

Viera Slesingerova With Students Of The Jewish Elementary School

This is a class portrait of the fourth grade of the Jewish elementary school in Zilina. The photo was taken in 1934. I am the fourth from the right in the middle row. My friend Duca Robinsonova is standing beside me.

Because of my dad's job we moved house many times when I was a child. We moved from Kosice when I was still a baby. We went through Martin and Trnava, but I was too young to remember much about it. My first memories are of Bratislava, where I started to go to elementary school. The school was known as a training school, as teacher trainees did their teaching practice there. I can remember one teacher, Mr. Musil, who introduced what was then known as the global method, and even wrote some books about it. According to this method we learned to read words straight away, instead of reading by syllables. My dad was very unhappy about that, because he was convinced that you could never learn to read like that. There were also problems with writing, because the way they did it was to start with slanting lines. I can remember learning about Czech spelling with my dad whose voice always used to falter towards the end. The teacher I liked in the second grade was Mrs. Chrenkova. In the third grade I went to a Jewish elementary school in Zilina. I can remember the teachers there: Goldberger, Salg and Brunner. It was a very good school which was also attended by non-Jewish children.

In Zilina I made friends with Duca Robinsonova and she has remained a friend to this day. Her parents had a house with a garden where we spent a lot of time. Duca went through Auschwitz and was liberated in Bergen-Belsen. She remembered waking up in a white bed in hospital and she thought she must be in heaven. She told me that when she returned home, the first person she met was the collaborator who had been watching them when they were caught. So she reported him to the police who took him in but released him a week later. Tibor told me that Duca's nerves were in a bad state. So I invited her to Prague and we lived together in my small apartment until 1950, when I got married. Duca then moved back to Bratislava, but we still meet up to this day. She became a photographer. In the 1960s she was sent by an international agency to Israel to take photographs for a book. The preface was to have been written by Arnost Lustig but, when he emigrated, he hid the text of the preface along with the photos in a wall at his cottage. It was as if the photos had disappeared into thin air. They didn't turn up until after 1989. In the 1990s, the Jewish Museum in Bratislava hosted an exhibition of Duca's photos and the book was finally published under the title 'Walled-in Paintings'.