

Matylda Wyszynska With Her Stepsister Anka



This is a photomontage made by Staszek, my boyfriend. It looks as if I was holding my stepsister Anka on my hand.

I lived on Na Bajkach Street with my mother, then we moved to another part of town, on Zielona Street, together with my mother, and there my mother died.

There the maid robbed us. One day the maid took everything from the house, the rest of the furniture my father gave away to some warehouse for storage because it was before he remarried, and me he gave away to the judge's wife, because he was always on the move. It was a judge's widow who had a huge apartment near Leona Sapiehy Street, by Gleboka Street.

She wasn't Jewish; she rented rooms to students, I had a room for myself.

She was supposed to have custody of me, and the custody was limited to me having to be back home at eight, and I remember I wore my school badge covered with black crepe paper as a token of mourning.

The apartment was on the third floor, there was a window in my room, and I was alone all day, I mean, I was permitted to go to a friend but I had to be back home at eight, meals were delivered to my room, she had a maid, a cook.

I remember that the afternoon snack was always strawberry preserve which I put into the oven to heat because the widow only told my father whether I was back home at eight and whether I ate my meals.

So, on that third floor, I did nothing but sit in the window.

On the first floor across the street lived my schoolmate, and in her apartment there rented a room a technical university student named Staszek.

He lived in lodgings because his parents lived near Kalusz, a town, today in Ukraine, 100 km south-east of Lwow, where they taught at school. Staszek studied at the technical university and rented a room nearby.

I was sending various messages to my friend through the window.

He also had a window in his room and that's how we got to know each other.

I learned to write in reverse and read various messages. He started writing to me, her too, and it was her who persuaded me to go on the first date with him.

We went to cycle or for a walk. Then it turned out I wasn't doing well with math at school, I had to tell my father, and Staszek started giving me lessons.

We started dating each other, and Staszek was an endek at the university.

He wore the Chrobry's Swords an emblem in the form of two crossed swords worn in the lapel, wore the special cap, had an endek friend.

He dated me and my friends Tamara and Irka were angry at me because they knew I was very close with him. We went to a park, and when we passed some endek activists on our way, I trembled with fear.

I used to say, 'Your nose is my insurance policy,' because he had this non-Jewish snub nose. I don't think he ever took part in attacking Jews. Those were not the German times yet.

Those were the Polish times. He took me to the polytechnic club for parties, but that was at my father's knowledge.

As my tutor. My father had to know where I went, with whom, he saw me off, and my father permitted that. I went to those student parties, it was great fun.

There was no question whether someone was Jewish or Polish, well, there were the thug activists in the park, but that didn't concern us.

One day my father spotted me biking with him, because Staszek always brought his friend's bike for me, a men's one, with a frame.

My widow didn't know either I was going biking, she thought I was studying with my classmate.

On the stairs I took off my skirt and put on sweatpants. And once my father caught me riding a men's bike.

He came to me looking very stern and said I was to report in his office the next day at hour so and so.

He had always threatened to give me away somewhere, to some orphanage or boarding house.

So I went, with my heart in my mouth, and my father took me to a large bike store and told me to choose a women's bike for myself.

I trembled he'd give me away. And that was my first bike. I have photo with this bike, it had that blue mesh cover on the back wheel. And, imagine this, he told me, 'Who's this? Your boyfriend?' 'A friend.' I said. 'I don't want to see you with him on the stairs, if you want to be meeting him, let him come in.'

Then we settled with my stepmother on Leona Sapiehy Street, an apartment I remember very vividly. It was a very large apartment, on the main street, opposite the technical university.

There occurred a clash because they assigned one large room for me and Anka, stepmother's daughter, together, the furniture was all new, everything painted blue, and there was a wardrobe where she had the lower part and I the upper one.

Besides that there were beds with those white-and-blue kind of curtains, there were writing desks, a table, and those blue armchairs.

I rebelled, because I was already at the age when my friends from school visited me, I was in gymnasium and high school, and the chit told her mother what we talked about, and we had all kinds of secrets.

Always when I told her to leave us alone, there was an argument, because she'd open the wardrobe and sit there, in her part, on the pretence that she needed some stuff from there. Because she had their crayons there, and her toys.

With my stepmother I lived like a cat with a dog, but my father arranged it somehow and she started sleeping elsewhere, not in my room, but her wardrobe was still there and she always came, especially when Staszek visited me.