

Emanuel Elbinger



This is me at the age of two or three. This picture might have been taken on the bank of the River Vistula in Nowe Brzesko, where we lived before the war. I don't know who took it.

I was born on 2nd January 1931 in Cracow, and before the war I lived in the town of Nowe Brzesko, that's 25 kilometers from Cracow. My two younger sisters were born when we were already living in Nowe Brzesko.

I think my parents met through matchmakers. It was a very good marriage. My sister Pola was born in 1932, and Lusia in 1934. We spoke Polish at home. My parents knew Yiddish, and sometimes spoke it to each other. Mother spoke Polish perfectly; Father sometimes dropped Yiddishisms in, because he'd spoken more Yiddish at home.

After their wedding Father and Mother set up their own dry goods store. Before that Father had been a glazier, but because he had a brother in Cracow with a cloth wholesale, they decided to get into the same business, because I presume they could get things on credit from him. I don't really know, because I wasn't into the business back then, I was too young. And usually Father bought his goods from his brother, brought them in carts from the wholesale. For the shop my parents rented a house that was even more central on the Square, on the Cracow - Sandomierz road. That house was rented from a Polish Christian family, the Lipnickis. It was a good location, because the biggest business was done at the markets. Before the war there were markets once a week, on Mondays. It's a farming region, so the farmers used to bring their produce, crops, horses, other things, and of course they had the time that day, and they bought everything they needed in the town. Our shop, I think, was quite well stocked. It was one of the bigger shops in Nowe Brzesko. Father and Mother ran it. On market day my parents would get someone in to help because there were so many customers. Mother looked after the shop all day, of course, kept shop. The house too, and the children - sometimes it was too much. So a woman would come in. She just looked after us

children. She wasn't permanent, live-in. From time to time, to take us for walks or wherever. No, she wasn't Jewish.

The first thing I can remember from Nowe Brzesko is Pilsudski's death. That was 1935. I was four, but I remember it as if it was yesterday. In Szmajser's yard - he made shoe uppers - there was this huge... pear tree, I think it was, and there under it was this guy lying on the ground. Asleep, in the daytime. Hot, it was. 'Why's he lying there like that?' I asked. So someone told me: 'He's drunk, because Grandfather's died.' Pilsudski was known as 'Grandfather.' That's the first thing I remember.