

Raja Szyfman



I don't know exactly when this picture was taken, sometime in the 1920s, in Lodz. It shows Raja Szyfman (nee Pikielna), my father's sister. She married Leon Szyfman, who was a doctor in Lodz. He was drafted into the army in 1939. He was held POW in an Oflag, and that probably saved him his life. After the war he moved to Paris for some time but soon left for Israel. He was a Zionist even before the war. Raja and Leon had two daughters, Nusia and Inia. They were slightly older than me. In 1962, Szyfman published a book in Israel, in Hebrew: 'Got My Whole Life Ahead.' It contained translations of the letters his daughters wrote him during his Oflag imprisonment. Leon

had suffered from depression before the war, and they tried to lift his spirits by writing him. There's a Xerox of one of the letters and a card sent from Poniadow. Here's a fragment of a letter written 9th August 1940: 'We're sending our beloved Daddy a photo of us playing volleyball. My face is in the shadow, and Inia is standing in the middle. We kiss your little nose, moustache and those sweet eyes of yours. We're outside our house on the corner of Zielna and Chmielna.' That means they certainly were in the Warsaw ghetto by then. The last letter was sent from Poniadow, I guess. Szyfman's daughters wrote: 'Dearest, beloved Daddy, we received a card from you yesterday, and a letter a couple of days ago. I haven't written from here yet as we didn't have the forms, and it's forbidden to write too much anyway. We live in a room together with Stefania [a lady whom the girls knew].' I don't know who this Stefania was. Not everything in these letters is clear to me anyway. 'We have very good conditions here. Stefania is very kind to us, she's really sweet. We'd love it if you could drop her a line or two. We're healthy, we work, and it's really very good here. The countryside is beautiful, woods, fields, and meadows. We hope for the best and we're filled with faith, just hold on, Daddy, and believe we're going to be together, all of us. Lots of kisses, your longing Inia.' 'Beloved, sweetest Daddy-pie, today I got yet another letter from you. Sending letters is a bit tricky here. So don't you be upset by the frequent lack of news. It's much better for us here than in Warsaw. The living conditions are great, we're very well fed. Trust us, we're strong, and hope for the best. Our health is good and spirits high. Daddy, I'm not making this up just to put your mind at ease, promise. I've got my whole life ahead. I have lots of energy today to fight and the health to enjoy it. I want to get letters from you that are not sad, that are full of anxiety, but also of strength and hope. We'll build us a life, come what may. Waiting for your letter, your N.' Iza de Neyman, whom I've already mentioned, told me about Niusia and Inia. She said there was a chance to get them out of the camp. Someone who came to take them decided he could only get one of them out, otherwise the risk would be too great. They refused. And they both died. One of my cousins reported that to Yad Vashem, told them about their solidarity. He informed them that the girls were killed in the Lodz ghetto and that's not true. They'd never been there. I don't know where Raja and her daughters died.