

Rubin Cukier



I don't know who took this picture and when exactly. As most of our family shots, this one was probably saved thanks to Chawa, my father's sister, who had left for Argentina before World War II. This picture is a portrait of my father, Rubin Cukier.

Father was born around 1891 in Radzyn. In 1914 he was conscripted into the tsarist army, but he was bought out.

In 1906, as a 15-year-old, after the revolution, he ran away to Warsaw, where he began working in some water-sewage corporation.

As a young, rebellious worker he was close to the socialist movement. He used to belong to some organization, but he never said anything about Bund.

He could have been in the PPS, but he quickly became bourgeois. In 1939 Father was mobilized, he had a military assignment. But he was sent back.

He was a hardworking, intelligent and honest man. I remember that I once bragged to him about riding a tram without a ticket. And he scolded me, 'I give you 20 groszy, so that you buy a ticket and not ride without it.' He considered it theft. Well, when your father has this attitude, it stays with you for life.

Father used to read magazines in Yiddish, which was his native language. He never taught himself to write Polish, he often complained about it, but he didn't speak with an accent.

He told us that he hadn't been a good student, that he was a rascal, like my brother Hipek. Studying was last for him, because he mostly ran around with the village boys.

He used to sing country songs in Polish, for example 'W poniedzialek rano kosil ojciec siano' ['On Monday morning Father was cutting grass for hay']. He also knew lots of Polish proverbs.

Father used to go to the prayer house, not to the synagogue. Mostly reformed Jews went to the synagogue on Tlomackie Street. The prayer house was usually just a classroom, which was rented for holiday and Saturday prayers.

Before the beginning of the religious year, a shammash from the prayer house would come and collect money, donations for the upkeep of the prayer house, about 20 zloty for the entire year.

There is a famous joke: they won't let Mr. Rozenblat in, because he didn't pay, but he says, 'But I won't pray, this Rozenywaig is in there and I just want to tell him that I'll return his money.' And the shammash says, 'But I know you, you're a scoundrel, you'll pray.'