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Telling Jewish women's stories

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Image

Year
1934
Location
POINT (19.94498 50.06465)
City
Krakow
Country & city

Krakow
Poland

Estimated
Ne

Teofila Silberring

Personal details

Place of birth

Cracow
Poland

Year of birth
1925

Teofila Silberring

Teofila Silberring

1930

Family

"We were all from Kraków, all of us: my grandparents and theirs before them. We had family houses, passed down from father to son. I know that my father's parents lived at 8 Długosza Street in Podgórze, and my mother's parents at 32 Kalwaryjska Street, also in Podgórze. All my family was assimilated; everyone spoke Polish. I don't think anyone in the family spoke Yiddish, anyway, certainly not to the children and not in front of them. We were spoken to in beautiful Polish. I don't even know whether my father knew Yiddish. Nobody in the family wore traditional Jewish dress. We dressed like everyone else on the street, and all the children went to Polish schools. But we kept up the traditions and celebrated the holidays.

We lived in Kazimierz, at 21 Miodowa Street, with my grandmother, my father's mother. It was her house: a huge, three-story house on the corner of the street. Later, when my grandmother died, she left the house to my father. She was called the same as me – Tauba Nussbaum. I am Teofila after my grandmother, Tauba in Yiddish."

Henryk Nussbaum

Henryk Nussbaum

1932

Childhood and school life

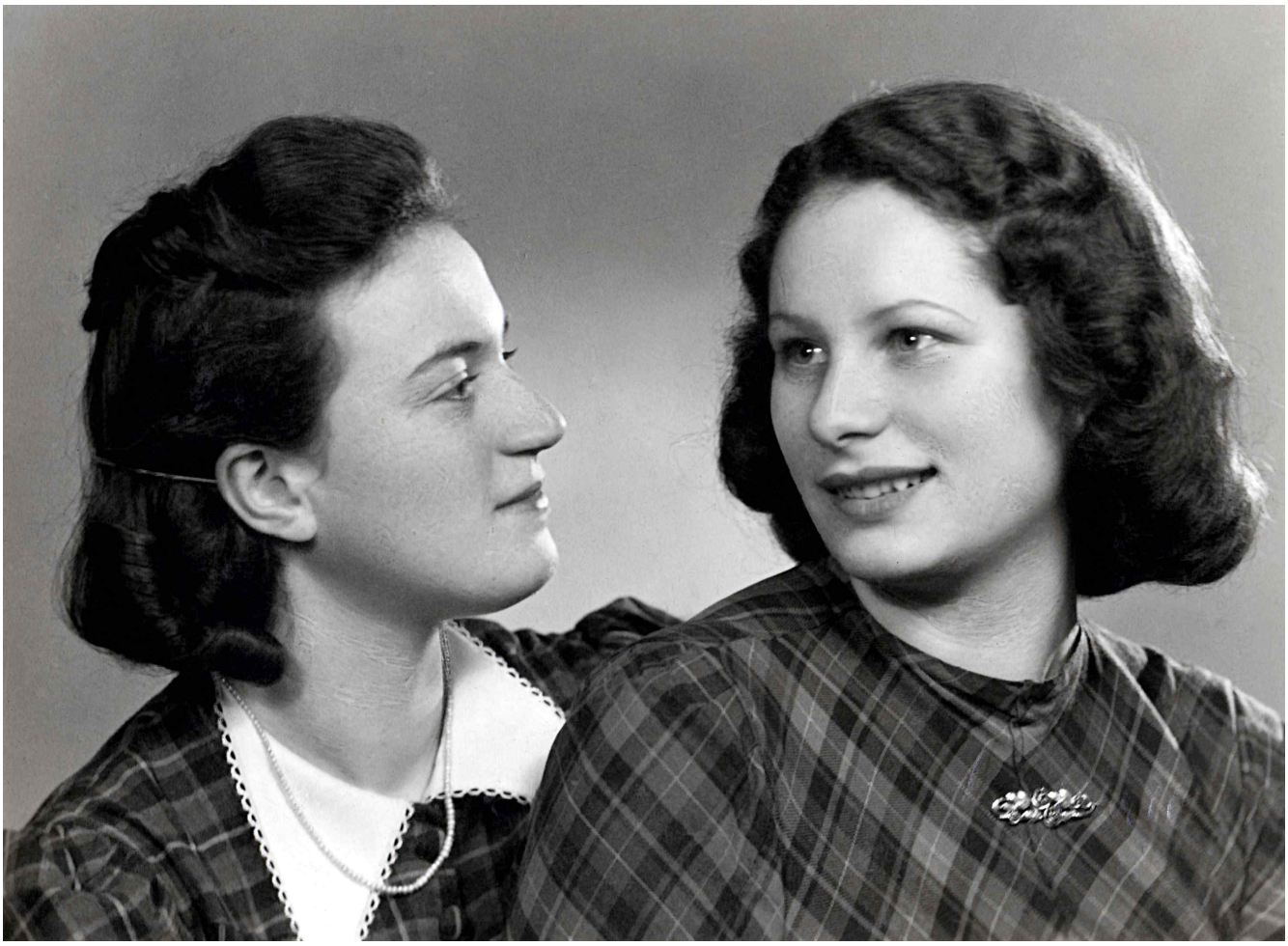
"I went to a state elementary school; that school is still there - on Starowiślna Street, on the corner of Miodowa Street, this big, red building. Not to the end; somewhere around the 5th grade my father transferred me.

[...]

After that I became a pupil at the Dr. Hilfstein Hebrew Gymnasium; Dr. Hilfstein was its founder. That was a beautiful school, on Podbrzezie Street, apparently a very high standard, with state entitlements. All the subjects were in Polish, and there was also Hebrew. There were only Jewish children, but well-off ones, because the fees were about 50 złoty; that was an awful lot. There were very good relations, very good conditions at the school. The school had a huge courtyard and a wonderful gymnastics hall.

I was a good student; I wrote poetry too. Once I won some Ćmielów porcelain, a little plate and a cup. I don't remember the poem any more, but I know that there was great rejoicing at home. I wrote something about Ćmielów and I won. I liked writing in general.

[...]



Teofila Silberring with her school friend Lusia Helzel

Teofila Silberring with her school friend Lusia Helzel

1939

My father was crazy about learning languages. I learned them with great ease, whereas my brother was a math specialist; he had a brain for the sciences. [...] We had a house full of books. The library was vast, but those books didn't really interest me at the time. I didn't look at them much. There were encyclopedias in various languages. The only thing that absorbed me was an atlas, where there were all the capitals of countries; I often used to look at that.

[...]

My first love was a boy in my class. It wasn't only me, but the whole class was in love with him. A gorgeous boy; he was Viennese, and came to us fairly late on, because he'd moved to Kraków."

Juda Nussbaum

Juda Nussbaum

1938

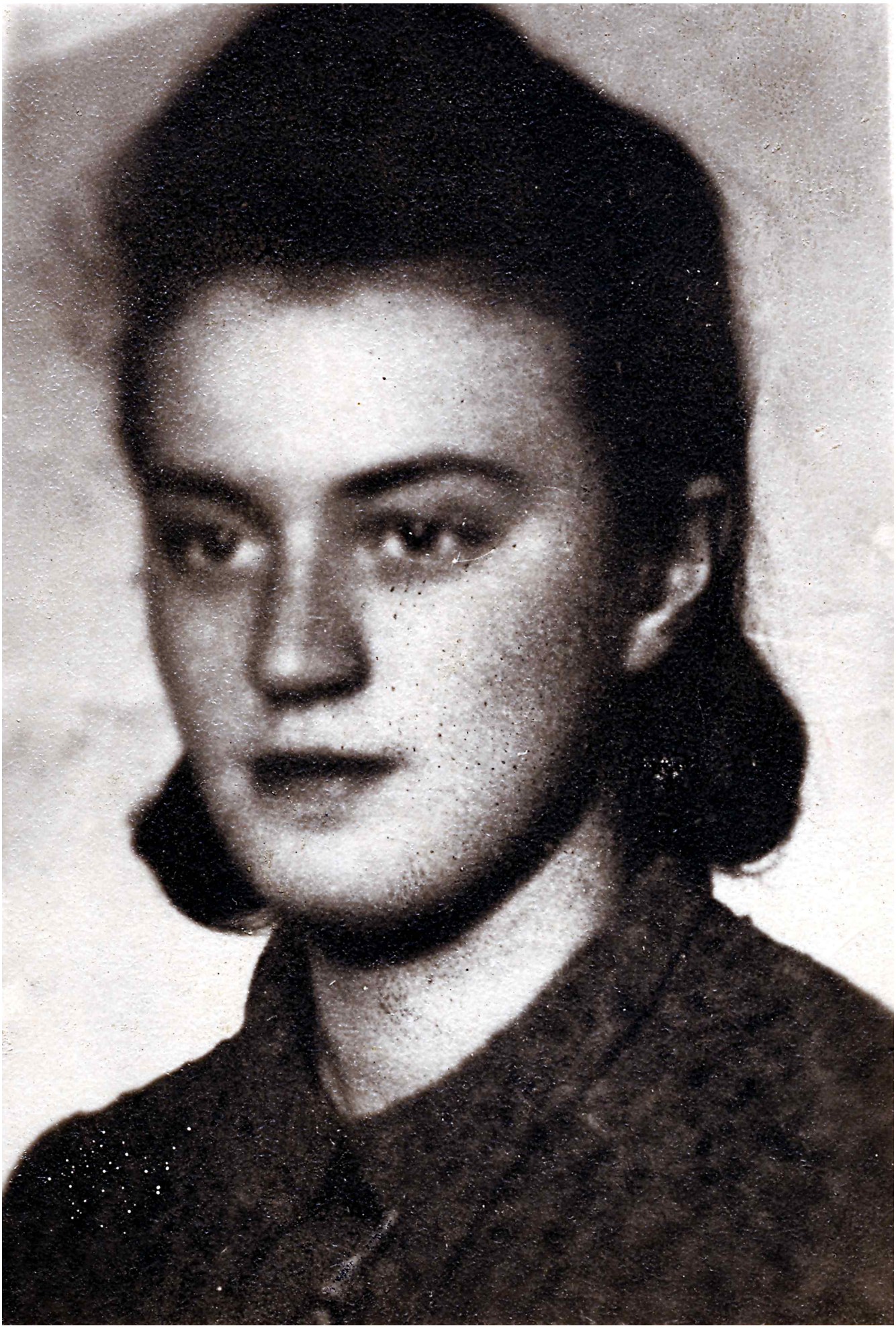
Wartime

"My brother Henryk passed his secondary school exam in 1939, at the Hebrew Gymnasium in Podbrzezie Street. He was supposed to go to England to study shipbuilding, I remember that. He was very gifted and our father managed to get him a place there. But because there was talk of war, my parents didn't let him go, because we had to stay together. And in September the war broke out. Mom was shot in 1939, at home, by Germans who were taking away the furniture. She tried to stop them and they shot her. I don't know where she's buried.

[...]

When my Mom died, aunt Hela took us in. She'd been closest to my Mom, you see, they'd loved each other the most, and her husband had died in 1937."

"...we went into the ghetto, and there they allocated one room to three to four families, divided by wardrobes. I slept behind one wardrobe, along with my father and my brother, another family slept behind another wardrobe, and well, that's how we lived. In the ghetto my father worked in the hospital. I don't know what he did there - he had had nothing to do with medicine, of course, but they took him, [...] I stayed at home; my brother worked too... I don't even remember where.



Teofila Silberring

1942

Later on Father managed to have some papers done that made me two years older. He bought these high-heeled clogs to make me taller, and I worked. It was a carbide factory, a Jewish factory, in fact, that had been taken over by the Germans, opposite the ghetto, on 2 Lwowska Street..."

"In Plaszow I was in a barrack, and my father and my brother were in a different one, and I lost touch with them and didn't know where they were. [...] I didn't know anything: when they had taken them... Nothing, nothing at all. I wasn't in Plaszow for long, because I was taken to Schindler's, to the Emailwarenfabrik in Zabłocie. I stayed there until the end, until they liquidated Plaszow, and I went to Auschwitz...

[...]

In Ravensbruck we all prayed that they would send us back to Auschwitz, because that was just indescribable. I think it was the worst camp there was."

Teofila Silberring

Teofila Silberring

1945

End of the War

"We didn't even know that the war had ended. We just stood there, there was no camp any more, nothing, but we were afraid to go out. The Germans had ordered us to stand, so we stood. The Allies came through, the Russians came through, and still we didn't believe.

[...]

I got back in July. I flew to Kraków like a madwoman. We had arranged to meet at our house, at the janitor's, whoever came back first. My father, my brother and I, that whoever came back, it was to there, and all news to the janitor. So I flew; I thought my father would be waiting for me, the apartment waiting, and I could go back to school, I wouldn't have to worry about anything anymore. When I arrived, the confrontation with reality, that was the worst shock, worse than in the camp. What I felt when I found out that there was nobody there, that no-one from the family had survived, only me! I had nowhere to go; I stood on the street and cried. And I wanted to go back to the camp."

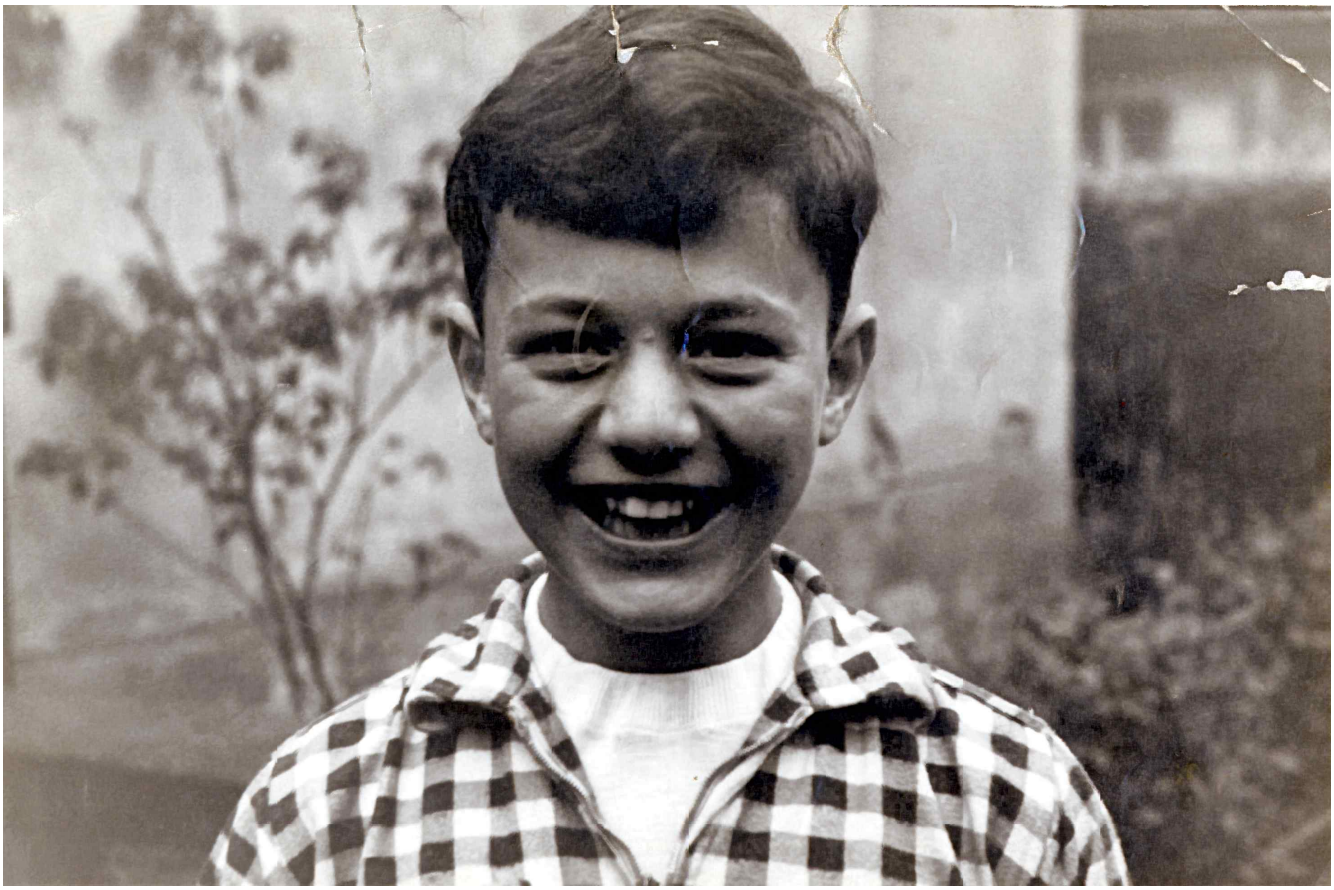
Teofila and Adam Silberring during their honeymoon

Teofila and Adam Silberring during their honeymoon

1947

"Hardly had I got back than I wanted to enroll in school, so much had Father instilled in me that 'you must learn.' I enrolled in school on Oleandry Street, but because I was too old to start from the beginning, I did two years in one year. [...] When I finished school I started studying chemistry at the Jagiellonian University 12. We used to go out having fun, as young people do...

My husband, Adam Silberring, is a chemical engineer. He was born in Bochnia in 1921... We met because of a book. Because I, I don't know where from, but I had textbooks that were hard to come by. And a friend knew that I had them, and sent Adam to me for them... [...] And so my future husband came for a book, and that's how it started. That must have been in 1946. We got married in 1947, and we spent our honeymoon in the Polish resort town of Zakopane."



Jerzy Silberring

Jerzy Silberring

1961

Postwar life

"My son, Jerzy, was born on 30th May 1949 in Kraków. Well, I really had nothing, but he had everything. My father had instilled in me that I would never be someone without an education.

[...]

One fine day, when he was in second grade, he came running home and says: 'Mom! Is it true that you're a 'Żydka'?! I say: 'Not a Żydka, but a Żydówka' 'Because my friends told me.' Some friend's mother, who knew us - anyway, I never hid it. Except that after the war there were none of the traditions, unfortunately. So he knows he's Jewish, but nothing else. He didn't change his name, either, and as he's always saying, being Jewish has never harmed him."

Teofila Silberring

Teofila Silberring

2003

"For years I refused interviews. Whoever called me, I refused. But then they started persuading me that it's for history, so that the memory doesn't die. Because when we're no longer here there won't be anyone to tell it, because there won't be anyone from our generation left. Only the second and third, who have heard about it. That's not the same. But I catch myself at what I'm saying is no longer a faithful account of what happened. So I wonder if it's true. What I'm saying, if it's really true. If it is true, it seems impossible to have survived it."