

Frantisek Robert Kraus



In this photograph my father, Frantisek Robert Kraus, is 15 years old. It was taken in Prague in 1918.

My father was born on 14th October 1903 in Prague, into a traveling salesman's family. As he himself once wrote, he lived a relatively idyllic childhood, on the slum-clearance and demolition lots of the Jewish Town, in those days Prague's fifth quarter. As was common back then in so-called better Jewish families, he came by his elementary education at the Piarist convent school on Panska Street, then continued at the private high school on Jindriska Street, and then did his graduation exams at the classical high school in the Kinski Palace on the Old Town Square. After his parents divorced he stayed with his mother and had to begin to contribute financially to the household. For a long time this meant the end of his considerations of an academic career, but it did lead him to be a journalist.

Dad was a journalist and writer. He wrote the records of the Kraus family in the form of books in which he reminisces about his family and childhood, though he did also write other people's stories, there are a lot of autobiographical elements in his works. During the time of the First Republic he began working for German Jewish papers, for example for the famous Prager Tagblatt, Prager Presse and others. He had contacts in Czech intellectual circles. He really did know all the famous figures of the time. He knew Franz Kafka and Jaroslav Hasek. His literary paragon, family friend and lifelong teacher at the same time was the 'raging reporter' Egon Erwin Kisch. At one time my father even lived at Kisch's place, and they became very good friends. But later, in 1948 they parted ways in a matter of opinion, because my father was a convinced leftist social democrat, while Kisch remained a Communist even after 1948, and approved of the putsch. From that time onward my father and Kisch never spoke again.