

Zuzanna Mensz As A Child



It is a photo of mine, when I was maybe 10 years old. I think it was taken in Lublin, where my family lived.

I was born in 1918 in Lublin. I was nicknamed Zunia. My Mom's name was Mariem Szyfra, nee Horowicz. My Father was called Mosze Rosset. We lived in a house on 1 Cicha Street. Cicha was a small cross-street of Trzeciego Maja Street, right in the center of Lublin. But we used to go to Skryhiczyn [a village in Lublin district] in every spring and leave at the end of summer. Mom had there 17 acres at Skryhiczyn-Folwark and she built a house.

I started my studying late, either; I went straight to gymnasium. I'd studied at home before because as soon as I'd gone to the kindergarten or school I'd caught a cold. I would always get tonsillitis. They would put compresses on my neck and ears, because I'd get ear inflammation in no time, and so I lay all wrapped up. First a surgeon-barber would come to see me, then, if the illness lasted long, a doctor, his name was Wajnberg. During the summer stays in the country I was sickly just the same. I even remember lying on a sun lounger covered to the chin despite the heat. When I was ten some famous doctor came to Lublin and told my parents I ought to have my tonsils removed. And so I had a surgery and got my tonsils removed. But I haven't grown too tall and it's said that the lack of tonsils affects your height.

When I was to go to gymnasium, Mom convinced Father to send us to a public school, where you had to attend on Saturdays, instead of a private, expensive Jewish gymnasium. Father wouldn't allow it at first but we had no money. A public gymnasium was much cheaper, the monthly tuition

fee was 20 zlotys, while the private ones cost 60 zlotys [a craftsman earned on average approx. 60 zlotys per month]. The problem was, they allowed only ten percent of the students to be Jewish; out of 30 students in the class there was the three of us Jewish girls. There was an entry exam. I passed it and was admitted. The school was called the Union of Lublin Public Gymnasium.

I was an average student. I was taught geography by Ms. Chalubinska, the daughter of the geographer Chalubinski [Tytus Chalubinski (1820-1889) - doctor, botanist, explorer of the, founder of the Tatra Mountains Museum]. I wasn't that good at geography but I liked the teacher. I also liked the nature teacher. I read a lot. I used to go to the Macierz Szkolna library [Polish Education Community, a national education organization founded in 1905] ever since my first year, the librarians offered me books, gave advice. When I was a bit older I started to use the LSS [Lublin Food Producers' Cooperative] library as well. They had translations of many Soviet books, the revolutionary literature. I'm sure they had Gorky [Maxim Gorky (1868-1936) - Russian and Soviet writer, creator of the Socialist realism literary style], but also How the Steel Was Tempered [a socialist realism novel by N. Ostrovsky]. I read Dostoyevsky at the time as well [Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) - Russian writer].