

Alena Munkova's Mother With One Of Her Children



This is a photograph of my mother, Marie Synkova, nee Steinerova. And I don't know if the baby is my brother Jiri or me. I can't tell. Plus there was one other child between me and my brother that died very young. It could even be him, hard to say. My mother was born on 9th August 1898 in Kolin - she was four years younger than my father - and died before the war, in 1933, of cancer. As I then found out, her father also died of cancer, a year before her. I don't even know what her religious inclinations were like, I was six when she died - it was at the end of Grade One - she'd already been ill for the last two years. From Grade One I remember that an apprentice from my father's lab used to come get me after school. I would always come with untied shoelaces, so he'd always tie them for me. I've got a very strong memory of this. The apprentice would kneel and tie my shoes. That's quite cute. I don't know if we always had gym class, or why I didn't have them tied. But back then people wore lace-up ankle boots, not sandals. I think that by then my mother was quite ill, and so no one was really taking care of me much. That it's the result of there being no one to tell me: 'You've got to tie them yourself.' That's why I'm talking about it, not because of those shoes. But that was given by the fact that our mother was dying, and I think that the cancer lingered on quite long. I remember being in some room, in some dining room, and my mother is lying in the next room, and Grandma Hermina, who'd come for a visit is with her, and my mother is weeping horribly. They didn't know that I was listening. And my mother is saying, 'What will become of the children, what will become of the children?' And Grandma is consoling her. That was a horrible experience for me. For one, I didn't want them to know that I could hear it, and then, for a child, suddenly something opens up in front of you, you don't even know its exact scope, because the words aren't completely filled with content, but despite that you know that it's something terrible. That it's something horrible, unjust, cruel, something that you can't defend yourself against. That was a very terribly strong moment for me at such a tender age. I was six then. Later I even wrote this poem about it. I also remember how horrible it seemed to me when then our teacher announced it to the class, and said, 'Your poor classmate's...' It was awful. Even though she probably thought that that was all right, she didn't know how else to react. You can't judge that at

all.