

Pola Elbinger In A Children's Home In Cracow



This is my sister Priwa. Our father changed her name to Pola soon after the war. She might be around 16 on this picture. It was taken in the children's home in Cracow where we both lived after the war.

They set up two branches of that home on Długa Street: one in Zakopane and one in Rabka. The one in Zakopane was called a preventorium, children generally ailing, like me, like my sister. She didn't have frostbite like me, but she was just generally weak. The one in Rabka was a sanatorium, for ones that were at risk of tuberculosis, those with sicknesses of the lungs. Me and my sister were sent to Zakopane. I spent almost all of 1945 in that children's home in Zakopane. It was wonderful there. I could study, I developed to way above my age, and after that year I graduated from 5th grade. We went on these special courses, because I had no idea about, say, geography or biology. I could read and count and that was it.

We had it good in Zakopane, because the Americans sent aid: UNRRA, Joint and some other organizations - I don't know which. So we had clothes. We wore clogs, shoes with wooden soles, but yes, there was food. We ate all sorts of tinned food, and we were even lucky enough to have chocolate - but we, as children do, wanted ice-cream, so we used to sell the chocolate in the shop so we could buy ice-creams.

At the children's home in Zakopane I used to illustrate the classroom newspaper. I drew well, but only copying, really. I could look at someone and draw them, I could look at a landscape and draw it. The odd basic thing from memory too, but there was one guy with me in Zakopane who was phenomenal. Literally. There were movement classes for the girls, and there was a piano, and that boy would go up to the piano afterwards and tap out any tune he'd just heard with one finger. Anything. And he knew nothing about music. And that's not all. The girls used to come up to him: 'Write in my autograph book,' or: 'Draw me a shepherd with some shepherd boys and some sheep,' they would ask him. And he could draw anything they wanted. I couldn't do that. I don't know where he is now, because he left the children's home in Zakopane. I can't even remember his name.