

Anna Lanota



This is my school photo from 1930. In this picture I was 15 and I went on to gymnasium last year. The photo was taken in Lodz.

Gymnasiums such as the German or Jewish ones had restricted state approval, which meant that they could award the school-leaving certificate but the examination had to be invigilated by someone from the education office.

The questions for the school-leaving exam were the same as in Polish schools. You took Polish, mathematics, Latin and I think physics, a written and an oral exam in every subject. I took my school-leaving exam in 1932.

They sent us an invigilator from the education office who was a German and a Nazi. I think they must have sent him to the Jewish gymnasium on purpose.

He flunked 14 out of 30 girls, often for silly things, for instance for turning their heads and looking behind them.

Several of them he refused to admit to the oral exam. The girls who didn't get their school-leaving certificate that time got together and straight afterwards went to Palestine together.

The same man from the education office had been at the school-leaving exams in the boys' Jewish gymnasium, and the lads had warned us what kind of a person he was.

My father believed that a woman didn't even need to graduate from gymnasium, because in any case she would soon be getting married and having children. But for my mother it was obvious that I had to have a profession and my own income.

As usual she convinced my father. I was interested in psychology, because at that time it was something entirely new. My mama didn't like that choice; she said, 'What will happen - well, you can't make a living from that.'

And my grandfather didn't understand what psychology is at all. Once he met me and asked, 'What are you studying?' I said, 'Psychology.' 'And what are you going to do?' I told him that I was going to be a teacher, and he said, 'A teacher?

The worst profession in the world! You have to work so hard and study at the university to go on and teach other people's children afterwards?' He thought it incredibly stupid.