time. After the war, it's name referred to the district's bad social conditions and general lack of safety.]

The two years I spent in the Jewish grammar school gave me a big experience: compared to the religious classes we had had twice a week, here they had them everyday, many Hebrew classes, we read the Tora, translated Moses first book [Creation], had a separate class for learning songs; the youth religious service every Saturday had a very strong emotional effect, where the blonde rabbi who looked so pretty to me then, gave his speech directly to me. A person regretted in tears all of their childhood uselessness. What stuck with me from religion, feeds on those one or two years. The Friday night devotion of candle-lighting remained - the best students were deserving of this privilege. I even got the chance once, but there was a problem, I wasn't allowed to touch matches at home. On the first of September, I started going here, and my grandma had died already by January. It's a good feeling to think back on how happy it made her when I recited everything I'd learned everyday. The songs for the Friday evening service, all kinds of Hebrew holiday songs, or when I could say a prayer. Because she was still religious.