

Krystyna Budnicka



This picture I had to take before my final exams in the Nazarene Sisters's grammar school in 1952. I finished elementary school in 1948 and had to choose a secondary school. I very much wanted to go to the grammar school run by the Nazarene Sisters, but the nuns said that I shouldn't, because I would be ruining my chances of a career. It was at the height of the Stalinist period and a church education was frowned upon. But I insisted. And the nuns were right - later on I had trouble getting a job. At school I was different, and didn't fit in. Not because I was Jewish, but because I was an orphan. The girls who went to that school were from well-off families. They brought white bread rolls with ham, while I had black bread and jam or dripping. I really never felt different because of my Jewishness. That was never an issue, it was something we never talked about - not because I

concealed the fact, but because it just wasn't a topic that we discussed. In those days we didn't talk about the war at all. I know from conversations with Jewish friends of my age [today] that it was the same for them - nobody talked about the war. Nobody talked about themselves. If ever anyone asked me about my family I said that they had all died during the war. Perhaps not revealing anything afforded us some security? In 1952 I went to Lublin Catholic University to study pedagogy. That was the very worst part of the Stalinist period, but the atmosphere there was fantastic. Many of us were escaping from communism and found our haven there. And not only that - it was the only time in my life that I felt on a par with my peers. I was just the same as they were - like them I was not with my family, like them I had no money, like them I lived for my studies, we were all young and in a similar situation. And I used to go back to the orphanage during vacations; I treated it like my only home. The nuns would mend the holes in my shoes and give me food to take back to Lublin with me. I was 20 years old, and I remember that there, at university, I was truly happy for the first time in my life. Everyone knew that I was Jewish, but it wasn't an issue. I think I was probably the only Jew at the whole university. I remember that once my friends came and told me that the young Father Daniel [Daniel Rufeisen], a convert who was going to be a monk in Israel, had come to Lublin and was going to give a sermon. I didn't go; somehow it wasn't something I was interested in. I graduated after four years.