

Julian Gringras



This is a photograph of me from around 1936, probably taken in Kielce. I was a student of the Warsaw Polytechnic at the time.

My future brother-in-law, Mosze Baum, and I sat for the Polytechnic. Why? I don't know what drove me. 180 boys sat for the first year, about 10 percent of whom were Jews. So something in the way of numerus clausus did exist. Not nullus but clausus.

I came to Warsaw in 1931 or 1932 and we took a lodging, a room with Madame Fürst. I think Mrs. Fürst was a Jew. She was round about 60 or so then.

She was a peculiar person, originally came from Germany, spoke fluent German, good Polish, sometimes told these not particularly refined anecdotes, a bit coarse.

Our floor was the 6th floor, a little room. It was on the main street, Marszałkowska. In the courtyard, of course, not at the front, but in the courtyard, no elevator, but we had a superb view from there.

From our window you could see the Cedergren, the former telegraphic switchboard on Zielna Street, it's the Nissenbaum Foundation today. And we used to flirt with the telephonists through the window, at a distance of a good 100 meters.

I didn't have much of a social life during my studies. Those matters connected with politics were very absorbing. I came into contact with the socialist organization OMS Zycie at the Polytechnic.

Both Jews and Poles belonged to Zycie; the Poles were usually from proletarian backgrounds, as you used to say. Later on I was also a member of the Communist Union of Polish Youth.

At the polytechnic in Warsaw anti-Semitism began to spread gradually under Pilsudski's rule. The origins of that anti-Semitism go back to the time of the Polish-Soviet War [1920].

The Jews were resented for having welcomed the Bolsheviks so enthusiastically in many small towns, which is quite probable given the poverty and misery of the Jews.

Sometime after the death of Pilsudski, and very quickly after 1936, when Nazism was spreading fast and furiously in Germany, anti-Semitism spread simultaneously in Poland.

I remember there was a point when we were thrown out of the Polytechnic. Młodzież Wszechpolska - Pan-Polish Youth. We were pushed out: both Jews and so-called communists - Poles who defended those Jews - pushed out of the gate of the Polytechnic.

As the police didn't intervene, because the police had no right of entry on the polytechnic campus, it all went off without interference, and the rector was around, and calmed things down, but didn't intervene. He was called Warchalowski.

Then there were incidents like this in Warsaw: students from student fraternities had sticks, in these sticks they would set razor blades, and they would hit people on the back of the head.

I remember a friend of mine, Czerskier, came to me from the Polytechnic. We dressed his wound. He had this terribly thick mop of hair and a cut in the back of his head made with a razor blade.