

Zuzanna Mensz' Little Sister Hilka Rosset



This is a school photo of my younger sister Hilka. I'm not sure what was her name in the birth certificate, Hinda I think, or perhaps Hilara? I think the photo was taken in Volodymir Volyns'kyy after 1934.

Hilka was born in 1920 in Lublin. As our older sister, Zlatka, used to say, she was the wisest of us all. She was truly very gifted, but she was also the so-called problem child. Mom always gave in to her. Hilka had her whims, she could say some day she didn't want to go to school and she wouldn't go. As a matter of fact, she didn't have such superb grades in her first years at school, maybe she just didn't feel like learning. But then she had a year off, because Mom could not afford to send us both to school; I went to Lublin to school and she stayed in the country with Mom. It was a very tough time for her. When she started to go to school in Volodymir again, a year after Father's death in 1933, she studied real hard and was an outstanding student.

After Hilka had passed her final gymnasium exams Mom sold her land in Skryhiczyn and bought a house in Falenica, just outside Warsaw. It might have been 1938. Mom wanted to live closer to us. We had a deal my sister would start her studies when I completed the school. During the remaining year she gave private lessons, lived with Mom.

After the fall of Warsaw in September 1939, Hilka and I left Falenica and went to Skryhiczyn. The border had already been closed, but there were people in Skryhiczyn who could smuggle you by night across the Bug river in a boat [the river Bug defined the demarcation between the German and Soviet occupation zones]. When we got to Skryhiczyn we met my cousin Kalmus with some

young people from Lodz and we crossed the Bug together and went to Volodymir-Volyns'kyy.

In Volodymir I started to work in an infectious diseases hospital as a nurse. It was my first real job and I was very glad to be working at last. Hilka learned later you could enroll for studying in Lwow and so she went there with some friends. She started to study agriculture. We made a deal I would earn the money for the time being and she would study. She was a very good student, she was very happy. In 1940 I joined her in Lwow.

And the war broke out again [German - Soviet war, in June 1941], and the Germans bombed Lwow. I was to report to the Soviet army as a nurse. There was a terrible air strike one day and they put all of us drafted to the Red Army in a double line and we marched out heading for Kiev. Once I got to Kiev I started to visit the places the evacuees from Lwow stayed at looking for my sister but I didn't find her. Eventually I met a large group of her fellow students and was told she hadn't left Lwow. She said: 'Whatever happens to all of us, I'll stay, too.' She managed to make it through to our Mother. She stayed with Mom in Skryhiczyn where they were both killed along with everyone else. After the war I came upon a friend of Hilka and she said she'd seen her on a horse wagon with the group which was to be transported to Sobibor. She urged her to escape but she didn't. Apparently, she didn't want to leave Mother alone.