

Cecylia Krasucka



This is my grandmother, Cecylia Krasucka, nee Schoenfeld, my mother's mother. This photo was taken in Warsaw in the 1930s.

Grandma came from a prosperous Jewish family from Lowicz or the environs of that town, which is on the Western fringes of the Mazovia region.

The family business was processing industry. They owned flourmills and distilleries as early as in the 18th century.

At that time, grain was exported to America via Germany.

In the 1830s my grandma's father, that is my great-grandfather, decided to move to Hamburg to sell grain and flour to America without German intermediaries.

In this way the Schoenfelds acquired a vast fortune. My grandma was also born there as 'Fraeulein' Schoenfeld.

Having made their fortune, the Schoenfelds returned to Warsaw.

When the family was living in Germany, my grandma resolved to get a medical degree.

And in fact, she was already well advanced in her medical studies when she had to interrupt them because of her family's return to Warsaw.

While she didn't finish university in Germany, she nevertheless came back to Poland convinced that for the Jews there was nothing better than Germany and that no good could come to Poland from the East.

My mother also adopted those views of hers. That was the cause of the incredible tragedy Grandma experienced on hearing the news about Hitler and developments in Germany, which I remember witnessing as an already reflective teenager. She declared that such a thing was impossible; she would read the papers and burst into tears.

She couldn't comprehend what was going on over there. Couldn't accept the facts.

I don't know if Grandma had any siblings; anyhow, she inherited the Schoenfeld fortune.

Grandpa and Grandma Krasucki lived in the most prestigious part of Warsaw - on the corner of Nowowiejska and Sluzewska Streets.

Nowowiejska was an almost fairy-tale street of the Warsaw of the time - beautiful tenement buildings.

My grandparents had a six-bedroom apartment on the third floor, which also included a maid's room, a huge kitchen, and a bathroom.

Many years had to pass before I learnt to appreciate it.

The apartment was fitted with beautiful furniture, there was a grand piano, and fine paintings hung on the walls.

When I would drop in to gobble down my 'befshytychek' [literally 'little steak tartare'], which Grandma used to prepare for me, I ate it with exquisite cutlery; when the family sat down around a large expandable table, the table was set with the best china.

I used to drop by my grandparents' to plunk around on their grand piano.

For a time, one of the rooms was rented by Leon Kruczkowski, the writer, who liked me very much and used to lend me books.

Grandma spoke excellent German, like a native; her Polish was also very good, but it grew richer by the year, which means that her Polish was 'in statu nascendi' [coming to being], that she was in the process of learning it.

She spoke a slightly different variant of Yiddish, since I remember that during their conversations Grandpa kept uttering a kind of 'eh' sound, and Grandma had to repeat what she had just said a second time.