

I will tell you about my life

My name is Wiktoria Rękiewicz, née Krensel, and I am living in Zgorzelec. My father, Teodor, was born on November 9, 1901, in Katowice. When his father died, the seventeen-year-old boy had to provide for family – his mother and two-year-old sister. He grabbed all kinds of jobs, engaged in trade. In 1920, Katowice became part of the Republic of Poland. However, those times in Silesia were terrible, and in 1927, with his inseparable friend Lesinski, my father set off for bread. He was in England, France, but eventually settled down in Belgium. He worked under very hard conditions as a miner in a coal mine, and later he ended up in a steel mill.

Everywhere, work was hard, but it was possible to make a living. My father brought his fiancée from Silesia - my mother to Belgium. They corresponded with each other for 10 years. They got married on December 4, 1937. Then my sister and my brother were born, then me. The Second World War broke out, and my father decided to go to Germany. He got a good job as a railwayman and a flat in a newly built block of flats, for a few years things were good; the war did not affect us. After the war, in 1947, my father decided – with the agreement with Lesinski, whom I called uncle because he was like a member of the family- to go to Poland. Both friendly families returned together. We crossed the border in Szczecin. At first, we had to stay in a special camp for Poles returning from the West after the war. This lasted for a couple of months. Then, we went to Bytom, where my mother's sister, aunt Gertruda, lived.

Again, my father could not sit still and looked around for a better job to support the family. He found out that they were looking for workers in Turosszów, which was on Polish territory after the war. After a couple of months, we went to see my father, who had been given a house after the displaced Germans. It was completely furnished; I could not marvel that it was all ours- I was 5 years old. My sister and brother started going to a Polish school, and I went to a kindergarten, where my mother found employment. Later, as the children grew up, mother worked at the Turów mine as a saleswoman in various shops, kiosks, the kitchen and in the canteen. There is a story connected with mum's stay in the famous Truskawiec. In 1932, she was sent there to a sanatorium because someone in the family had contracted tuberculosis, probably my mum's sister. It was on the territory of then Poland, near Lviv. I mention this because, in 2016, through the Municipal Senior Club, I was in Truskawiec too. I found this sanatorium house where my mother was treated. And to my amazement, I recognised my mother in the old photographs hanging there.

My father was such a traveller and a very active man. He also taught us to be active - cycling, running, swimming, hiking, and touring. I am not so good at swimming, but to this day I love hiking in the mountains, in general, as much as my health allows. My father knew languages really well - German, French, and English. He tried to teach us, but we, as children, did not want to. The mine was under German administration, when my father was hired in July 1947. He was the fifth Pole hired in the mine. First, he was a medical orderly, then he worked in (the department of) surveyors and in the pump station. After working in Belgium, he developed pneumoconiosis and was plagued by dyspnea. He knew a bit of natural medicine; he cured his mother of chronic sinus disease. He took care of us. Every year we went on holiday camp from the mine: Opolno Zdrój, Szklarska Poręba, Świnoujście.

Later, my sister got married. After some time, my husband and I also moved to Zgorzelec, where my only daughter was born, by the way - she also lives in Zgorzelec. My first marriage fell apart. I came back to Zatoń, worked at KWB Turów, and finished the secondary school of

economics in the evening. I worked in mine for 41 years. I remember my life with a smile because, despite everything, it was happy and good. I remember that my father grew roses and was even awarded for that by the mine.

In general, we had a plot of land, we grew potatoes and beetroots, there were rabbits, chickens, geese, goats, pig. My father praised me saying that - just like him- I knew how to do everything. I was his golden girl. He talked about his acquaintance with the famous bard Jan Kiepura (1902-1966 - editor's note), who came from nearby Sosnowiec. They were almost equals, my father being a year older.

In 1969, I moved back to Zgorzelec to Broniewskiego Street. After the 1989 breakthrough, they wanted to rename the street to Orląt Lwowskich by force. The inhabitants protested and defended the name Władysław Broniewski (at all, not only a poet from the period of the so-called People's Republic of Poland, but also II Polish Republic, soldier of Piłsudski's Legions, a Virtuti Militari cavalier, patriot who allegedly refused Bierut to write new text for the Polish anthem - editor's note).

Of my siblings, I am left alone. My sister Rita passed away in 2018, my sister Regina 2 months later, my brother-in-law Zbyszek in 2020, and my beloved brother in March this year. My life in Zgorzelec is not too bad, I have gotten used to it. Before that, we often went there for some performance, like motocross. And I remember that in the 1950s and 1960s, the Greek community was conspicuous, the women characteristically dressed in black. They went to Greece, today you do not see them. Moreover, there is a community centre and amphitheatre. Unfortunately, our mine, „Kubuś,” is falling into disrepair. It was a famous venue for various mine events, dances, discos, there was a TV room, a cinema room, a restaurant, a game room. There were also organised weddings, etc. The Municipal Senior Club has also been important to me for a long time, to which I used to go to meet friends, talk, have a laugh. After my knee operation, I am not as fit now, but I still take my walking sticks and march. I encourage everyone to do it.

Tekst źródłowy: Miejski Biuletyn Informacyjny „ZGORZELEC.EU” październik 2022, wspomnienia

Tłumacz: Honorata Olszewska – praktykantka