

Zuznanna Mensz With Her Sisters Hilka And Zlatka Rosset In Warsaw



This is a photo of mine and my sisters Hilka and Zlatka. Hilka is first from left, me - in the center, and Zlatka first from right. It was taken in Warsaw in 1937. We were living there at the time.

My elder sister was born in 1909, I was born in 1918. The age gap was quite big. Later our youngest sister was born, a year and a half my junior. My eldest sister was called Sara Zlata, we called her Zlatka. I was nicknamed Zunia. The younger one was called Hilka. I'm not sure what was her name in the birth certificate, Hinda I think, or perhaps Hilara? Zlatka was born still in Volodymyr and we already in Lublin. Zlatka moved to Warsaw to study when she was 16. She studied Polish history at the Warsaw University. She already had communist sympathies back then. She spent a year in prison for some political affairs. With a sentence like this she was unable to find a work as a teacher. She gave private lessons, she was a very good math tutor. She earned so well on tuition that she was even able to help Mom a little.

During my first year in Warsaw I stayed with Zlatka. Later she moved to Vienna to the man she loved, Sruł Bursztyn, who worked there. I think it was in 1937 or 1938. It was an affection dating back to their school years. And anyway, we were friends with his whole family, they lived in Lublin, used to come to Skryhiczyn for the summer. He was a communist, just like her. Right after she'd arrived there was the Anschluss and Hitler took over Vienna. At that time many communists, with the help from various people, were somehow being transported to England. They were given money for the flight which they returned once they'd reached England. Anyhow, she went to

England and someone helped her find a job as a maid. Some time later came her fiancé, who already held an engineering degree, and got a job at a factory. They got married just before the war, in 1939. I remember Mother getting the letter with the news of their wedding. She was happy her daughter got married.

Zlatka stayed in England for a couple more years after the war. We wrote letters to each other. She even came to see us. Her husband, Srul Bursztyn, didn't want to come back to Poland but she had him come. They returned for good in 1949 I think. They lived in Warsaw. They came with their son, Jerzyk, who was born in England. Later they had two more sons: Wlodek and Andrzej. Zlatka was an editor in a popular science publishing house. Her husband worked in the PKPG [Polish Committee on Economic Planning] as the head of the technology department. They left for Israel in 1956.

My younger sister Hilka was, as Zlatka used to say, 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 the fall of Warsaw in September 1939, Hilka and I went to Skryhiczyn, and then to Volodymir and Lwow. 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. 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. In Kiev 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.