

Niselcyrla Bachner In The Warsaw Ghetto



This is my mother. The picture was taken in the Warsaw Ghetto by a professional photographer, I think. It was 1941 or 1942. She needed a photo for her kennkarte.

My mother had a Jewish name, Niselcyrla. I don't know how she became Natalia, they must have called her that since she was a child. She was born in 1890, in Warsaw. I don't know which school she attended and I don't remember any particularly important events from her childhood. She got married in 1911, most likely through a matchmaker. What kind of wedding they had, I have no idea; I'm sure it wasn't held in a synagogue, because a synagogue wedding is very expensive, it's not free. I never asked about that, it didn't cross my mind to ask.

My mother was quiet, just a housewife, taking care of us all. She was a handsome woman; my sister resembled her a little and my sister was considered pretty.

My parents obviously felt Jewish, I'm sure of that. In those times it used to be called 'of Moses' creed.' I think they had Jewish names in their papers. My mother was a little religious; she didn't wear a wig. She lit the candles on Friday, but then, when it got closer to the tragedy, she stopped; there was no point in keeping that up. I don't know if the kitchen was kosher or not, but I don't think so. But before the war we never ate pork.

In September 1939, when the war broke out, my mother was spending her holidays in Srodobrow with my sister's little son. So she walked back to Warsaw with this child in her arms under the falling bombs. I remember she told me how she walked across the bridge with him, scared to death.

We lived at Leszno: my mom, my brother and I. My father cut it short and committed suicide, through the window in his sisters' apartment... That may have been in 1940, before the Ghetto [before October 1940].

The year was 1942. We remained at Leszno until the deportations began. Two Germans entered the house and yelled: 'Alles raus!' [Ger.: everybody out!]. We were all scared, so we all went out. Only we took bedclothes with us, to have something to sleep on. We got an apartment at 16 or 18 Mila. I wasn't there long, only a few weeks; then I got out of the Ghetto. It was September 1942, a few days before the big deportation [Grossaktion]. I got up and left. I hid a few pictures in my purse: my mom's (this one), my brother's and sister's, her son's and my own. At first I was in hiding in Warsaw, then in Konskowola [around 100 km south-east from Warsaw] at the home of a woman called Zaba, one of my brother's friends. My mother stayed in the Warsaw Ghetto.

My brother sent me letters by mail addressed to Zaba [toward the end of 1942]. My mom no longer added anything. He lied to me that she had bad legs, but what could legs have had to do with writing? Probably she was already gone. They took her out of the house and just took her away. I don't even know where and when she died. To this day I can't forgive myself that I wasn't there.