

Julian Gringras And His Family



This is a photo of our family, taken in my father's studio, 'Moderne.' It must have been before 1922, because my eldest brother Simon, who is in the photo, emigrated in 1922.

My parents are sitting in the center, and my brothers are standing behind them: first on the left Leopold, then Simon, Maurycy, and Artur. I am sitting next to my mother.

The little girl with the white bow in her hair is my sister Bala, and the one sitting on my father's lap is Mania.

I was the youngest of five sons; there was one sister before me as well, and three younger sisters. There were nine of us. My brothers were older than me - there could have been quite an age difference.

The eldest is Simon, who we often called Zygmunt, he could have been eleven to twelve years older. Artur six or seven, maybe eight.

Two of my brothers, Simon and Artur, were born in the Kielce region. Maybe in Busko, Pinczow, or Chmielnik. It could have been Pinczow, because Chaskiel Majtek [the husband of Mr. Gringras's sister Ziuka] told me not so long ago that my father's family came from Pinczow; I thought they came from Chmielnik.

Simon, Zygmunt or Symche - in his Polish and French papers. Simon went to Palestine, in 1921 or 1922, I think. It was a well-known fact that an awful lot of lads from Jewish families tried to dodge their draft, and they used various techniques.

I remember that there was even the technique of starving yourself and drinking black coffee. Simon was probably a Zionist, or maybe he was draft-dodging. Later on he was in some kibbutz, he contracted malaria, and then he turned up in France.

He worked in a cinema, but towards the end of his stay in France he was the owner of a cinema. He had a certain interest in painting - I remember a drawing of his: a man in prophet's robes sitting on a huge boulder, a sunset, and behind him desert.

My brother from France was betrayed and ended up in Auschwitz. I don't know, but apparently the woman he lived with, a French woman, turned him in, or so the rumors had it.

That cousin of mine, Czarny, met him in the camp in Auschwitz. Czarny went through several camps and coped admirably, but my brother gave in very quickly and turned into what they call a 'musulman' [camp term for a person who lost the will to live].

And he died. On a monument in Paris are the names of several hundred Jews deported to the camps, and Symche Gringras is listed.

Then there is Artur, or Adolf, but after Hitler's rise to power he changed it to Artur - but what his Jewish name was I don't know.

I suspect that Artur, who neared the age of conscription slightly later than Simon, also tried to dodge his draft. He used to drink black coffee like that, I remember. In any case they didn't call him up.

Artur graduated from gymnasium; he didn't matriculate.

The third boy is Maurycy. He was born in Switzerland. Maurycy was born in 1905, 1906; he was five years or so older than me. My brother Maurycy went gray at the age of about 16 or 17.

He went gray suddenly. I went gray much later, at the normal age, 30-something. But that was at the time I was in the Soviet Union. He was terribly highly strung, talented, played the piano and painted well. He was artistically gifted.

Then there's Leopold, born in Switzerland too. Leopold was perhaps four years older than me. In Yiddish Leopold is Lipe, or Lipek, I think. He used to be called Lipek. 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. Children were born close together there [in Mr. Gringras's family], as you can tell. But nine children!

Then there was me, born in 1911 in Kielce. Julian. I probably had a Jewish name. I don't remember when I changed it. From being a child they always called me Julek. I don't remember my Jewish name.

Ziuka was properly Edzia, in Yiddish Estera, she was my younger sister. After the war she lived in Israel until she died, at 85, three or four 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.