

Julian Gringras's Class At School



This is a photograph of my class at the Rey gymnasium in Kielce. It was 3rd March 1930 when I took this photo.

Among us, sitting in the center, is Mrs. Niedzielska, the Polish teacher. I am standing first on the right in the second row, and third from the right in the third row is my best friend and future brother-in-law, Mosze Baum.

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.

The three of us didn't keep apart from the rest of the class. We mixed with the others. There was no isolation within the class. There were no insults, name-calling, etc.

The number of pupils dwindled fast. In the next grade there were not 50, but 40 or so, and about 30 of us made it to matriculation. They dropped out, didn't move up from grade to grade, or the economic situation was such that they couldn't carry on.

They were boys from the countryside there. There was this one, Bezak. You could tell he was from a very poor family. There weren't too many wealthy children in my gymnasium.

We had a school uniform: a stand-up collar on our jackets and kepis on our heads, with crowns, like the kepis the French policemen wear.

That was the compulsory gymnasium uniform. The boys on the photograph are in uniform.