

Mendel Wojdyslawski



This is my father Mendel Wojdyslawski. The photo was taken in the 1930s, but I don't know when and where exactly.

I don't know anything about my grandmother and grandfather from my father's side. Grandfather was not alive ever since I remember. My father's name was Mendel.

He was born in Strykow near Lodz. Before we went to school, he changed his last name to Mother's maiden name and since that time his name was Wojdyslawski.

He changed it, because his last name was funny. The mailman would laugh at him when he brought the mail, strangers used to laugh too. Father had 2 sisters and 2 brothers.

Father stayed in Strykow until he was 15. He graduated from elementary school there. He later went to Berlin, where he studied in some vocational school, a tailoring one, I think. He studied to be a cutter.

He came back from Berlin to Lodz and got a job in a company on Wolnosci Square. I don't know what company it was, but it must have had something to do with tailoring, because he worked there as a cutter.

He fought in World War I, but he was dismissed from the army, because he fell ill with the 'Spanish flu'. Later, this I remember myself, there was a ladies' coats workshop at home. 3 or 4 apprentices would sit down and sew.

You could say that Father was running a kind of cottage industry then. I don't think he was very successful, because there weren't too many customers. In the 1930s, but I think closer to the year 1930, he started his own business.

He had 2 partners. The company was first located on Piotrkowska 56, with an entrance from the backyard. After 3, maybe 4 years he moved it to Zawadzka Street.

Our parents were very tolerant when they were raising us. Father never hit me. He was very interested in what I was reading. He browsed and sometimes even bought books for me. Father was very warm, considerate.

He took me to tailors, so I'd know what poor people lived like. He showed me children who worked, helped their parents. Some ironed, others sewed on buttons.

When I later had some leftist brochures, Father saw what I was reading, but he didn't mind, he didn't forbid it, he accepted it.

He wasn't a religious man, he had leftist views. I don't know if he was in the PPS or only sympathized with that party. He was also connected to Bund.

Father was a very open, intelligent, talented man. He could speak several languages. He spoke Yiddish and Polish, but he also knew German and Russian. He read a lot. He also traveled a lot, mostly on business.

He used to go to Berlin and Vienna to get coat patterns. He was so talented, that when we were walking on Piotrkowska Street and Father noticed some interesting coat pattern, he'd enter the doorway and draw a kind of... sketch.

He was also a man who helped others very much. Without Mother's knowledge he sometimes went to visit the tailors who took materials from him and sewed at home.

If he saw they were very poor, he gave them money. He helped the Jewish Theater 'Ararat.' He also helped some Jewish writers.

Father had financial problems. He didn't have money to run the company. In spite of this he suffered heart failure. This was in 1936. He had to be constantly watched for the next year, because he was depressed.

We were afraid he'd commit suicide. He carried some string with him, and some razors. Someone always accompanied him everywhere, Mother checked his pockets. Later, in his own house, he sewed some muffs, some accessories.

He earned some money. Finally, he got back on his feet, so there was enough money for everyday expenses and paying the bills. I was also earning some money by then, and so was my sister.

We were able to survive, but it was a completely different standard at home. You'd count money, what to buy for dinner, what to buy for breakfast. A different standard of life.

He died in Lodz ghetto in 1944.