

Michal Friedman With Friends



This is me with my two friends. The photo was taken in Kovel in 1929 or 1930. The first guy on the left is my friend Wolk. And the one in the center is Marder. We are sitting in front of the Marder's house. It was just before they emigrated to Palestine. I was a very good soccer player; I was often carried off the field on the shoulders of my teammates and fans. I played on the Hasmonei team. That team was initially called Maccabi, but later it split. It was the principal Jewish sports team. There was also the Sztern team, and Gwiazda, affiliated with the Bund. There were several Polish teams: Sokol, which was later converted into PKS, the Police Sports Club; and WKS, or the Military Sports Club. In my soccer team, the Hasmonei, the goalkeeper was a Pole, Kola Chmielarski, who spoke Yiddish as well as I or the rest of us did. Once I met a Polish girl, a goy, and as they say, I dated her for a while. Not for a very long time but long enough to fall into sin. She lived in the other Kovel; to get there you had to go through a tunnel. One day, I was walking her home at a late hour, and when we were near the tunnel, we saw points of light - someone was smoking cigarettes. She

says to me that I shouldn't go on, because they'll give me a beating. Well, I remember that I felt I couldn't show that I was afraid, stupid as I was; so I told her: 'No, I will walk you to your very house.' We're walking on boldly, they challenge me at first, but after a moment they say: 'oh, it's you! The soccer player!' They slapped me on the back; we talked a bit, I was offered a cigarette, and took it, even though I didn't smoke. A yeshivah graduate headed one such group in Kovel's underworld; Zajdel was his name. He was a very romantic figure; he had great success with women. I remember him as a smart, well-educated man. Whenever there was a major robbery, the victims would turn to him rather than to the police, and after he was paid a considerable fee, the lost property would materialize. He must have been 40 when the war broke out. Naturally, he was killed during it. And there was another one, Sieroszewski. And for a time I was a hero among those petty criminals when we played in the district soccer league and kept beating Polish clubs, such as the WKS (Military Sports Club) or Sokol. On one occasion I scored three goals against the hated military club, Halerczyk; that is called a hat trick in soccer jargon. Those guys from the underworld always attended our matches. So after that hat trick they came to me right away: brought some beer, of course; tossed me in the air and yelled: Molodets! Attaboy!