

Saia Grunberg As A Prisoner Of War



In this photo you can see my father, Saia Grunberg: he is the second from the right, in the back row. The photo was taken during World War I, when he fell prisoner to the Austro-Hungarians and had to stay in Trentschin-Teplitz, in what is today Trenčianske Teplice, in Slovakia. I think the man in the middle of the back row was the one who supervised them, because he isn't wearing the white collar the prisoners had to wear.

From what my father told my mother when he came back in 1918, he was treated very well as a prisoner; he had to stay on a large farm, and he helped the owner with his bookkeeping, because the owner of the estate had a sugar factory and he needed my father's help. He had a daughter, and from what my mother told me, the owner kind of hoped my father would stay after the war was over, to marry his daughter; he liked my father very much!

My father, Saia Grunberg, was born in Iasi in 1887. He spoke Romanian, and he studied at a business high school in Iasi. He worked as an accountant and as a proxy for another Jew named Horovitz. I never knew my father, he died in 1921, when I wasn't even a year old. Everything I know about him is from stories my mother told me.

One year after my parents got married, in 1915, my elder sister Angela was born. My father had already left for war; in 1914, he was drafted to the Romanian army. During World War I he fell prisoner to the Austro-Hungarians, in Slovakia. My mother didn't know where he was for a while, she was desperate, so she kept on going to Bucharest, to the army's general staff, and she persisted until she found out that he was alive. My father came home in 1918.

My father spoke Italian very well, and when he came back from the war, he was sent by his employer to Italy, and, with his gift for languages, he became fluent in Italian in six weeks. So those Italian partners, who were in the weaving industry, grew interested in him, and fond of him as well, so they gave him a new job, supervising their new representation in Galati.

My father set up the business with the help of two of his Social Democrat friends, he had no money of his own to invest. This was his occupation between 1918 and 1921, but nothing much came out of it, because he soon died. He fell ill with flu, got a septicemia and died. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Iasi, named Pacurari; my maternal grandfather recited Kaddish for him.