

Anna Mass With Her Sister And Friends In Kazimierz



We are there in Kazimierz with my sister Elka and our friends. My face was cut from this photo, because one boy who loved me, would have a souvenir...

My father, as I said, was a watchmaker. At first he went from village to village to earn money, then he set up a small shop where he worked. It was at Pijarska Street in Lublin. As we always barely made the ends meet, if we bought something, it was on credit. Those bills of exchange had to be eventually repaid, and there was always some hectic searching for the money. 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.

There was a family that went by the name of Gorecki there, the grandmother was a converted Jewess - she fell in love, married a Pole. And the whole family had the characteristic looks - black hair and blue eyes. We lived with her in the summer. I was very bold - perhaps too bold - and one day I asked her whether she didn't regret having changed her religion, living among the Poles. And she told me, 'Well, you know, my child, yes and no.'

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.