

Anna Mass And Her Friends On Holiday In Kazimierz



My father, as I said, was a watchmaker. In the summer, my father always went to Kazimierz [resort town on the Vistula, some 100 km south of Warsaw], there was work there. People dropped their watches into water, into sand, you had to clean them. And that's why Kazimierz is like a second home town for me. I always spent the whole summer there. After I had gone to work, I took a free leave in the summer and was able to spend two months in Kazimierz. Mother went with us, chiefly because of me, because I was very sickly. She was always worried I'd stop eating in Kazimierz and get even thinner. And I hated the beach, to this day I don't like baking in the sun. In the water I felt cold, on the beach I felt hot, I lost my appetite. My mother could sit on the beach for hours, she loved the sun.

Kazimierz was also a Jewish town. It was inhabited almost solely by Jews. There were some Poles there, but those were rather the peasants from the nearby villages. The soil there was excellent. But I saw how the peasants lived. The peasant ate a chicken only when he was dying or when the chicken died, if he slaughtered a pig, he salted the meat and stashed it away in a barrel for winter, for Christmas. Normally they ate fatback. Or used the blood to make blood sausage. The peasants were poor.

Though Jewish, Kazimierz was a clean town. There was a disastrous flood in 1933. And the market square, which is far above the Vistula level, was all flooded. I've never learned to swim. My father swam quite well. When a child, he lived on the Pilica river, when he was 2 or 3 he played with kids, they used to push each other into water near the mill, he had to learn to swim if he didn't want to drown. But I was afraid to, I had seen too many drowning swimmers. The swimming suits of the era were the suspended, tricot kind of ones. You didn't wear what you wear today - bikini, or even topless. Here, breasts and stomach, everything had to be covered, even though I was flat as a board. There were boats, kayaks... Even though I couldn't swim, I liked the boats very much. And, strangely, I wasn't afraid.