

Anna Mass With Her Sister Elka Szwarc



It's me and my sister, Elka, in Kazimierz.

Elka was born 18th May 1919 and was a small baby when the war started in 1920 [Polish - Bolshevik war]. My mother told me that she had nothing to eat, so she gave the baby water to drink because she had no milk. My sister suffered from serious stomach problems. Then I was born. It was on 23th May 1921. Mother had the two of us and, to say the truth, she was happy. Because there would have arisen the problem of circumcision had she had a boy.

I went to school always together with my sister and it was like that: I was small and skinny, but had a strong fighting spirit. I mean, at school I was quiet. But if someone stepped on my toes, I knew how defend myself. I was always ugly but I laughed a lot. And I always looked well in photos, I was photogenic. Trousers were unfashionable those days; I had a pair made by a tailor because I wanted to wear trousers. Elka was more similar to my mother's brothers, whom I didn't know. She was very non-photogenic, though a pretty girl. Brown-haired. She had plaits so thick you could barely grab them with your hand. She was tall, taller than our parents... At first she was also slender. Only after turning 11 she put on weight, blossom. At 11 years old, she was 165 centimeters tall and weighed 70 kilograms. And if someone tried to pick up a fight with one, the other stood in her defense. My sister irritated me a little. If we went for a walk to a park together and I disappeared from her sight, she'd run and around shouting, 'Where's my child!' I am her child! Well, but still we lived harmony, we were two sisters, we lived together. We studied together, but it looked like this: when she was reading out a poem or anything to memorize it, I wasn't. I had already memorized it.

And we completed an elementary school. I went to work. My sister too had already gone to work by the time. Elka was serious, quiet, my opposite, because I was a little devil, which you can tell even today. She had a boyfriend, but believed he laughed a lot, was unserious. She went to gymnasium after completing elementary school, but we didn't have money for that. Finally, after a year she gave up and went to work, first as a babysitter, and then she worked at some hops plant.

The war broke out and everything ended. My sister was saying all the time, 'I'll die because of the Germans;' she wasn't leaving the apartment at all. And finally, she died with my mother, in Belzec.