

Julian Gringras's Class At School



This is a photograph of my class at the Rey gymnasium in Kielce. It was 1930 when this photo was taken.

We are standing in the classroom. You can see a tiled stove, benches with desks that opened, and sitting among us, in the center, is Irena Breneisen, the German teacher.

I am first on the left, standing up, and fourth in the row is my best friend and future brother-in-law, Mosze Baum.

I took all the class photographs, assembled the group, with the camera on the tripod. I would put on what we called the 'autoknips,' the timer, and run to my place.

Very often on these photographs I'm peering at the camera to check if it's working. My face is a little different to the faces of my other classmates on the photograph.

Then I would make the prints, myself. I developed them, because that camera took glass plates, about 6 cm by 9 cm in size, not film. And I made the enlargements in the laboratory at my father's photography firm.

I developed and enlarged them myself, and made 50 or so prints. For all my classmates.

There were two gymnasiums in Kielce, boys' gymnasiums. Mine, the Mikolaj Rey Gymnasium, is called the Zeromski Gymnasium today. The building looked as if it had been a monastery building, because adjoining it was the building that housed the seminary.

What the street was called? Jednosci Narodowej, something like that, I can't remember. The gymnasium was very old, the plaster badly crumbling.

The other one, the Sniadecki Gymnasium, was richer, I'd say, that was where children from fairly wealthy families went. And there was a girls' gymnasium too, which my fiancée went to, the Zimnowodzina Gymnasium, Zimnowodzina was the headmistress.

I got into the Polish gymnasium by passing an exam, in 1926, I think. I sat mathematics, Polish; Latin started once you got into the gymnasium, I only had it for four years. But two of us took the examination, my future brother-in-law and I.

He did better than me; he was taken at once, but I had to re-sit the exam six months later. Four years of gymnasium, from 5th to 8th grade, 4 grades.

In 1927 I started, something like that, more or less. Matriculation was in 1930.

I was in a class that numbered around 50 students. The class teacher was Konradi, the Latin master. 50 pupils, three of them Jewish, with surnames that made up a tiny fragment of landscape.

You see, there was Baum - a tree; there was Gringras, or green grass; and there was an apple, he was called Jablko, the third one, not Appel, but Jablko [Mr. Gringras is translating the surnames].

As it happened, in terms of level, we, the three of us, were top of the class. There were a few clever Poles, but not many. Some of them were one-sided, mastered literature well, for instance.

Our classmates used to go to Baum's house; he helped them in math, Polish, etc., he was very helpful. They didn't come to me.