

Zuzanna Mensz In Nursing School



It is a photo of mine, taking on the balcony in Czyste hospital in Warsaw. It was time I was studying in nursing school, maybe 1938.

After my exams I went to Warsaw, to my sister Zlatka. Mom stayed in Volodymir with Hilka. We lived in a rented room on Ogrodowa Street. My sister make her living with private tutoring, I also got a few people to coach and that's how I earned some money. But Zlatka wanted me badly to have a profession. I said I wanted to become a nurse and she found me a nursing school. It was located on Dworska Street, at the Czyste quarter hospital. Ms. Szindler, Ms. Lubowska, and Ms. Bielicka taught at the school. (Luba Bielicka is a well-known person, she even has a memorial plate in Warsaw, because she ran the school during the German occupation.) They were very strict teachers. Only Ms. Bielicka was a bit more approachable, maybe because she was also a bit happier. Ms. Szindler completed Florence Nightingale's nursing school in England and she based her school on the principles applied there. The education at the school lasted two and a half years. We only had the theory during the first six months and afterwards we practiced in various wards at the Czyste hospital. At first our duty was simply to clean the tables and provide such help, and only in the following years we were allowed to carry out medical procedures. It was a Jewish hospital, meaning it was financed by the Jewish community of Warsaw. The patients varied, however most of them were Jews. Same with the doctors. Naturally, there were often patients who didn't speak Polish, but I understood everything and was able to communicate with them. It was a big hospital, lots of buildings, all kinds of wards. Nowadays there's a children's hospital there.

When I was in the nursing school I lived in a dormitory on Dworska Street. There were like four of us in each room. They stressed keeping things in order very much. You had to air your room in the morning, keep your closet perfectly organized. There were many different girls, coming from various families, and I was not the only one who had to learn how to maintain such perfect order as was required. We had a day off once a month.

When the war broke out I was in Warsaw, at the Czyste hospital. Most of the personnel moved eastwards after the order from the government. Maybe five students stayed, the rest went back to their homes. The school was closed. Only the housekeeper stayed and she cooked us meals. We worked at the hospital. The patients able to go home left. When the battles outside the city started the hospital quickly filled up with the wounded, they simply lay all over the floor. Since there was no personnel and no supplies only few of the wards were open, surgery the longest.

In Wola, the quarter of Warsaw where the Czyste hospital was located, the water works were destroyed early on by an air strike. We had to go fetch the water in buckets. It was really tough. The air strikes never ceased. The sky was clear throughout that September and all the targets were clearly visible, and the Germans loved to bomb hospitals. Many buildings were destroyed. If the bombing got real bad, we moved all the patients to the basement. Once, when everyone was already downstairs, I realized there was a feverish wounded man left upstairs. We went to get him with a young doctor, who was lame and therefore hadn't escaped to the east. We put the wounded on stretchers and brought him to the basement. A moment later a bomb hit the room he'd lain in. At some point they bombed our kitchen and stores and it hurts me to say this, but there were many people who lived nearby who simply stole our flour, sugar, everything, all the hospital's supplies. We were then included in the army hospitals' supply. After Warsaw's surrender on 28th September we had to wait three days for a soup delivery. The wounded were given soup served by the German soldiers. The Germans were acting in a very arrogant way, they jeered at us. That's when I learned to hate them so much I wanted to be as far from them as possible.