

Rena Michalowska At Elementary School In Tysmienica



This is me in 1937. The photo must have been taken by professional photographer in Tysmienica or Stanislawow. I sent one print of this photo and my school report of the first class to the Polish President - Ignacy Moscicki after my father had been arrested in the fall of 1936 for communist activities. I asked the President to release my father. This print is torn on the edge, because my father after his return from a jail was carrying it in his wallet for a long time. I went to school in 1936. I guess there was only a Polish school in Tysmienica. I think it had six grades. I remember only girls in my class, so there must have been a parallel one for the boys. There were not more than twenty of us in one class: Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian. I think that maybe the Ukrainian children

took religion classes at the Orthodox Church and the Jewish children went to the synagogue. I didn't. About two weeks into the first grade, the girl who was placed at the same desk with me by the teacher, raised her hand and said, "Ma-am, my mother wants me to sit with someone else, not with Reginka, because Reginka is Jewish." So the teacher moved her somewhere else and I sat with another "Jewish" girl. I remember another girl from school, Wanda. She was Polish and her family was one of the richest in town. Her father had a large workshop in which he employed people making embroidered sheepskin coats. Wanda found me after the war. Nothing gave me any problems at school. Even if at home everybody spoke Yiddish, my aunts, my grandmother and my parents spoke very fluent Polish, in fact my father spoke Polish beautifully, and so did my mother. I suppose my aunts graduated from a Polish elementary school. They read a lot to me, as I was the oldest grandchild, and for a while the only one, so I was given a special kind of attention. I can't remember ever having been refused reading or conversation. I learned how to read with my aunts and my mother: "What does it say here? What letters are these? Why is it pronounced like that?" Nobody ever sat down to teach me, it just happened, fast and easy. My father was very demanding in that he took care I don't become a typical "only child" spoiled by the mother, grandmother and aunts. Most of the time, he called me "son." His strictness balanced the women's tendency to see me as "a poor child, who never sees her father."