

Maria And Beniamin Szwarc With Their Daughter Renata



This is a studio portrait of my parents, Maria and Beniamin Szwarc, with my older sister Renata.

This picture was taken in Lodz, in 1924 . It survived the war due to a fortunate incident: before the war, my mother had mailed it to her sister, Ruth, who lived in the USA.

My mother was my father's second wife. The first wife had died. I don't know anything about her.

My father had three children from that first marriage: Sala, Fela and Hersz. These children were all placed in an orphanage in Lodz - apparently, my father just couldn't manage on his own with three children.

It wasn't until after my parents got married that these kids returned home. And I was raised together with them.

I also have a biological sister - Renata. She is two years older than me, born in 1923. Before the war we both went to the same elementary school.

She completed this school and went on to a Polish public vocational school on Narutowicza Street. She was studying book-binding. In 1939 she finished this three-year vocational school.

We attended a school which seemed quite ordinary to me at the time, but now it seems strange. In Lodz, at 11 Sienkiewicza Street. I remember it very well, it was school number 131.

A school for Jewish children, but it did not have only Jewish teachers. You could say that the Jewishness of this school was limited to two things:

no classes on Saturdays, and Jewish religion lessons, but nobody studied for those, because we all knew that you had a guaranteed 5 [highest grade] for behavior and for religion.

I don't remember anything from religion lessons I attended in this period.

We were being educated in the spirit of patriotism, and this really spoke to me. You had to stand up at attention in front of the eagle [White Eagle – Poland's national symbol], and of course I remember till this day all the legion songs and the Polish national anthem.

We were taught all the patriotic, military and folk songs.