

Irena Wygodzka With Her Friend Fryda In A Kibbutz During The War



In this picture I am with Fryda with whom I was in a kibbutz in Vilnius during the war, in 1940.

We sent that photo to Hela Hass, who was in Siberia during the war. We wrote on the back: 'Helus, we miss you and hope that we will meet soon.'

I went to a kibbutz in Vilnius in December 1939. My brother walked me to the train station. I didn't tell Father that I was leaving, because I was afraid he wouldn't let me go.

It was horrible! I crossed the border to Vilnius when the temperature was 40 degrees below zero, so I remember this.

When I was in Vilnius one of my friends from the organization said: 'What?! You didn't say goodbye to your father, you didn't tell him? Write him, he must be worried!' So I wrote him and Father somehow forgave me.

I went to the kibbutz, because I wanted to leave for Palestine, but I was one of the youngest in the kibbutz.

Well, it was the older ones who got to go first. It was all quite illegal, papers were arranged in Russia. There were all kinds of organizations in the kibbutzim in Vilnius: leftist, rightist, all Zionist.

We were in these former army barracks on Subocze Street. It was horribly cold! There were no toilets in the building. You had to go out into the yard. And to get there you'd slip on frozen pee.

There were hundreds of people there and lice. We used to go to the so-called 'banya,' the baths, and those lice were crawling on the walls, on the tiles. It was a horror, this first period.

But then we broke up into groups and each organization tried to somehow function independently.

There were more or less 90 of us in our organization, Akiba. I knew some of the people from before the war. For example there was this Fryda whom I knew from a camp organized by Akiba before the war.

We settled in a very nice house with a porch from the yard. It was somewhere near Ostra Brama. The street was called Beliny. We'd be assigned jobs and then paid for doing them.

The money was collected in one cash box and then used to buy what was needed to survive. I was the nanny of three children, I think it was a Jewish family. Later I worked in a printing house, I chopped wood, I cleaned apartments; there were always lots of windows to be washed.