

Antonina Kleinberg



This is my grandma, Antonina Kleinberg (nee Kirschner). The photo must have been taken by my Grandpa Wilhelm in his atelier in Cracow, sometime in the 1920s.

My grandmother, Antonina, nee Kirschner, was born in Cracow in around 1869. She had a beautiful voice, and in her unmarried days sang in the city choir, 'Echo,' which performed in all sorts of institutions, including churches. Grandma was well known for her beautiful voice among young people in Cracow. She had a huge repertoire of songs, from the songs of Niewiadomski, Chopin and

Moniuszko to folk songs, often witty. Grandma had a sharp tongue altogether. I'm 80 years old now, but Grandma's songs are still with me to this day.

Granddad and Grandma Kleinberg got married in the early 1890s and went to live just below Wawel Hill, on Na Groblach Square. It was a large tenement house built at the beginning of the 19th century. My grandparents had three rooms, plus a vestibule and a bathroom. They had electricity, and hot and cold running water. The apartment was terribly cluttered and very cramped, because in those three rooms even up to ten people lived in the last years - my grandparents, their six children, and then also my mother with her husband and me.

I was born in my grandparents' apartment and lived there for the first five years of my life. I remember that in the living room, which was my grandparents' bedroom, above their marital bed, in plush frames of a dirty green color, hung two portraits, daguerreotypes of Chopin and Mickiewicz. My grandparents' neighborhood was mixed Polish and Jewish. There were a few Jews in the same house; I vaguely remember shouts in Yiddish. Before the war my grandparents moved to Sarego Street, to no. 14, into two tiny rooms, so they were living very close to Grandma and Grandpa Keiner.

The Kleinbergs, like the Keiners, weren't particularly religious. It was more tradition that they respected. Granddad Kleinberg went to Tempel Synagogue on Miodowa Street two or three times a year. But he would stroll over there more as if he was going to a Greek Agora, to meet friends.

My grandparents didn't eat kosher food. Grandma Antonina loved cooking and made wonderful traditional Jewish dishes, but they were treated more as delicacies, and weren't kosher. I don't remember there being a traditional Sabbath at my grandparents'. I remember how Granddad Wilhelm's father, my great-grandfather, once paid a visit to Cracow. He came from Drogobych. He was a very aged man, he had a long, white beard, as wide as a spade. He certainly observed all the religious laws, but his son didn't.