

Emila Leibel With Her Parents Ester (Hadasa) And Bencyjon Grossbart



This is me and my parents on Starowislna Street in Cracow. A street photographer took this picture. I was already pregnant because I'm wearing this long, black coltskin coat so it must have been 1933 or 1934.

Julek Leibel was friendly with my father. They had common business interests. He was his 'gesheft freund.' 'Geschaeft' [Yid.: gesheft] means 'business' in German. And he used to come to our apartment, to see Father. He was a lot older than me, and I was in love with him, I gazed at him like a dog at the moon. All I used to do was serve tea or something, as you do for guests. It didn't occur to me that he took any interest in me at all. I was a modest girl. What was I? A young girl without a penny, without a dowry, and he was rich, had a car. What that meant back then! Julek

was an independent leather exporter, and my father was a modest Jew, bought the hides himself and then dispatched them. And I was completely surprised and amazed when one day my mother called me into the dining room, where a distant uncle was sitting, the father of my future husband, and Mother said that he'd come to ask whether I would marry Julek. And I was speechless. I said that of course I would. He liked me, and that was it. He even bought me a trousseau - he didn't buy it, he gave Father money, so that nobody would know, and Mother got me some linens together, what I had to have, so that I'd have a trousseau.

After he proposed to me, Julek was back and forth from Kalwaria Zebrzydowska [approx. 25 km from Cracow], where he lived with his parents, to me in Cracow all the time. It was winter. Along the Kalwaria-Cracow road there were woods nearly all the way, and attacks on travelers happened all the time. My mother-in-law was afraid that something would happen to him and refused to let him go to Cracow. She demanded a quick wedding: 'It's not like you met each other yesterday, you can get married, let her come to you here and that's the end of it.' My mother-in-law was called Anna, and my father-in-law Markus.

The wedding was 3 months after the marriage proposal. Actually, it wasn't a big wedding, just a quiet ceremony in my parents' apartment. The rabbi came, married us, and that was it. No reception, because there was no money. There were just a few people: my Aunt Ela, the one who'd really brought me up, came down from Warsaw, and the 2 cousins of mine that were in Cracow. After my wedding my parents didn't need 3 rooms. They moved to Rekawka Street, because Father had heart trouble, and that was nearer Podgorski Park - the air seemed to be better there and he found it easier to breathe.

Before we moved to Kalwaria we went to Italy - that was a beautiful honeymoon. We traveled on trains, just the 2 of us. First we went to Vienna, because my husband had an uncle there. From Vienna we went to Venice, then to Rome, as everyone does, to Naples and to Capri. Karol, my husband's brother, traveled a lot, because he was a confirmed bachelor, and he drew us up an itinerary, where we had to go, what we had to see, and we followed his lead. We were going to go to Yugoslavia as well, but it was 1934 [Ed. note: Mrs. Leibel got married in 1933] and Hitler had started operating in Germany - he'd woken up, so we came back to Poland. The expulsion of the Jews and all those troubles had started... And then I went to Kalwaria... and as soon as I arrived, I broke my leg. There were these twisted stairs there, and I was running down the stairs fast...

Julek was the youngest of his family. He had 2 brothers and a sister. Karol was the eldest and was a doctor. The second, Heniek, was a lawyer in Bielsko. He was married and had a child. Their sister was called Giza, and the brother-in-law was Jozef Krygier, he was an engineer and came from Jaroslaw [approx. 200 km east of Cracow]. They had a daughter, Irena. Our daughter, Halinka, was born on 14 June 1934.

There were a lot of Jews in Kalwaria. There was a synagogue there, but we didn't go. My parents-in-law went, my father-in-law. We rented an apartment straight away, and at my behest the apartment was altered. There were 2 large rooms and a huge kitchen, but no WC and no bathroom. Only at my request was the kitchen divided, and a hall, bathroom and WC made. That engineer, the brother-in-law, designed how it would be. That apartment was in a good spot, on the town square near the church, in a farmer's house. I don't remember what his name was.

Julek's grandparents and my in-laws lived in a house across the square, at right angles. My in-laws came from Kalwaria, but they'd later moved to Wadowice [approx. 40 km from Cracow]. My husband was born in Wadowice and had even been at high school back in Wadowice - the same high school that the Pope [John Paul II] went to. I don't know why they moved back to Kalwaria. I got on very well with my mother-in-law, and my father-in-law was very fond of me. He was no longer working, but they were all still taken up with the leather business. Wouldn't I have preferred to stay in Cracow? If he had business there, I went there to be with him. I'd have gone to hell to be with him, not just to Kalwaria. I was madly in love. What my husband's firm was called? It wasn't called anything - there was just a wagon full of goods, off it went, and that was it. Abroad. I don't know exactly where those wagons went.