

Meeting Of Ex-Prisoners Of The Camp In Bereza Kartuska



This picture was taken in Warsaw in 1964. It was the meeting of political prisoners of the prewar camp in Bereza Kartuska. The meeting took place in the Institute of History of the Party [PZPR] at Gornoslaska Street in Warsaw. My father is sitting in the third row, he is fourth from right, wearing glasses. My father was a member of the Communist Party of Western Ukraine, called KaPUZa, for short. I must have been four, five or six when he put some papers under the mattress of the bed in which I slept. That happened at night. Before 1st May, I remember panic, commotion, and then knocking on the door: "Police! Open up!" Occasionally they summoned my father preventively for 24 or 48 hours. I know that he was in hiding for a while. Someone must have warned him that they wanted to arrest him, so he left home and when he came back it was in the middle of the night, only to leave again before dawn. In the little town everybody knew everything about everybody else. In those times when my father would disappear only to come home at night for a few hours, there was a policeman I can remember as if it was today: Mr. Maciejewski. In terms of appearance he reminded me of Pilsudski, for he had a similar walrus mustache. He'd meet me on the street and say, "Poor child, you haven't seen your father for a long time, have you? Maybe you know when he's coming back? When is daddy going to be home?" Several times my father was in jail in Stanislawow. I visited him there with my mother. We went by train, and then walked or took a carriage to the jail which was certainly not situated in some isolated place. Well, and I remember when my father was taken to Bereza. He was taken in the evening. It was around my birthday, some time in November. Next day my mother woke me up at dawn and we went to the police station. My grandmother was already there. There was a carriage. We stood on the street. They brought out my father and another man? I don't know who that was? both of them in handcuffs. And then, I remember my grandmother, who threw herself at the police like a lioness: how dare they treat my father like that, handcuffed, like a criminal! This is one of the images still very strong in my mind: my grandmother with dark hair and then, cut, and my grandmother gray-haired very

soon afterwards. My father spent eleven months in Bereza. My father's imprisonments were very hard for my mother. She was very scared. She had no profession, she was totally dependent. In 1937, I sent to President Moscicki my picture attached to my grade report from the 1st grade; I remember it was a very good report. I asked could I please have my daddy back. Some months later, my father came back home. After the war, some of those who spent time with my father in Bereza, wrote memoirs. It was expected of him to write one, too. He said to me then, "You know, Son, I don't feel like going back to that. Let them only note the name and dates in the index?"