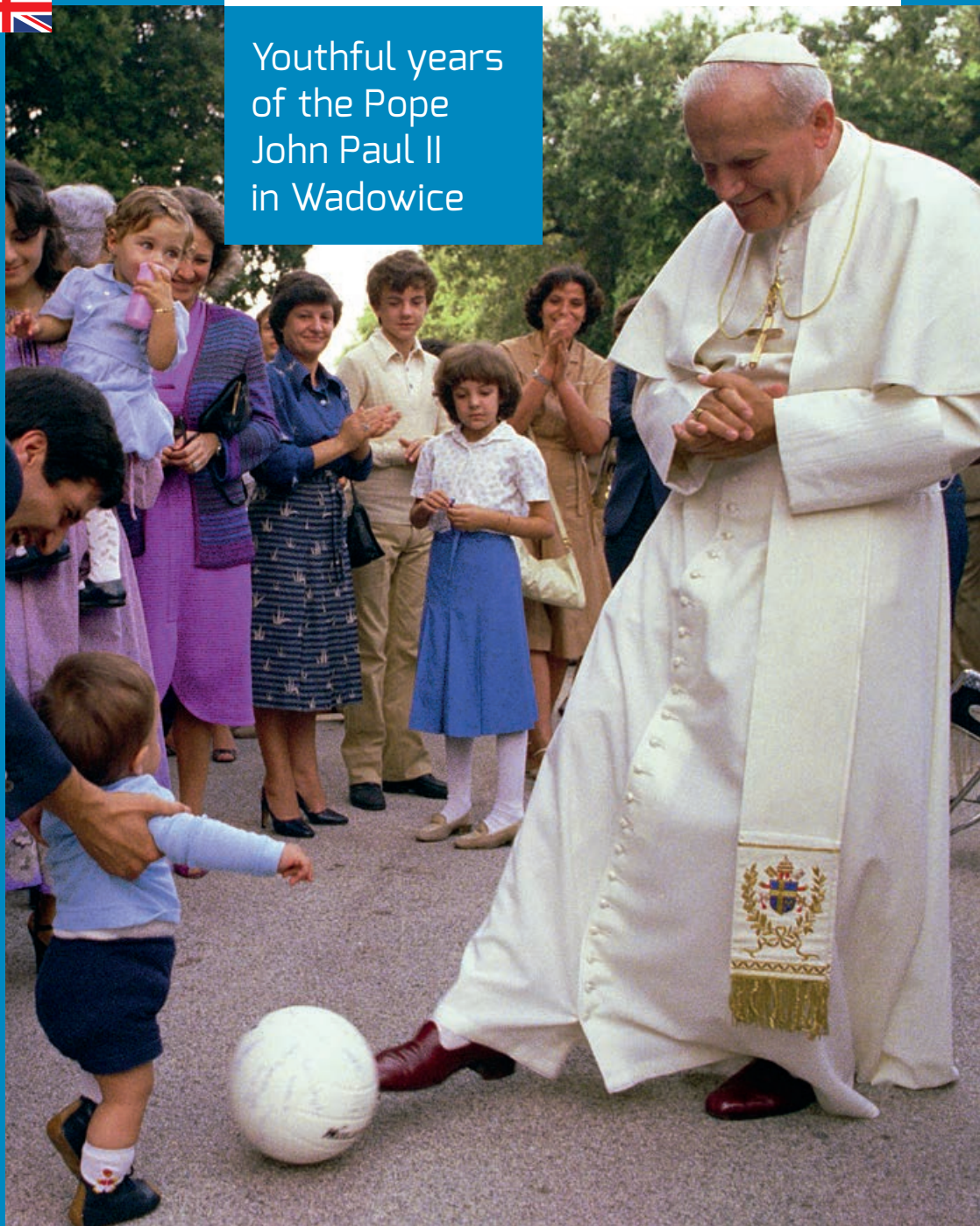


Even the Saint **kicked the ball**



Youthful years
of the Pope
John Paul II
in Wadowice



‘... here, in the town of **Wadowice**

everything began. **And life began**, and school began, and studies began, and theatre began, **and priesthood began**’.



Panorama of the home town of John Paul II, early 20thc.

Photo: Archive of the Municipal Museum in Wadowice

‘I was always strongly attached to the town of my childhood and early youth, to the town **that gave me much, very much**. It seems to me, more than Kraków could give. Breath of the town and breath of the earth, certain straightforwardness in the way of thinking and an unquestionable cultural foundation’. (John Paul II)

During the school years of Karol Wojtyła,

the town had about 10 thousand inhabitants. It was a thriving administration, education and military centre.

Former view of the market square- nowadays the square of John Paul II, early 20thc.

Photo: Archive of the Municipal Museum in Wadowice



As a result of this fact, a group of intelligentsia existed **in Wadowice**. This group made its contributions to the cultural life of the town of that time. The town at the Skawa river is located in a picturesque region formed by **the ranges of the Little Beskids** from one side and by **the Skawa river**, flowing lazily in the valley, on the other side. The Leskowiec peak has a dominating appearance, over the nearby mountain range. At that time, this summit was a trip destination for young and adults both in the summer, as well as in the winter. Wadowice of those years appears as **a clean town, full of colours**. And this was how Karol Wojtyła, who lived there at that time, remembered his hometown.

“What a joy
there was **in the family.**”

Mrs Wojtyła carried the pram with the baby to our yard. (...) There was a well in the middle. So, **Mrs Wojtyła** would bring the child, sit next to the well, and I would go out onto the veranda. Very often she would ask me to come down and look after **her little son**, because she had to go to the dinner or go shopping. I would then come down and drive her son around in a stroller. (...)



**Karol Wojtyła
in the arms of his
mother, Emilia, 1920**

Photo: Archive
of the Holy Father
John Paul II Family
Home Museum
in Wadowice

Her older son, **Edmund, who was only twelve years old**, used to help his mother carry the pram down this steep, winding staircase. Apart from that, mother used to send him for nappies, for the bottle, for clothes. Poor Mundek would run upstairs over and over, sometimes I even felt sorry for him. At that time I used to think to myself – **what will become of this baby?** They are all over him as if he was a prince”. (Helena Szczepańska, neighbour of the Wojtyła family)

After death of his mum, Emilia,

Karol’s friends often used to see his father in the kitchen, as he prepared breakfasts and suppers.

**Karol Wojtyła with
his dad, Karol senior
– a military official,
approx. 1925**

Photo: Archive
of the Holy Father
John Paul II Family
Home Museum
in Wadowice



For dinners, however, **the father** would take his son to a nearby eating place ran by Mr and Mrs Banaś. The Wojtyła family lived very modestly. **Wojtyła senior** used to alter his old uniforms, so that his son would have something to wear in the house. Father of the future Pope **was a military man**, so a more strict discipline could indeed be felt in the house. Every day was carefully planned. The time during the day was divided between prayer, meals, learning and walks.

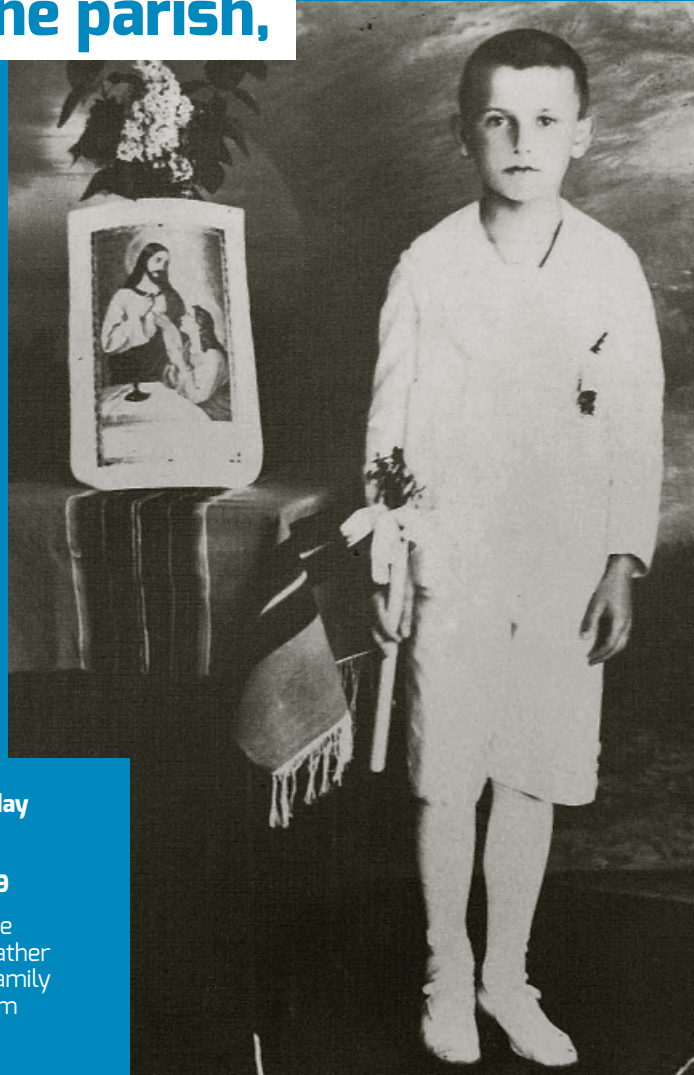
‘As I look back, I can see as the way of my life through the environment here, **through the parish,**

through my family, leads me to one place, to the baptismal font in the parish church in Wadowice. **At this font** I was admitted to the grace of God’s filiation and faith in my Redeemer, to the community of his church **on 20th June 1920.**’

(John Paul II)

Karol at the day of First Holy Communion, 25th May 1929

Photo: Archive of the Holy Father John Paul II Family Home Museum in Wadowice



Already since childhood, **little Karol** showed an exceptional **gift of prayer**. He was seen at the parish church, kneeling before the image of Virgin Mary, deep in prayer. During preparations to **First Holy Communion**, because of mourning for Mrs. Emilia, everybody **forgot about the customary white shoes**. They were brought specifically to Wadowice, but unfortunately there were no more boys’ shoes, so Karol had to wear the girls’ ones on that day.

‘Lolek prepared Adam, my brother, **to serve as an altar boy** and taught him Latin texts.

This usually took place in our garden on a tree, as no one would disturb their peace there.



Karol in a group of altar boys with rev. Kazimierz Figlewicz, 1933

Photo: Archive of the Holy Father John Paul II Family Home Museum in Wadowice

When Adam learned the theoretical part, I suggested that they might use the texts in practice. According to my idea, a mirror with a wide marble at the base was supposed to be the altar. *Am I supposed to pray to the mirror?!* – Lolek became indignant. **He was supposed to be the priest**, whereas Adam and I were supposed to serve as altar boys. *You won’t pray to the mirror, you will just lift your eyes upwards, above the mirror* – I said. He thought for a bit and agreed, although he wasn’t quite convinced. (...) When “the priest” started to say “Confiteor”, I shouted **Sanctus, Sanctus** and I began to beat my breast. I got a scolding for it. I was thrown out of the room and I heard on parting: **It’s the way it is with girls!** (Danuta Gruszczyńska née Pukto, friend from theatre group)

Karol Wojtyła spent the first 18 years of his life in Wadowice. When he was 6, he went

to the common school,

and when he was 10 – to 8-year gymnasium, which he finished with the matura exam. He believed it was to the Polish school and its teachers that he owed the foundation of his future. He emphasized that through culture encountered at school people are themselves.



Karol in his early years of gymnasium education, 1931/1932

"The boy was very lively, **very talented**, very clever and very good. He was **an optimist by nature**, but if you looked carefully, you could see in him a shadow of early orphanhood. I got to know him soon after his mother died. What distinguished him was that he was **extremely loyal towards his friends**, and he had no conflicts with teachers. He was a good student." (rev. Kazimierz Figlewicz, Catechist of Karol Wojtyła)

"Teaching classical languages, particularly Latin, was a significant element of education

in a gymnasium
of the older type (...).

Karol and his friends on a school trip in Wieliczka, 1936

Photo: Collection of E. Mróz



Not only was the emphasis placed on **the basics of grammar**, but also on correct pronunciation of Latin texts – prose and poetry. Every student who at that time knew Catilinian Orations of Cicero, did not learn the properly stressed, **rhythmical Roman poetry** (Ovid, Horace)". (Tadeusz Królikiewicz, friend from gymnasium)

Jerzy Kluger, a gymnasium friend of Karol Wojtyła recalled:

Lolek was well **liked and respected** by students and teachers.



Karol with his friends from gymnasium, approx. 1938

Photo: Collection of E. Mróz

He was perceived as a leader and **the best student**. In the class, he always used to sit in a designated place. He actively participated **in lessons, especially classical ones** (classical culture, Greek, Latin, Polish, history). **He treated prompting the answers as a fraud**, but sometimes, when there was an especially difficult task to translate Ovid or Horace, he would let us crib.

After lessons, the students of the Wadowice gymnasium were spending their free time participating in extracurricular activities.



Karol with his friends and teachers in the final year of gymnasium, 1938

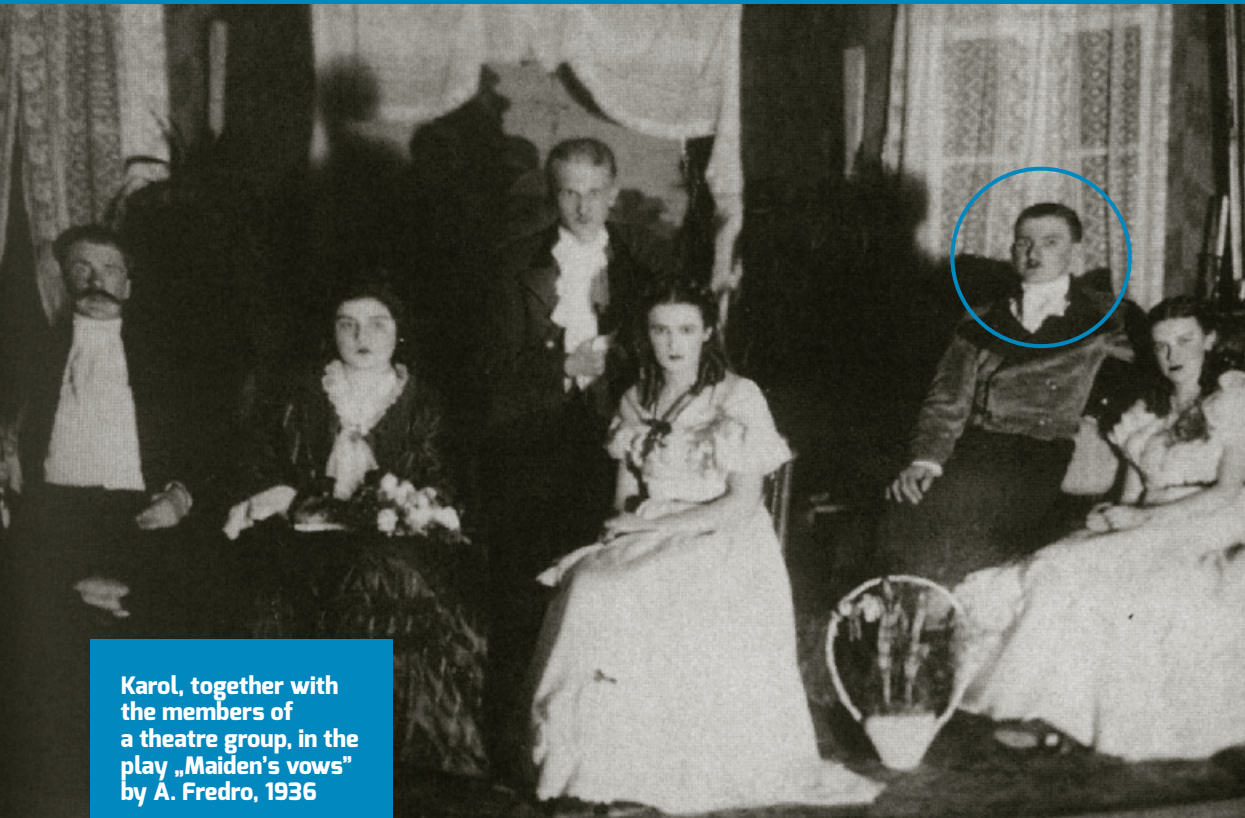
Photo: Collection of E. Mróz

Those varied and included **special interest groups**, youth organizations, orchestra, school theatre or football games. However, a significant role in their lives was played by **education**. **The teachers** from the gymnasium **were extraordinary people**, they possessed vast knowledge and a skill to pass it on. In the eyes of their students, with the time they assumed the proportions of **legendary figures**.

“I had many friends at school,
I was involved in work

in the amateur school theatre,

but this was not decisive.



Karol, together with the members of a theatre group, in the play „Maiden's vows” by A. Fredro, 1936

Photo: Collection of H. Królikiewicz-Kwiatkowska

During that period, what seemed decisive to me was mostly **my love** for literature, particularly **for dramatic literature** and **for theatre**. My passion for theatre was started by **Mieczysław Kotlarczyk**, a Polish studies teacher, older than me. He was **a true pioneer of amateur theatre** with great repertorial ambitions”. (John Paul II)

‘The performance

[‘Balladyna’]
dragged
on for hours,

as this drama
requires many
changes of place
of action.



Karol in the title role in the play ‘Zygmunt August’ by S. Wyspiański, 1938

Photo: Collection of E. Mróz

The intervals **during the premiere** lasted longer than five acts of the play. Near the end, groups of hungry spectators thinned out a little. I remember **the despairing whisper of Karol** – Kostryn, who was looking at the backstage for the crown of Grabiec, killed for this crown together with Balladyna. **Luckily, the crown was found** and the action could go by further’. (Halina Królikiewicz-Kwiatkowska, friend from theatre group)

‘Since childhood, I used to like books.
The person who got me into the tradition of
reading books was my father.

He used to sit next to me and read the whole Sienkiewicz and other Polish writers. When my mother died, **we remained two** with our **father**. And he would not stop encouraging me to explore the most valuable literature. He also **never stood in the way** of my interest in theatre.’ (John Paul II)

Flat of the Wojtyła family – Museum of the Family House of the Holy Father John Paul II

Photo: Archive of the Town Hall in Wadowice



‘His father, **Mr Wojtyła senior**, used to read a lot. **He had a gift of appearing as an MC**, he used to tell us a lot of things, and even such people like me, who would rather play cards, would listen. He **told us about the history of Poland**, showed commentaries to books by Henryk Sienkiewicz and Karol May. He used to speak about all this in such a way that he managed to capture the interests of such little boys as we were at the time’. (Jerzy Kluger)

Already in the times of gymnasium,
young Karol Wojtyła started to write
poems and dramas.

His works were difficult, deep and exceptionally mature for the young age of the author. Friends who surrounded him knew about it, although he did not present any work publically at that moment.

Monument of young Karol Wojtyła in front of the former Marcin Wadowita Gymnasium

Photo: Archive of the Town Hall in Wadowice



‘He was a cheerful, athletic **boy** (he played football, swam, walked in the mountains), however, he did not waste any moment for useless entertainment. He used to read very difficult, philosophical books which were incomprehensible to us. **Extremely religious**, while **learning with his friends** in his house he would go for a moment to another room, where he **prayed aloud**.’ (Halina Królikiewicz-Kwiatkowska)

'I remember from our early years in gymnasium

that when **we organized trips**

or summer picnics at the Księży Las or the Dzwonek peaks, the Wojtyła's father always went with our year apart from the tutor and he looked after us together with the teacher'.

(Marian Bieniasz, friend from gymnasium)



Little Karol with his dad on a trip to Wieliczka, 1930

Photo: Collection of The Center for Documentation and Research of the Pontificate of John Paul II in Rome

One of our gymnasium trips, **to Zator**, would not take place because some students didn't have money to **travel by train**. **Karol** then suggested that we go by train one way, and the other way on foot. **The idea was accepted** and the trip took place.

'It was in our sixth class, in 1936.

Many of us went to

a trip to Kraków

with professor Klimczyk.



Karol and his dad during a pilgrimage to Częstochowa, 1936

Photo: Collection of E. Mróz

He then showed us Wawel, the Cloth hall, the St. Mary's Basilica, and after that he left us unattended for a while. **Lolek** took a group of friends which was supposed to visit churches. **He had notes about the monuments in his notebook**, and **he showed his friends around**'. (Włodzimierz Piotrowski, friend from gymnasium)

‘We used to treat **sport** with a great ambition.

Matches between classes were big events, a holy war. The desire and the aim of all of us was to win.



Karol with his brother Edmund during a football match, approx. 1924

Photo: Archive of the Archdiocese Museum of cardinal K. Wojtyła in Cracow

Karol treated it this way as well. **He first played as a defender.** He even had **his football pseudonym – Martyna** (a renowned defender of the Lviv “Pogoń” team of that time). I remember Lolek better as a goalkeeper’. (Szczepan Mogielnicki, friend from gymnasium)

In Gymnasium, the boys established the ‘Czarni’ football club, and **Edmund**, brother of the future Pope, **used to play** there as well. When Lolek was 3 years old, his older brother would take him to the football team **training sessions and sit him down on the pile of the students’ caps**, which served as posts at the goals.

‘When we were fifteen, we established a wild **sports club.**

Karol with his friends from the football team, approx. 1937

Photo: Collection of E. Mróz



A ball, bought skis – at that time this was a rarity. (...) We played in our gym suits with an emblem on the shirts. **There were two goalkeepers:** Lolek and Zdzisek Piotrowski. They used to defend in turns. When one played, the other remained on the reserve bench. (...) Ambitious **Karol** often asked me: *Włodek, listen, tell me if Zdzisek defends better? – No, equally – or you do it better.* He distrusted my assurances. – *I know, **he plays better**, but score me one by one even twenty penalties, I need to train.* And he threw himself with dedication even on the stones. **Such was his ambition** to equal, and even to outdo’. (Włodzimierz Piotrowski)

'Our journeys led us also **to the Kalwaria Zebrzydowska**, which was beautifully situated at the foot of the Żar mountain. There, in a 17th-century monastery of the Friars Minor of the Observance, we would lose ourselves in prayer.

We would walk among hills
with evangelical names:

Mount of Olives, Mount Zion, Mount Moriah, where the pilgrims are welcomed by picturesquely located chapels, **commemorating the Way of the Cross and the ways of Mary**'. (John Paul II)

10-year-old Karol with his dad on a pilgrimage to the Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, 1930

Photo: Archive of the Holy Father John Paul II Family Home Museum in Wadowice

'**The father** was a friend of the son. They would often go together for walks, and as **they both loved mountains**, they would also go on further trips. It happened that I joined them in their journeys. **We would venture** on foot **into the region of Kęty and Andrychów, travelling across the routes of the Little Beskids**.' (Eugeniusz Mróz, friend from gymnasium)



On Sunday evenings, **right after the Holy Mass**, young Wojtyła with his father would set off

together on a trip

for the peaks of the Little Beskids: **Dzwonek, Jaroszowicka Góra, Łysa Góra, Bliźniaki** or for more distant **Leskowiec**. More than once such journey was being finished with a warm tea in the hostel at Leskowiec.

Panorama of the Little Beskids – view on the Dzwonek peak, 1936

Photo: Archive of the Municipal Museum in Wadowice



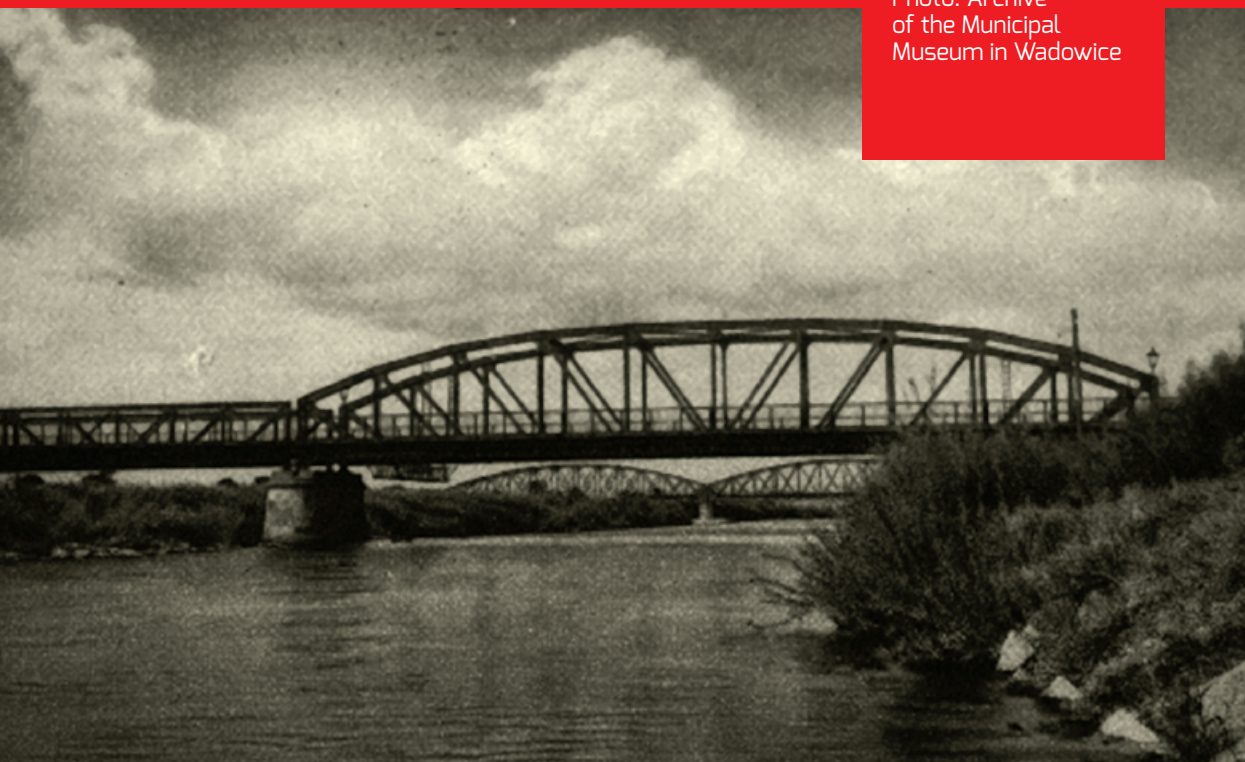
'In those times, **skiing** dominated Poland. The intelligentsia from Wadowice and **students of both gymnasia used to ski** as well. Panczakiewicz [The teacher] was a driving force of the skiing frenzy. It was probably then that **young Karol Wojtyła developed a taste for skiing and for Beskidy**'. (Jan Sarnicki, gymnasium teacher)

'Poor father, left with one son only, feared for the younger boy. After all, he already lost one adult son.

We used to go swimming in the Skawa river.

Bridge over the Skawa
river in Wadowice,
1936

Photo: Archive
of the Municipal
Museum in Wadowice



It was our shared passion. **Karol's father also swam well.** He could stay in the water even for an hour, in the cold mountain river. He never seemed either chilled or tired. Karol used to like water sports. We would often **go kayaking.** In the morning he was one of the first to rise. First a morning washing: Karol used to soap himself and jump into the water in the morning. **He had to swim for fifteen minutes** to be in good shape and good mood later'. (Zbigniew Sitkowski, friend from gymnasium)

In later years, after he left his hometown, Karol Wojtyła tried to continue and develop

the passions that started in Wadowice.

Panorama of the
Little Beskids – view
on the Księży Las and
Bliźniaki peaks, 1936

Photo: Archive
of the Municipal
Museum in Wadowice



As **a student** – in spite of the difficult reality of the Nazi occupation – he was involved in poetic and dramatic works. After he assumed the function of **bishop**, later archbishop of Kraków and finally cardinal, he shared his passions with young people and friends. It was with them that he would ski, **play football**, climb the mountains and, of course, kayak. Even after he became **a Pope**, in spite of numerous duties he was entrusted with, he still tried to remain active. He used to ski or to walk in the Alps. Till the present day, inhabitants of the Aosta valley remember the walks of the Pope.

In 2016, Pope Francis

invites young people
to Kraków.



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Wadowice 2016

This Year's World Youth Day organized in Poland is a great opportunity to present previously unknown anecdotes from the life of Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II, originator of these meetings. This publication, containing memories of the Polish Pope as well as those of his friends, neighbours and teachers, is intended exactly for this purpose. Those recollections tell about his childhood and youth in Wadowice, describing what was he like, what was he interested in and how did he spend his free time. Thanks to this journey back in time we get to know the Saint – in a dimension closer to us, the ordinary people. Just 'Lolek', a boy next door.