

Irena Wygodzka With Mrs. Hass And Mr. Lew



This is a picture of me, Irena Wygodzka, with some acquaintances, taken in Zakopane in the 1930s.

In the picture I am standing next to Mrs. Hass - I don't know her first name - the mother of my friend, Hela Hass and with Mr. Lew - I don't remember his family name - who took care of our Zionist youth organization Akiba.

Most of my friends were in Akiba - a Zionist youth organization, so I also joined it. I was in touch with my girlfriends for many years. My best friend Hela Hass was in Siberia during the war.

We sent packages to her from Vilnius, from the kibbutz, pictures and greetings. She survived, got married, she was in Israel and died a few years ago.

I was nine years old when I joined the Zionist organization and I was a member until the end. My friends encouraged me to do it. My parents didn't have anything against it. I remember that my father said, 'You can join anything, but the Betars.'

Because Betar was an organization whose members looked like fascists, almost like the 'Hitlerjugend': they had uniforms, brown shirts and these military belts. They also had this idea to take Palestine by force, which my father didn't like.

I joined Akiba, but I wasn't always there. I was also in Hanoar, but later returned to Akiba. Which organization I was in, depended on where my friends were at the time.

There were probably some ideological differences between those two organizations, I don't remember exactly. I only know that they were more pious in Akiba: they made us pray, organized religious celebrations. There was also Hashomer Hatzair in Katowice. It was a socialist organization.

In Akiba we'd meet, learn Hebrew, sing some songs in Hebrew. It was quite fun. We wanted to leave for Palestine. Studying, discussions, camps - all of this prepared us for emigration.

When I was some 15-16 years old I wanted to go to Palestine and work on a farm, like I was taught in the organization. They told us about Palestine, what was happening there, what life was like, about how land was being conquered, about how everything was being built, how difficult it was there.

They talked to us a lot about morality, pride, love of Israeli land. There were discussions about current events, political and sexual issues. Those discussions made me conscious of sexuality. I was very young then, 12-13 years. What did we know then? Nothing. Our parents didn't tell us anything.