

Jozef Cohn (or Kon)



This is a studio portrait of my father, Jozef Cohn or Kon. It was taken in Warsaw in 1916.

My father had a lot of brothers and sisters, but none of them survived the war. The situation was very complicated there. My grandparents had been married previously and both their spouses had died. They got married around 1895. My father had three brothers and sisters just from his father's side and three from his mother's. Then they also had my father and his brother. There was a big age difference between the stepbrothers and sisters. I don't think they all lived together.

I don't know any stories about my parents' childhoods. My mother studied chemistry at Warsaw University, but she didn't finish, but my father, who studied at the Warsaw Polytechnic, did finish. I think my mother attended all her classes but she didn't get her certificate. I think she and my father met during their studies.

My parents got married in a synagogue. That was an exception, in a sense. They weren't religious at all; they weren't even believers. Perhaps someone wanted it, it was somebody's wish - I can't say why it happened. But that has stuck in my mind. I remember that it was something of a curiosity in my parents' circles. Once, a friend of my father's came to Warsaw, and I remember that when he met my mother, he said, 'This is the beautiful Bela who got married in a synagogue!'

After their wedding and before I was born, at the beginning of the 1920s, my parents went to France for six months and then came back. My father even wanted to get a foothold somehow, because there was some distant family there and quite a few people had stayed in France. The family had moved to France gradually, over two to three generations. But my father either couldn't

find a good job, or didn't have one at all, and my parents came back to Warsaw. My mother didn't work. My father worked for his stepbrother, Stanislaw, who owned a private firm. His line of work was galvanizing technology, which is electrical metal coating. My father was a specialist at that.