

Zuzanna Mensz' Cousins Mietek Perec, Esterka Rottenberg And Other Kids In Skryhiczyn



This is a group of my cousins from Rottenberg family. It was taken during summer holidays in Skryhiczyn in 1930s. A boy standing first from right is Mietek, Mieczyslaw Perec, my mom's sister Chana's son. A little girl sitting first from left is Esterka Rottenberg, a daughter of my mom's uncle Nusyn Rottenberg.

The whole big family Rottenberg lived in Skryhiczyn. There was Skryhiczyn-Dwor [Manor] and Skryhiczyn-Folwark [Farm], three kilometers apart. All that was owned by one family, the Rottenbergs. The land was divided between the heirs and Mom got her 17 acres at Skryhiczyn-Folwark. Mom's cousin, who worked in a sawmill, rented her a large shed. I remember the building clearly, we stayed there with my sister and a friend of her, it was a room with a cooking stove. And later Mom decided to build a house. There was a brick wall on the land she inherited, the remaining three had been pulled down, I don't know why. A house was built. It had three rooms and an annex with a traditional country kitchen, with a large stove which you could sleep on, and which you baked bread in. The kitchen was built before the house was finished, we spent our first holidays there. Aunt Hanka, Chana Perec, Mother's sister, came to visit us and she liked the place, and added one more room with a balcony and a large kitchen. And so the house had two porches, a balcony, and a great attic. We had our tenant farmers, the Blanders, living in the house whole year round. It was a couple with three children, very religious Jews. He'd earlier worked for some Germans, he was a very good farmer. He built a barn next to the house, had his own horses, cattle. When the house was finished, one room was occupied by the Blanders and we would take the other two. When we were gone, they used the whole house, and when we came, their two sons slept in the attic.

A whole bunch of kids used to come to Skryhiczyn every summer, an awful lot of people, and all of them family. Skryhiczyn is our legend, our happy childhood. We had this game, it went on and on. It was called The Kingdom of Fun. The idea was of course Ida Merzan's [née Halperin, daughter of Masza, 1907-1987, educationist and writer, associate of Janusz Korczak]. We had a Queen, it was always Sara, Ida's sister, the most beautiful of the girls, we made a bulletin, flags. It went on for years. We used to go swimming in the Bug river, three kilometers from the Farm, and visit the uncles at the Manor on our way back, they would give us treats and we would go back to the Farm. We often worked in the fields, helping harvesting or threshing. The harvest was still done with scythes. We tied the sheaves and carried them over to the barn. There was a treadmill in the barn and we tossed the sheaves into the threshing machine. We helped our tenant farmers that way, although it was not our duty. When there was some work to do, we did it with pleasure.