

Wacek Kornblum's Aunt Chawcia With A Cousin Of Hers



This is my father's sister Chawcia with her cousin, who's name I don't know. She looks like 18 years old, so the photograph must have been made in 1910s.

There's an dedication written in Yiddish on the back of the photograph: 'Tsum andenk fur mayn libe un tayre shveger, brider un plamiennitse fun zayer shvester Khava Kornblum: Oh! Vi git iz volt gevezen ven mir Amain!' - For remembrance for my beloved and dear brothers-in-laws, brothers and relatives from their sister Chawa Kornblum. Oh! How good it would be if we'd be together, I always want to hug you, oh little brother, brother of mine!'

Father had a couple of sisters and a brother. The youngest sister, Father's favorite who he used to always help, was Aunt Chawcia, that is Chawa. Her husband Benjamin was also a Kornblum, he was Father's cousin. They had two sons. One was Icchak, the other one Kuba Akiwa. Icchak was three-four years older than me, and Kuba was my age, my best friend who kept getting me in trouble. They lived in Warsaw, on 17 Panska Street. It wasn't a religious family, but a traditional one, they had a kosher kitchen. Aunt's husband was very active in Zionism. Kuba used to go to a Hebrew school, and probably belonged to Betar. They had a piggy-bank for Karen Kayemet at home and his father, whenever he could, would give money. My father didn't like it, Mom even less. Izaak was very talented. He used to play the violin, paint. He used to go to the Pilsudski School of Lithography on Konwiktorska Street in Warsaw. He also sang in a choir, in the Large Synagogue on Tlomackie, and whenever he had shows, the entire family tried to get there. I remember that synagogue as a large palace, staircase going up, lights. I felt strange there, a bit uneasy.

My best friend was Kuba Kornblum, the son of Aunt Chawcia and Uncle Benjamin. He used to come over to our place, I used to go there, we played together, together we constructed the first radio detector with headphones, which was a big achievement. We used to tease Kuba's older brother, Izaak - we often broke his violin. We used to play with photographic film. We played it as follows. On Sliska Street there were cobblestones, we had pieces of a photographic film with five frames on each, and two coins. We'd throw the coin on the ground, between the cobblestones, and we had to toss the second coin as close as possible to the first one. We measured the distance with our fingers. The thumb and the little finger, that was the largest distance, but if you could touch both coins with the thumb, then you'd win most. The smallest bid was five frames.

Some summers Kuba came with us for vacation. Once Dad did it so that Aunt Chawcia and Izaak came as well.

When the war started and the bombings begun, we went to Aunt Dobcia, another sister of Dad's, on Panska, she had a large apartment. There were lots of foreign people who didn't live in those buildings, but who, like us, were running away from other parts of the city, but nobody asked any questions. We all went to the basement, because they announced a bombing, and a bomb fell on that house. I know I lost consciousness. Everything went dark, it must have taken a while, when I woke up the basement was full of black dust, and people were pushing their way towards the exit to the stairway, I instinctively got out, and then heard some woman scream: 'Vu iz mayn man un mayne kinder?' [Yiddish: Where is my husband and my children?]. And it was my mom. Then Dad showed up and Borus and Estusia, and it also turned out that in the same house there was Aunt Chawcia with her husband, Kuba and Izaak. And when we met at the gate, it turned out Izaak wasn't able to walk. Aunt Chawcia said there was a wooden exit door, and it hit him in the head. And when we all got outside to the street, Aunt Chawcia decided to go to Aunt Frania's on Wielka Street, and Dad and Mom decided to go back to Niska. We parted and from later stories we know that Izaak died two days later.