

Koppel Gringras And His Daughters



This is a photograph of my father and sisters. It was taken in my father's photographic studio, 'Moderne.'

First on the left is my sister Roza Eugenia, then Ziuka, Bala and Mania, and on the right is my father, Koppel Gringras.

Father's name was Koppel according to the official papers. Later that was changed to Jozef, but he was still known as Koppel, like the hero of one of Singer's novels [The Family Moskat].

My father was the owner of the 'Moderne' photographic studio. It was a long road. First somewhere holed up in the provinces, Pinczow or somewhere like that, then my father's emigration with his wife and two sons [Simon and Artur].

Father might have been about 25-28 at that time, by my reckoning. He went to Switzerland, via Hungary. In Switzerland Father learned the art of photography. He lived there for more or less six years with his wife and children.

After 6 years in Switzerland they came to Kielce; they probably had some money saved up. To be a recognized craftsman you had to buy a license, I seem to remember.

I suspect it was in around 1908, maybe 1909 or 1910 that the 'Moderne' photographic firm was opened, and it soon began to grow. And around 1930, 1932, 1931 my father built a factory of photographic paper and materials, which was called 'Orion'.

Roza was officially called Eugenia - she was born in Switzerland. We used to call her Rozia, Rozka, she was older than me too. Maybe two, three years.

She married Obarzanski and had two children. It's only now, recently, that I found out from my brother-in-law, by telephone, from Israel, from Majtek, that Roza's husband, Obarzanski, died in Kielce in a terrible way.

Apparently he was tied to a car and dragged through Kielce. Roza was killed in the quarries near Wisniowka, a few kilometers outside Kielce. She was killed with her children Bobek and Giga. I don't know the details.

Ziuka was properly Edzia, in Yiddish Estera, she was my younger sister. During the war she was in Fergana, Soviet Union. After the war she lived in Israel until she died, at 85, 3 or 4 years ago.

She was the only one of the four sisters to survive, because the others died at the hands of the Germans. Ziuka's husband is Chaskiel Majtek, who lives in Israel, in Holon; he calls me up sometimes.

Next was Bala, or Bela. I think we used to call her Bala, but how it was written I don't know. I remember Bala well. I was very fond of her, a very lively, intelligent girl, active, very handsome, in my view. Nice eyes, and she had dimples on her face.

Mania didn't, nor did Ziuka. Mania was the last in the line, the 9th child. But by the time she was growing up I was in Warsaw, I hardly met them, except in the vacations, and then very rarely.

Whether Bala and Mania had their admirers, that I don't know. The girls worked in the photography studio; I think they spent some time learning retouching too, and then they worked in Orion. I don't think they had any schooling.

They could read and write, and were good with figures, of course, and spoke proper Polish, but what school they went to I don't know. Both the girls went to the Birkenau camp.

Mania died at the age of 18 or 20. Nobody knew anything about them. They were liquidated by the Germans very quickly.