
Stories of a Dollhouse

Exploring our family
Memory and Traditions

A War Bride

1917



Family Pride

Preparing a bridal trousseau is one of the oldest tradition in our family. In past generations, the bridal trousseau was an extensive collection of items that included home linen (bedsheets, bath towels, table clothes, kitchen towels and napkins) as well as the personal clothing of the bride (underwear, petticoats and underskirts, nightgowns and handkerchiefs). Before the 1920s, the larger pieces of household linen were washed only once a month, with the exception of the winter season when Poland was frozen by snow and ice. Hence, the impressive number of items in a bridal trousseau.



The trousseau was also the pride of caring mothers who took this matter very seriously. All the items were stored in dedicated trunks and big cupboards. The trousseau was supposed to reflect the social statute and future aspiration of the bride. Every visit of family and friends was an opportunity to show the latest additions. Over a cup of tea, there were endless discussions about the provenance, number and quality of items.

In our Książyk branch, there is an unusual demographic unbalance. Over 4 generations between 1900 and 2000, the genealogy tree has grown with 18 boys and only 6 girls. The preparation of a bride trousseau is quite occasional. When Paulina married in 1917, she had lost her mother two years before. In Warsaw, her aunt Józefa and her cousin Małgorzata Książyk were in charge of preparing her trousseau during this time of sorrow.



Embroidering initials

The engagement period was a busy time. During these few months before the wedding, the young *fiancée* completed her trousseau with embroidered initials. Family traditions can differ on this point. Some families mixed the names of the bride and her future husband. Other families selected only the maiden name.



Three generations ago, specialized publishers offered models for making beautiful monograms.

In France, Maison Sajou was famous for the variety of its models. In Poland, women's magazines regularly featured new drawings. However, in 1917 women's magazines were hardly found. We suspect that Paulina selected her model from a pre-war issue of *Nowe Mody* or *Świt*.



The style of the letters can be very helpful to identify when a piece of linen was embroidered. Bridal trousseaux tell a lot about previous generations. They are precious and should be kept as a legacy of family tradition.

Besides the beautification aspect of monograms, tagging was required by laundry services. Kitchen clothes were marked with simple cross-stitch letters. Larger pieces received elaborated monograms. When the period of engagement was too short or the trousseau too extensive, most pieces would be sent to a seamstress for embroidery. Before WWII, many Catholic convents proposed this service.



War Bond

We do not know about the circumstances of Paulina's wedding. Most probably the future couple wanted to officialise their bond before a long separation related to the war.

By all extent, this war period was not the best time to marry. Since 1915, Warsaw had been under German occupation. Combats were raging in the Western front and there was no end in sight.

Still, many young people were getting married, sending a signal of optimism. Historians, demographers and sociologists have another perspective. They highlight that the anxiety generated by the war is an accelerating factor for entering the marital status.

During WWI, many young girls wanted to secure their future, fearing the expected post-war difficulty to find a suitable *kawaler*. In 1917, there was 32% more women than men in Warsaw. Many were working but these ad hoc positions were temporary and far from providing a financial security.

For their part, young men were facing much uncertainties. Many wanted to strengthen a relationship that would help them confront danger in combats and maybe the terrible consequences of a war wound.

In 1917, Małgorzata Książyk was 18. There is no doubt that the romance of her cousin was an inspiration for daydreaming her future. She turned her interest in sewing into a permanent occupation and would not get married before 1927, 10 years later!

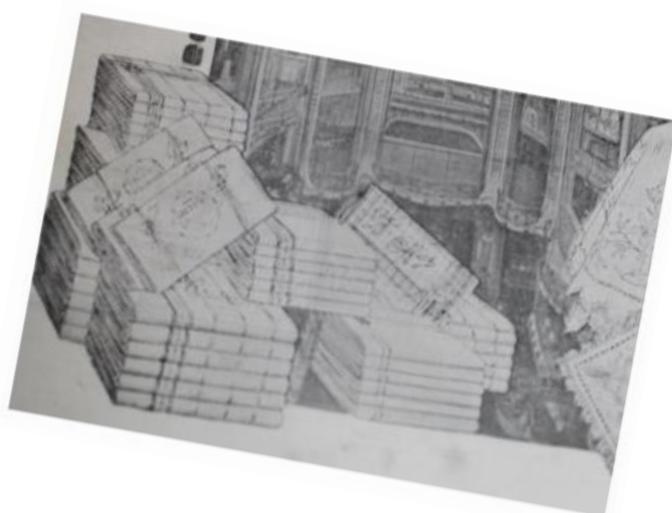


1917 - Ulica Nowy Świąt in Warsaw – The Książyk Family was living in ul. Świętokrzyska, a small street in the center of the city.



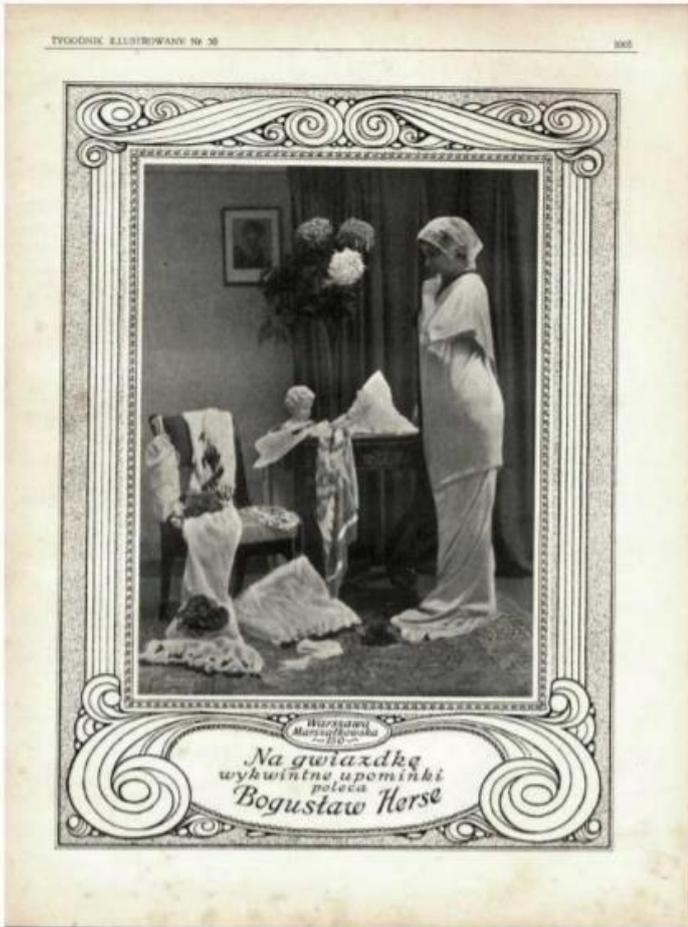
War Restrictions

War restrictions affected the preparation of the bridal trousseau. At this time, most household items, including the bride dress were handmade. But finding fabrics, lace, ribbons and even the basic equipment for sewing was quite impossible. Breaking the strap of the sewing machine was a domestic catastrophe. It could take months before getting a new one. Threads were carefully retrieved and reused. No needle, no pin was lost.



Everywhere, war restrictions limited choice and quality. Warsaw was no exception. In the city, there were two big department stores: the Jablkowski Brothers (Dom Towarowy Braci Jabłkowskich) and Herse (Dom Handlowy Firmy B. Herse). In normal times, they had a fine supply of imported cotton and woollen fabrics. Some factory outlets (sklep fabryczny) specialized in household linens and trousseau preparation. The Żyrardów store was one of the most famous, with the possibility to order ready-made items but the cost was prohibitive.



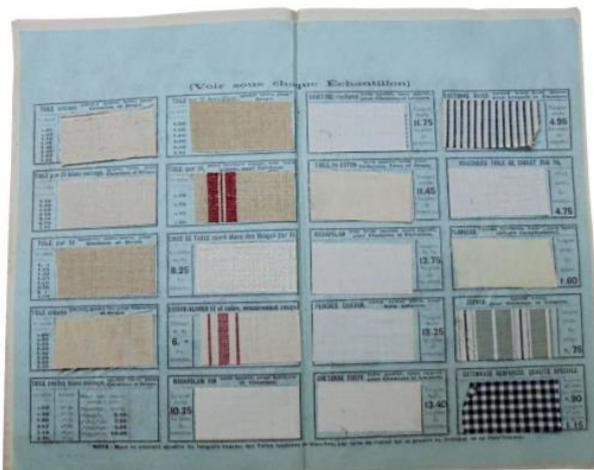


In 1917, the Książyk Family was living ul. Świętokrzyska, in the bloc between ul. Nowy Świat and ul. Caskiego (previously Włodzimierską). Their building was just a few minutes away from the main department stores.

Before WWI, Herse was a top-end fashion department store with quality imported clothing. The business dynamics was not recovered before the early 1920s. The flagship store was ul. Marszałkowska.



The Żyrardów store was located ul. Krakowskie Przedmieście in Warsaw. The quality of household fabrics (linen, curtains, table clothes) was a reference in Europe.



Once again, the rule of Lavoisier applied in the Książyk house: *“Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed”*. According to this principle and under the supervision of Józefa, Paulina transformed many pieces of her mom’s trousseau. She made table clothes from bed linen and she converted pillowcases into napkins.

Aunts and cousins contributed by giving whatever they could. The value of these gift was in the fabrics. Everything could be used. With much talent and creativity, Paulina revamped underwears from past generations. Large petticoats, open drawers panties, and antique corset chemises received a new life.



The result was gratifying with a trousseau aligned on the new fashion for lingerie: long corsets (front opening), petticoat panties, large underbodices and cropped camisoles.

This war trousseau was certainly below the usual family standards but the bride had all the basics. Paulina entered her new life with an impressive number of linen tea towels, cotton sheets, poplin nightgowns, flannel underwear, and batiste hankies.



A wedding in 1917 was the occasion to bring the family together but the conditions limited the expression of joy. Many relatives of the Książyk had suffered terrible losses during combats. Cousins from Wielkopolskie and Mazowieckie were fighting in opposite camps. Some of them were reported missing. Others were prisoners in unidentified places.

In this environment of sorrow, magazines insisted that wedding celebrations should be modest and discreet. Fashion sections highlighted the benefits of using simple fabrics such as cotton or linen. They insisted that a new pair of shoes wasn't necessary if an existing pair could do.

For Józefa, borrowing a bridal gown for Paulina was not an option. Her Mom had married in the late 1890s in a bustle dress with extremely small waist, puffed sleeves and high neckline. Transforming this bridal gown was impossible. From models pictured in magazines, she made the best from bits and pieces of lace and white ribbons to beautify a white summer dress. The result was simple but fresh and elegant.





Family Tradition

This family tradition of bridal trousseau was passed down to the unique niece of Małgorzata. Born in 1937, this French little Książyk girl received a first trousseau when she entered her Catholic boarding school. In the late 40's, the nuns had very specific requirements regarding the number of bed sheets and wool covers, table napkins, underwear and school uniform. The list of required items included a corset to compress the bust and avoid the development of "big breasts". Today, the family keeps preciously the big wood trunk that contained this trousseau. A small white nightgown has survived, marked with a red cross-stitch "137", the boarding number of the little owner.

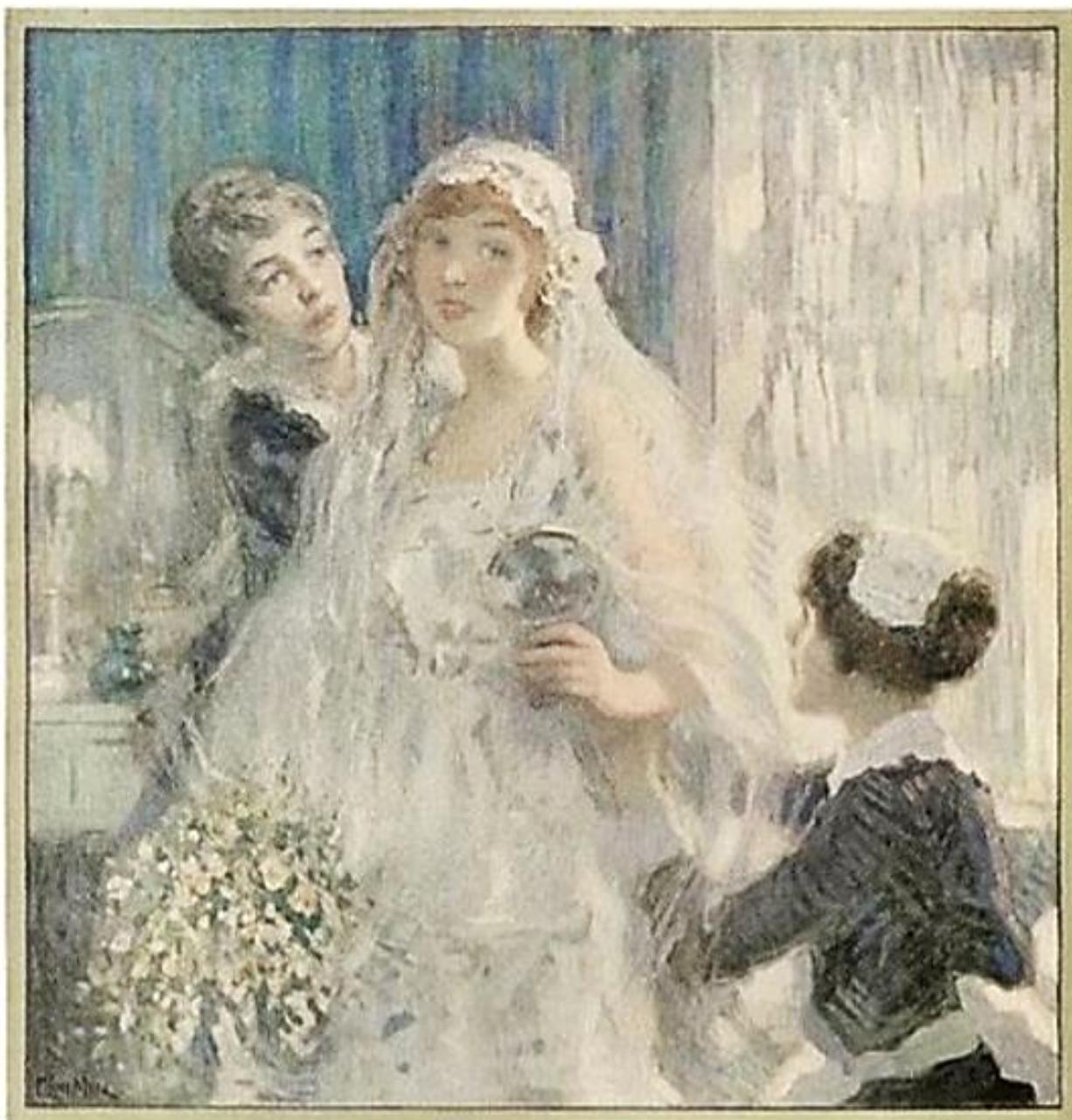
When the niece of Małgorzata married in 1960, her bridal trousseau was ready three years before the wedding. Actually, the preparation had begun when she turned 12. Over a decade, her Mom had patiently collected the items, ordering from catalogues of Les Grands Magasins du Louvres and from the Galeries de France collections. This modern trousseau had the best quality available in the late 50's with Linge des Vosges bed linen, Jalla bath towels and Valisère underwears. No monogram was embroidered and the top quality of the items was the only signature. We have a precise list of this trousseau (see next page). More than 60 years later, many items are still used every day.





A Ksiazyk trousseau in 1960

<p>Kitchen</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3x12 kitchen towels including cotton, linen and metis dishtowels • several cooking aprons
<p>Dining room</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 reception table clothes • 3x12 damask napkins (matching table clothes)
<p>Bedroom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 sets of complete double bed linen including sheets, pillowcases, bolster cases, and cotton fleece (molletons) mattress covers • 3 wool blankets in mohair and merino • 1 large eiderdown (red satin covered)
<p>Bathroom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2x12 wash clothes (French "toilet gloves") • 2x12 pink and blue bath towels • 12 white honeycomb bath towels • 2 white bathrobes • 4 large bath towels



Find this story in our Dollhouse
