

Irena Wygodzka With Her Friends From Akiba



The picture was taken on the occasion of Bronek's, one of the Akiba leader's departure to Israel.

On the back of the picture there is an inscription in Polish: 'For Bronek, a keepsake, on the day of departure to Erec.'

In the picture Bronek, I don't remember his family name, is sitting in the first row, in the center, on my left-hand side. There are all girls from our unit which was called 'Blyskawica.'

From the left, in the second row: Mala Lobel, Ketzi, Ruska Cimberknopf, Hanka Urbach, Mina Schiff. From right, in the third row: Mania Walner, Fela, Hela Hass.

It was all organized very well in Akiba: there were these units, platoons, kind of like in the army. They all had names: 'Sharon,' 'Degania' - named after places in Palestine. For example I was in 'Blyskawica' [in English 'Lightning'].

Later in others, because that would change. We had this 'kfucovy,' that is a leader, male or female. There was this Zyga Halbreich and his brother Paul Halbreich, there was Edi Goldberg, there was Rakower, Bronek, there was Mania Walner.

Some of them would later go to Palestine. For the older ones - you had to be 15-16 years old - there was the so-called haksharah, this preparation for emigration to Palestine, it took place at a farm. I never went there. I was too young.

In Akiba we'd meet, learn Hebrew, sing some songs in Hebrew. It was quite fun. We wanted to leave for Palestine. Studying, discussions, camps - all of this prepared us for emigration. When I was some 15-16 years old I wanted to go to Palestine and work on a farm, like I was taught in the organization.

They told us about Palestine, what was happening there, what life was like, about how land was being conquered, about how everything was being built, how difficult it was there. They talked to us a lot about morality, pride, love of Israeli land.

There were discussions about current events, political and sexual issues. Those discussions made me conscious of sexuality. I was very young then, 12-13 years. What did we know then? Nothing. Our parents didn't tell us anything.