

Wacek Kornblum And His Relatives On Vacation



This is me, my cousins Izaak and Renia, my mom, my cousin Kuba and his mother, aunt Chawcia. I don't know who is the women behind me and the girl with the flowers. We are in Miedzeszyn on a vacation. I'm fat here, I always have been a bit fatty. People even used to call me fatboy. I remember it. And there's this talented Izaak. Because his brother Kuba was a rascal; you can see it.

Almost every year we used to go for holidays with the family, usually to the so called Linia - a row of tourist-health resort towns located on the line Warsaw-Otwock. We went to Otwock, Falenica, once to Swider, many times to Miedzeszyn, once to Jablonna - summer resort towns near Warsaw. And once to Kazimierz.

We used to go for a month, sometimes two. Estusia, mom's niece who used to live with us, would come with us, of course. Once she stayed behind on the train station, she didn't manage to get on the train, and it was a big fuss, was she going to come on the next train or not. She did. Some summers Kuba came with us, too. Once Dad did it so that Aunt Chawcia and Izaak came as well.

Renia was the third daughter of my mother's sister Chana. She was a very pretty woman, who lived with her parents, married, before the war, Elek, who was mildly cross-eyed. Elek was a taxi driver, when he was to take a test to become a taxi driver, I questioned him about where what streets were, and he would tell me off hand how to get there. He used to drive a German car, a Steier.

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.

Kuba Kornblum, the son of Aunt Chawcia and Uncle Benjamin, was my best friend. He used to come over to our place, I used to go there, we played together.

When the war started and the bombings begun, we went to Aunt Dobcia, an 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.