

Chapter 3 – Personal Poems

This largest collection offers glimpses into Bernice's personal history, at least what she wanted to share or have people believe. I believe much of it is romanticized idealism, especially about her pastoral childhood in Poland. There is almost no mention of the suffering and hardship that region experienced during WWI, with the possible exception of "Ashes." Even that poem is not clear who or what it is about; it could even refer to the Polish–Soviet War, which ended just before she left Poland.

These poems reference friends and relatives from Bernice's family of origin, but there is no mention of the husband she met in Chicago, Joseph Wolnik, or of their son, my father Emil Wolnik. Perhaps she deliberately left them out of her published poems to protect their privacy? Her only other child was the daughter who died after one day, was that the subject of the poem "Tears"? Her poems about love seem to be about someone long lost, not her husband. Many of the personal poems reflect extreme sadness, but don't say explicitly why.

The last two poems directly address real people. One seems to be an argument with an acquaintance in her home town in Poland who apparently criticized Bernice for leaving. The other is a typed rhyming letter, not a published poem, to an old friend still in Poland, perhaps the same person?



Bernice's Sister Wikta and Family