Anna Mass With Her Father And Sister

It's me, my sister and my father, in Lublin, but I don't remember exactly, where.

Lublin was beautiful. The Saski Garden in Lublin... It certainly wasn't smaller than the Lazienki in Warsaw. In the summer there was always a military band on Sundays, a concert bowl, you could listen to concerts. In the winter there were toboggan runs. Huge ones. You could really go far... Before the war, the garden was open until dusk. Then a janitor went around with a clapper, announcing it was time to leave. And everyone went, they closed for the night. If someone uttered a profanity on the street or dropped a cigarette butt, a policeman would spring up out of nowhere and you had to pay two zlotys. A fine.

The Jewish quarter was down Swietoduska to Lubartowska and the surrounding area. And the Poles who lived there spoke fluent Yiddish. They played with Jewish kids from early childhood. I always laughed that a Jewish Friday smelled of kerosene and cake. Kerosene, because you washed children's hair and rinsed it with kerosene, which allegedly prevented lice. I also had my hair rinsed with kerosene. Perhaps that's why it was so black?

I lived in the Polish quarter. At a small street called Peowiakow. Grandmother had wealthy relatives, nieces. One of those owned a tannery plant. But a wealthy family wants nothing to do with the poor one. I mean, when my mother got married, they wanted to give her an apartment in their house, but my mother rejected the offer. She simply didn't want anyone's generosity. We lived in the very center of Lublin, but the apartment was rather small, two rooms with a blind kitchen. We lived there until the war.

There was an iron warehouse in the back of our house, owned by a man named Wolman, a distributor for the entire Lublin province. I remember a story how an anti-Semitic priest said he wouldn't buy rails for his house from a Jew, he'd go to the factory and buy straight from there. And later Wolman bowed deeply before him and thanked him for sparing the trouble, because he got his money anyway and didn't have to deliver the goods… and the other guy almost exploded. [The factory was owned by Wolman too].

The iron warehouse was closed after 7 pm and on Saturdays. And all the kids from our street, there were seven or eight houses alongside it, came to us to play. You could really play great hide-and-seek among all that scrap. I was a major hoodlum. I was small and thin, in fact I'm even more petite today. Still, even boys were afraid of me.

Near where we lived was the Bernardynski Square. Lublin is within the reach of the continental, Russian climate rather than the oceanic one. In early December there was already snow. And on Bernardynski there stood green trees, the Christmas ones. It was beautiful! The cawing crows, the green trees, and the white snow. Ours was a Jewish home; there was no Christmas tree or anything of the sort. But in the afternoon, after getting back from work, Grandmother took me and my sister by the hand and led us to the city.

The shop window displays were all set for Christmas and were full of movement. Sleds riding out from behind little houses, snowmen dancing, everything was moving in that window. And Grandmother led us down Krakowskie Przedmiescie so that we could watch the displays. As we weren't rich, I stood in front of the store and wondered how the pineapple could taste if one ring cost one zloty. The sweet canned ones were sold by ring. And for one zloty you could buy one kilogram of sugar. Or twenty buns. And so on and on - it was expensive. Oranges, lemons, in turn, you could buy from street vendors, for 10 groszy [100 groszy = 1 zloty], so I could afford to eat an orange. There was also St. John's bread. A pod-shaped, oblong loaf, you gnawed at the sides, a sweetish taste. It's no longer, I don't regret, it wasn't anything to die for. You bought it by piece and ate it. There were no deli stores before the war. There was either the usual grocery, or the so called colonial store which sold all those imported foodstuffs.