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## Stories of a Dollhouse

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Exploring our family  
Memory and Traditions

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# Spanish Flu 1919



On 11 November 1918, the Poles celebrated the restoration of independence (*Niepodległość*) with joy. In Warsaw, Leon (aged 9), and Ciesław (aged 6) were not the last to rejoice after a long time of sorrow. The war years had been terrible for the people of Warsaw. Leon had lost his brother Władysław two years before and his beloved sister Małgorzata had left the house when she married in 1917.

The *Niepodległość* enthusiasm was visible and shared by all. But far from this enthusiasm, alarming news were coming from France. A so-called Spanish flu pandemic (*hiszpanka*) had broken out in the final months of the conflict. In Poland, many families were still remembering the cholera epidemics that had swept through the country and affected past generations in 1831, 1847-49, 1852, and 1873. In 1891-92, the heavy toll of a deadly flu had launched an early warning alert about the exposure vulnerability of the population and the blatant deficiency of the public health service.

The first wave of *hiszpanka* reached Poland during the summer 1918. The flu spread rapidly, disseminated by troops returning from the Western front and the massive transport of population related to borders change.



Our Dollhouse with a 1919 atmosphere in Warsaw!

This project was achieved during the first COVID 19 lockdown in Paris

(March-May 2020)

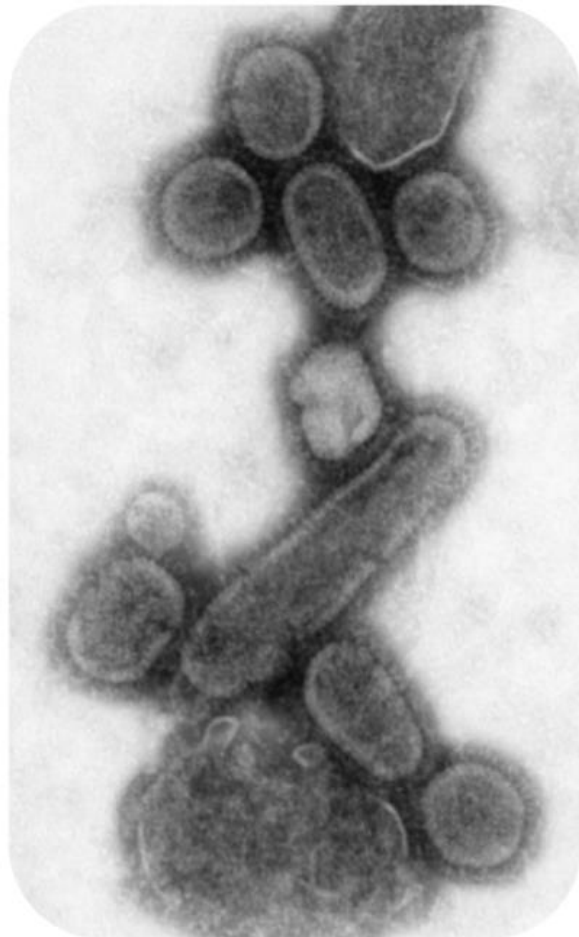
## No respite

By October 1918, Hiszpanka was in Warsaw. Observations of the time note a peak from October 1918 to February 1919. Two successive waves followed during the fall and winter seasons of 1919 and 1920.

At this time, the town had not recovered from WWI destruction. The new government was engulfed into border disputes and a conflict with Bolshevik Russia. Hospitals were overflowed by sick persons of all ages. Most people died at home from complications such as pleurisy or pneumonia.

The Grandmother of Leon died during the second wave in 1919. Aged 77, Julianna (de domo Słomczyńska) was born in 1842. She was living with her husband Paulin Krzyzna (1844-1921) in Dąbrowa. This hamlet was located in the Kampinos Forest, some 40km north of Warsaw. We don't know how did Julianna get infected. Maybe attending the Holy Mass in the Górki Church, visiting her son in Czosiów or going to the market in Kazuń.

Hiszpanka was equally lethal in urban and rural environments. Reports highlight that even isolated hamlet could be deeply affected. There was nowhere to hide, just like the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.



In 1919, there was no vaccine against the flue. The first jab would be developed in the early 1930s, validated in 1937 and made available only after the mid-1950s.

Epidemia influency, zwanej „hiszpańską”, przybiera obecnie rozmiary przestraszające, zwłaszcza ze względu na groźne powikłania. Ponieważ zarazki tej choroby przedostają się do ustroju przez usta i drogi oddechowe górne, przeto **jedynym środkiem zapobiegawczym jest**

## MENTOFORM Mag. Klawe,

odkażający drogi wejścia dla zarazków.

Pastyłki Mentoform Mag. Klawe są przyjemne w smaku i zawsze w działaniu pewne.

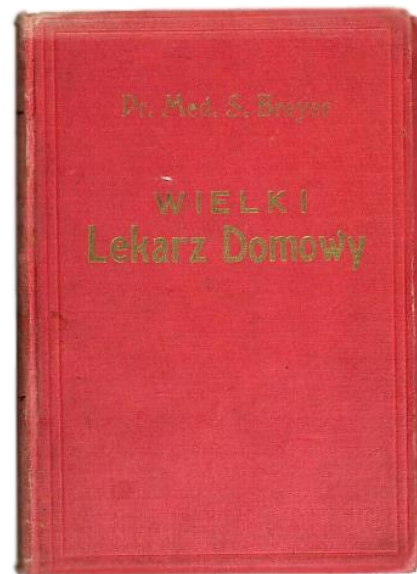
Żądaj wszędzie.

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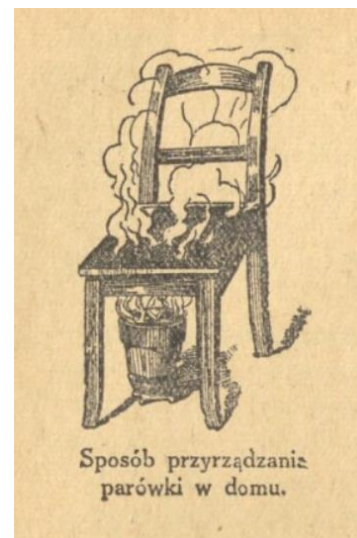
### Home therapies

The death of Babcia Julianna highlighted that grandmother recipes might be useful to reduce and relieve some syndromes but fail to eliminate deadly miasma. At this time, herbal shops were widely considered first choice pharmacies. Many ad hoc “medical guides” were circulating and there was a proliferation of home therapies against the flu. Some aimed at “getting rid of evil” with enemas and laxatives. Others focused on relieving respiratory pain with suction cups, snail slime syrup and camphor poultices. Eucalyptus fumigations and other herbal inhalations were used as air sanitizer. Phosphatine was a restorative food bedridden and sick people.

In 1919, *kompot* was one of the most popular home therapy. This word can be translated by grog or toddy. Every Polish family had a recipe against seasonal flu. Usually, they mixed boiled fruits (apples, pears, plums) with honey and some “warming spices” such as cloves, cinnamon, ginger root, cardamom or anise stars. Expansive “colonial” fruits, orange and citrus, were exceptionally added.



Médecine familiale – Stanisław Breyer - édition 1913



Sposób przyrządzania parówki w domu.

## Street Anxiety

Jozefa had just lost his mother. She had three children at home: Małgorzata (20), Leon (8) and Ciesław (6). Two years ago, the family had lost Władisław aged 5 (we suspect a typhoid fever).

In 1919, the family was living in Świętokrzyska Street, between ul. Mazowiecka and ul. Czaskiego. This downtown area was a very busy place with many banks, business offices and the proximity to the Great Post Office on Napoleon Square. Świętokrzyska Street was crossed by two bus lines (A and G) and 7 tramway lines. There was a permanent flow of people walking in this street that connected ul. Nowy Świat and ul. Marszałkowska, two shopping avenues.

The incessant street traffic added to the anxiety of Jozefa. Her apprehension was justified. In addition to *hiszpanka*, there was a double pandemic of typhus and dysentery in Warsaw. The neighbourhood of the family was not affected by people were circulating and the risks was serious.



## Self-lockdown

Between 1918 and 1920, the authorities did not rule an *hiszpanka* lockdown in Warsaw but the flu put the city under an invisible siege. Local authorities recommended limited human interactions, the isolation of sick persons and rigorous hands hygiene.

This last recommendation was strictly enforced in the Książyk house. Jozefa had a 0 tolerance for escaping the rule and the boys were under permanent scrutiny.



During several months, the only authorized outing was the Holy Mass on Sunday evening (less people attending). The family suspended most of the “outside routine”. Jozefa stopped her grocery trips to Hala Mirowska. Walenty did not attend his political club anymore. For him, this was a grim sacrifice considering the effervescent political life of the young II Republic. The boys had to stay home, longing for an unlikely walk in Park Ujazdowski.

The schools had remained open, but many parents kept their children at home. In this gloom environment, the only good news was the presence of an older cousin, student at the university. He was tasked with the challenge to teach the boys at home. In charge of grammar, Mom decided to enforce the rule of two daily dictations. Dad who spoke German and French was also recruited, but he was much less efficient than the two other teachers!



## *Żeby ustrzec się grypy — należy:*

1. Unikać kontaktu z chorymi na grype, nie odwiedzać ich domów, w czasie nasilenia zachorowań unikać niepotrzebnych skupisk.
2. Przestrzegać czystości ciała i odzieży, szczególnie rąk, zwłaszcza przy pielęgnacji chorego.
3. Dbać o czystość otoczenia.
4. Przy kichaniu i kaszlu zasłonić chusteczką usta, gdyż tym uchronimy nasze otoczenie od zakażenia. Wymagać tego również od innych.
5. Chorego w miarę możliwości należy odizolować od zdrowych, zaopatrzyć w osobne naczynia, ręczniki i sopluszkę ze środkiem dezynfekcyjnym.
6. Naczynia i bieliznę chorego odkażać przez gotowanie.
7. Pokój, w którym leży chory, należy codziennie dokładnie sprzątać i kilka razy dziennie wietrzyć. Podłogę, ściany koło łóżka chorego oraz meble należy przecierać ścierką zamoczoną w 0,2% roztworze chloraminy.
8. Należy płukać gardło łagodnymi środkami dezynfekcyjnymi np.: 3% roztworem soli kuchennej (1 łyżeczka na szklanekę przegotowanej wody), 3% roztworem kwasu bórico lub lekkim roztworem nadmanganianu potasu (lekkofioletowy roztwór).
9. Przy małych dzieciach — nakładać na nos i usta maseczki z gazy.

Leaflet distributed by the hygiene authorities of Warsaw. The text provides a recipe for homemade soap with kitchen salt, boric acid or potash. This document recommends to isolate sick persons in a regularly ventilated room and to wash their objects and immediate environment with chlore. The text insists on prevention by covering the nose and mouth of little children with a gauze fabric.

## Homemade masks

With the arrival of *hiszpanka*, hygiene activists had intensified their fight. Previously mobilized against typhus and dysentery, they were now facing a new threat. This threat was all the more serious that some areas of Warsaw were still the urban cesspool described by Boleslaw Prus.

Jozefa knew that the fight against the pandemic was a race against time. At the request of the Women's Committee of the parish (*Parafia Wszystkich Świętych*), Jozefa joined the "home brigades". She decided to sacrifice a few sheets from her trousseau to sew homemade masks. The post-WWI period was a time of scarcity. Thread and needles were precious. All the scraps of fabric were reused. There is no doubt that this massive mobilization of women contributed to mitigate the impact of the flu.



In 1920, the pandemic was not over in Poland. During the spring and summer 1920, the war to repel the Bolshevik invasion caused the arrival in Warsaw of a flow of refugees from the Eastern occupied regions.





## 300,000 Victims

*Hiszpanka* occurred at a time of great uncertainty regarding the future of Polish borders. The recovery of Independence had generated several insurrections and conflicts with neighbouring countries. During the Summer 1920, Poland waged an intense war against the Bolshevik invasion. On the front, a great number of soldiers were contaminated. The pandemic killed 20,000 Polish soldiers and 25,000 Russian prisoners.

In Warsaw, *hiszpanka* affected more than 800 000 people and killed 70,000. In Poland, the total number of victims who died is estimated between 250 000 and 300 000. At this time, the population was 27.2 million (1921 census). Experts highlight that Poland was the third most affected country in Europe, after Hungary and Spain

