
CHRONICLE _____

ANNA ZOFIA KRYGOWSKA

speaks on herself*

I am a pessimist in general. When comparing the human life with two scales of a balance: the black one – full of all our suffering and pain, all disappointments, all our dreams which did not come out, and another one – white scale – filled with the moments of luck, minutes of satisfaction and contentedness - it seems to me that this black scale is much heavier and overbalances the white one in spite of all. Nevertheless all this could be surmounted if one has a passion for something, for doing something with heart and soul. Then one may survive even those black moments of life.

I was educated in the schools in Zakopane up to the examination for the grammar-school certificate. The school was the center of life, it was not the same as today. Of course it is understandable: there was no radio and TV-broadcasting, the life proceeded about school. The school has taught us to read at all, to read understandingly, to feel the whole beauty in literature. The classical education is very useful for me as a mathematician and teacher of mathematics; it gave me an insight into the human mind.

My second passion was mountain hiking. Nowadays we have so many papers dealing with sport claiming with statements that there is lack of this and that equipment. Young people now are in want of good ski and boots etc. And I had no equipment, terrible boots only, awful mended trousers and I had simultaneously happy experience in the mountains; it was so exciting! I keep these moments in my mind for ever.

The one who had never spent a night in mountains, under the open sky, can never understand what it means: silence is full of voices. I mean the silence in mountains which does not exist because of dribbling drops, southing trees,

*from a radio interview broadcast in 1985

rustling leaves, spattering rains, murmuring brooks and brooklets, blustering winds and falling stones... It is past relating, these feelings cannot be expressed. And there is the extraordinary passion which obliges to go only there, to experience that, to have a change of air, to change the surrounding, to spend several hours in the open. But there is no expression to express that.

When I had to make my choice of high school, I could choose the humanities; furthermore – the Ministerium had promised a scholarship to me if I have chosen literature. But my taste for mathematics was stronger. I went to the Jagiellonian University to be a student of mathematics. Here grew my passion called *science* stimulated with magnificent University and eminent Professors. In spite of difficulties, we – one hundred freshmen – were dazzled with science. Twenty students only have passed positively the first year of study because of very rigid requirements. Only the one, who had such a passion, such fondness, could meet these requirements. With no students' homes, with absolutely no financial aid, I earned for living by coaching to pay my way through the University and to come to mother's assistance.

Then war broke out. The organization of clandestine study groups began. Excellent young people thirsting for learning though they had not been under obligation to learn. I long miss such a meeting with young people such as these!

I was not only a teacher, I was a courier of secret school authorities, too.

During one of these secret trips, just on the eve, the Germans closed us for a whole night in the building of the railway station in Tarnów, terribly crowded in a small room. It was during the war against Russia, the German soldiers were coming back home for Christmas from the eastern front; it swarmed with louses. And probably one of these louses has stung me – I fell ill with spotted fever.

Then I was offered a post in an enterprise consisting of many sawmills spread in the Gorce mountains, in Ochotnica, Tylmanowa, Krościenko (small towns and villages about 80 km to the South of Cracow).

I was an accountant and furthermore I carried on teaching. This time I took it over from a man in danger. He had organized the clandestine study groups in the region of Podhale but then he had to escape (the Nazis arrested his wife and he was in danger, too).

Therefore the secret school authorities charged me with a double task: to continue teaching and to keep books for the enterprise.

So once more mountains played an important role in my life. I was obliged to ride along the length and breadth of the whole region to supervise the clandestine groups in Rabka, Zakopane, Maków, Jordanów and Ochotnica near Mount Turbacz.

My official post made the task much easier, because formally I supervised the sawmills. I can say, I was really an expert in the field of wood!

To be sure I do not remember it now, but at that time I was well up in a subject of all these boards, one-inch planks, logs, etc. So I visited sawmills and at the same time I attended the lessons of clandestine study groups, I organized the examinations for the secondary-school certificate. All that should have been supervised.

In general I was afraid. I cannot say I was brave in contradistinction to many brave men at that time. I was very afraid. It was like a nightmare. It appeared to me in many dreams. Yes, I was very afraid. But I thought just as Kali – the Negro hero of the well-known novel by Henryk Sienkiewicz: *Kali be afraid but Kali go!* There was no alternative.

Moreover, such an extraordinary contact with young people, with teachers, this unforgettable rise of human dignity at the time when it was so brutally downtrodden. Thanks to these brave people I won back my feeling of human pride and dignity at the time when human nature was trampled to death.

I remember, once I rode from Cracow to Nowy Targ – I lived there up to the end of Nazi occupation. I carried at that time a very large trunk full of school-books. There were many mountaineers travelling with me. They transported bread from the region of Miechow (about 40 km to the North of Cracow) – there was no bread in Podhale. The train was blocked out, there was no light, darkness only. And a crowd, terrible crowd of people standing side by side.

And I remember the aroma of bread to the present day! How fresh, was the bread! The mountaineers took those loafs from Miechów or Kielce to Podhale.

This aroma of bread... and at the same time these school-books...

What an association: bread and books...

My passions grew up. In spite of very hard conditions (not only material ones) I found always a fire-place to get warm, to relax and to start doing something to somebody's advantage.

I succeeded because I always met people who helped me to develop my passions, to buoy me up.

In 1956 I was delegated to Geneva to take part in the Conference of UNESCO and International Bureau of Education and in those days I have contracted a friendship with many people from the West. So since that time I had a lot of contacts in the East and in the West. I was successful because I met a group of people having passion similar to mine.

I come back to the starting point: life is very difficult and it is undeniable: in fact we have a lot of obstacles, a lot of difficulties, a lot of misfortunes (among them personal ones, professional ones and many others) as well as much physical and psychical suffering, many complications.

And in fact it would have been very difficult to get over them if one would not have a passion, if one would not do something with heart and soul. One has to believe that one's work is useful for others.

Of course when I look back, I estimate critically various effects of my activity. I think, that some problems (both in my private life and in the professional work) should have been solved in other way. But I am sure that all my passions, always exciting, were very helpful to me.

If I were young and would have to go through my life once more, I should live, think and feel just the same. I should change nothing in my relation to the belles-lettres, to the music. When I listen to the Mozart's music, it seems to me that I am all but in a stream of plain, cold water. And these mountains, and my friends in Poland and abroad – I attach great importance to all that...