

Emilia Leibel With Her Husband Juliusz



This is me and my husband Julek. This picture was taken while we were on vacation in Smokowiec, Slovakia in 1936, 3 years after we got married. On the back of the picture is the dedication 'August 1936, dear cousin Julek and Miska.'

Julek Leibel was friendly with my father. They had common business interests. He was his 'gesheft freund.' 'Geschaeft' [Yid.: gesheft] means 'business' in German. And he used to come to our apartment, to see Father. He was a lot older than me, and I was in love with him, I gazed at him like a dog at the moon. All I used to do was serve tea or something, as you do for guests. It didn't occur to me that he took any interest in me at all. I was a modest girl. What was I? A young girl without a penny, without a dowry, and he was rich, had a car. What that meant back then! Julek was an independent leather exporter, and my father was a modest Jew, bought the hides himself and then dispatched them. And I was completely surprised and amazed when one day my mother called me into the dining room, where a distant uncle of mine was sitting, the father of my future husband, and Mother said that he'd come to ask whether I would marry Julek. And I was speechless. I said that of course I would. He liked me, and that was it. He even bought me a trousseau - he didn't buy it, he gave Father money, so that nobody would know, and Mother got me some linens together, what I had to have, so that I'd have a trousseau.

The wedding was 3 months after the marriage proposal. Actually, it wasn't a big wedding, just a quiet ceremony in my parents' apartment. The rabbi came, married us, and that was it. No reception, because there was no money. There were just a few people: my Aunt Ela, the one who'd really brought me up, came down from Warsaw, and the 2 cousins of mine that were in Cracow.

Before we moved to Kalwaria, where Julek lived with his parents, we went to Italy - that was a beautiful honeymoon. We traveled on trains, just the 2 of us. First we went to Vienna, because my husband had an uncle there. From Vienna we went to Venice, then to Rome, as everyone does, to Naples and to Capri. Karol, my husband's brother, traveled a lot, because he was a confirmed bachelor, and he drew us up an itinerary, where we had to go, what we had to see, and we followed his lead. We were going to go to Yugoslavia as well, but it was 1934 [Ed. note: Mrs. Leibel got married in 1933] and Hitler had started operating in Germany - he'd woken up, so we came back to Poland. The expulsion of the Jews and all those troubles had started... And then I went to Kalwaria... and as soon as I arrived, I broke my leg. There were these twisted stairs there, and I was running down the stairs fast...

Julek was the youngest of his family. He had 2 brothers and a sister. Karol was the eldest and was a doctor. The second, Heniek, was a lawyer in Bielsko. He was married and had a child. Their sister was called Giza, and the brother-in-law was Jozef Krygier, he was an engineer and came from Jaroslaw [approx. 200 km east of Cracow]. They had a daughter, Irena. Our daughter, Halinka, was born on 14 June 1934.

Julek's grandparents and my in-laws lived in a house across the square from us, at right angles. My in-laws came from Kalwaria, but they'd later moved to Wadowice [approx. 40 km from Cracow]. My husband was born in Wadowice and had even been at high school back in Wadowice - the same high school that the Pope [John Paul II] went to. I don't know why they moved back to Kalwaria. I got on very well with my mother-in-law, and my father-in-law was very fond of me. He was no longer working, but they were all still taken up with the leather business. Wouldn't I have preferred to stay in Cracow? If he had business there, I went there to be with him. I'd have gone to hell to be with him, not just to Kalwaria. I was madly in love. What my husband's firm was called? It wasn't called anything - there was just a wagon full of goods, off it went, and that was it. Abroad. I don't know exactly where those wagons went.

In the winter we would go skiing in Zakopane. My husband skied better than me, because I only learned to ski with him. Before my wedding I hadn't been able to afford skis. Skis and boots cost money. I had my own gear, but bought by my husband.