

Ferenc Sandor's Grandfather Ferenc Rosenthal



Ferenc Rosenthal, my grandfather. He was a brother of Cecilia, my great grandmother, and this rather unfortunate thing happened: he married his own niece, my great grandmother's daughter, a very beautiful young girl. But then my granddad was a full-fledged schoolteacher, and when he took fancy to Janka, the 17-year-old niece of his, the poor creature was duly married to the schoolteacher. I never knew my grandfather because he was born in 1849 and he was sensible enough to die in due course in 1913. My grandparents married in 1893 in Sopron, and that's where they lived. Only one child was born to them, my mother. It was a pretty unlucky kind of business.

The bridegroom was 25 years older than the bride. And Grandmother wanted to kill herself, by jumping out of the window, on the first night of her marriage. It was typical of my grandfather, Ferenc Rosenthal, that in the Neolog school where he worked, the word cheder (a Jewish religious primary school attended only by the children of the Orthodox) was considered a dirty word. In Sopron there was both a Neolog school and an Orthodox one. Well, some supervisor remarked: "This is not a school, this is a cheder." A word of abuse, it was. And so my Grandfather retorted: "Yes, schools will become cheders if they have directorates like ours." Grandfather was an orphan. He took an unusual career path to become a schoolteacher. One year he would work regularly as a private tutor in the service of a particular family. Then the following year he would study at college. They must have lived in extreme poverty when he was a child. He was raised by his elder brother. As a young boy he was supposed to eat a variety of foods, but they usually had nothing but bread. He would ask his brother, "Please, give me something to eat!" "You want bread and jam?" "No, I don't want bread, give me something to eat." He was craving for something, it could have been meat or fruit, I cannot tell, but he said: "Give me something!" "Bread and lard? You want bread and lard." "Not bread, I want something to eat." He got nothing else. He was twenty-four when he got his degree. The general nickname for teachers in those days was "light" or "lamp." People called my grandfather was that. He told my grandmother that he once met an upper class Jew who remarked: "I wear velvet and you wear rags, yet you are the one called 'the lamp!'" Grandfather lived completely in the spirit of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. When Grandfather was about three or four years old, the Emperor Franz Joseph stopped in Sopron on his way somewhere. They lifted him above the crowd, and he yelled, "Uncle Emperor, Uncle Emperor!" The story goes that Franz Josef even waved back to him, but, of course, one cannot be sure of that. My grandfather wrote reviews of performances staged at the theatre in Sopron. I had the chance to read a few of them. And if the prima donna happened to show her ankles in some performance, he went to see that play thirty times in a row. He must have been a man of brains for sure.