Rena Michalowska As A Medicine Student

This is me in 1947 or 1948 when I started to study medicine in Wroclaw. That picture was taken at a photo studio in Wroclaw or Walbrzych. I finished 10th grade and took my matriculation exams in 1947. The exam covered lots of subjects: both written and oral exams in math and Russian. But there were also: geography, history, physics, chemistry, and a foreign language, I can?t remember which. The newly repatriated young people didn't have to take exams to college. Anyway, I didn't take one to study medicine in Wroclaw. In Wroclaw I lived for a year in a Jewish dorm. There were two: one for students, into which I didn't get for some reason, most likely because I was late signing up; and one for working class youth, where I lived. It was in the center of the city, at Olawska Street, I think. We walked the paths trodden among the ruins. The dorm building had two floors and an attic. Rooms for boys and girls were separated by floor. People who lived there were very different from each other and of diverse ages. Some of them worked only, others took college preparatory courses. At the beginning of 1948, I interrupted my studies after the first semester. I

was aware of how poor my Polish was and how little physical, chemical and anatomical vocabulary I had. I felt really bad throughout the first semester, with all of the assistants from the Jan Kazimierz University in Lwow very aware of my Russicisms. I felt completely disheartened and I decided that I would have to master that language if I didn't want to be treated as an alien, an outsider, a second-class citizen. For that's how I felt. Not because of my background, not at all, only because of my pronunciation and my vocabulary. I took a leave from the University and studied, reading lots of Polish books, sometimes even copying. I decided to repeat the first semester. I finished my second year in Wroclaw and in the academic year 1950/1951, I came to Warsaw, to my parents. They moved to Warsaw at the beginning of 1950.