

A Portrait Of, Irena Wygodzka's, Mother Bajla Beitner



This is a portrait of, Irena Wygodzka's, mother Bajla Beitner, taken before the war, in the 1930s, in Katowice in our prewar apartment.

In the picture my mother is holding some magazine or book. The only book which I remember we had at home was in Polish. It was Tolstoy, I remember, it was bound in these red covers, but not leather, it was in my father's study.

My parents didn't read much, they didn't have an intellectual education, no needs. They were simple people. Among themselves they spoke about family, business, that there wasn't enough money. I'm sure they didn't talk about politics.

I remember that before the war there started to be talk about whether there'd be a war. They were afraid. Mother thought we should have left for Palestine.

Mother dressed very modestly. She may have had one better dress, for outings. I remember Mom's shoes, laced up, with heels, narrow, gray. Sometimes my parents would go to Bytom to buy clothing.

That's where the border was and there were Germans there. You could buy something a lot cheaper, but the Germans didn't permit for anything to be taken out of the country.

So I would leave my worn out shoes in a trash can and put the new ones on. But I remember that once my parents bought some oranges and it was forbidden to take those oranges to Poland and Father was so angry that he smashed them into a wall.

I remember that Mom was always busy with work. And she wasn't that strong. She had some health problems, she couldn't sleep. I think she went to Naleczow once. I don't think it was a longer stay, because that would have been too expensive.

Mother took care of the house, there were four children, so there was a lot of work. Once every week or two the bed linen had to be changed, the washing would be done in a tub and the servant did the washing on a washboard, the wet things would be dried up in the attic.

Everything was washed at home, we never took anything to a laundry. Everything was so primitive, simple. I didn't help with the cleaning and cooking.

I was studying, taking care of my younger sisters: taking them for walks, playing, reading to them. There was no nanny or governess. There were no luxuries.