

Samuel König's Class Photo In The Polish School In Mielnica Podolska



This is a photo of my Polish elementary school. I'm standing in third row, as a second from left. The photo was taken in Mielnica Podolska in 1936. Some photographer took it, but I don't remember his name.

I used to go to the Polish elementary school parallel to studying at the Hebrew one. I started it at the age of 7 years old. It was a Polish public school. It was all set up so that the schools did not collide. I think I used to go to the Polish school in the morning and to the Hebrew in the afternoon. The Polish school was located near the market square, on the main street leading to the railway station, right, at the very beginning of it. The school was obligatory. You had to attend, the paupers sometimes did not, though, because they didn't have any proper clothes. There were lots of those have-nots. The Ukrainians didn't usually go to school in the winter because they didn't have boots. That's true. Father brought me to school my first day. He gave me a piggyback ride. On the second or third day, it was fall, harvest time, I left home for school and saw a farmer driving a wagon. It had the perch sticking at the back, a sort of a shaft. You could make it shorter or longer. I sat on it, held on to the wagon's rail, and we drove on. The horses were walking slowly when I got on the wagon, right, so no problem. When we almost reached the school the farmer suddenly whipped the horses and it was a bit too fast for me, so I was scared to jump off and decided not to. He didn't look back, hadn't noticed me so we drove on far, far away, to the Russian border where he collected sheaves from his field. I didn't come back home until evening that day, with the farmer and his sheaves. I got spanked for that, I remember.

We only learned Polish at school, plus Ukrainian twice a week. There was no Ukrainian school as such, even though the Ukrainians were the majority [in the town], right. They all went to the Polish school. Girls and boys together. There were no rules as for seating at desks. Jews sat with Ukrainians, or Ukrainians with Poles. There wasn't even other possibility. The class was small and there were 30 or 35 of us. I don't remember any conflicts, or negative attitude of the teachers towards the Jews or the Ukrainians. On the contrary. They didn't make any distinction between

Poles and Ukrainians. If you were good, you were good, and if you were a troublemaker, Dziubinski, our maths teacher, would throw a piece of chalk right at your forehead, no matter if you sat at the far end of the class. Well, it happened sometimes in the school yard that one student punched another but that was just children playing. Nobody beat me and I never beat anybody. I don't remember experiencing anti-Semitism in my childhood. Well, some people frowned at you, right. But I don't know if that was already anti-Semitism.

Apart from Dziubinski I remember one more teacher from that school. She was a very nice lady. She was one of seven or eight teachers. They were all Poles, right. Her name was Danuta Lange. God, what did she teach us? The drill was one thing. She led us in fours, left, right, yes, and turn, and form a double line. I have to admit I was a mediocre student.