

Maria Donathova



In this photo you can see my paternal grandmother, Maria Donathova, nee Polacsek, who came from Zalaegerszeg, Hungary. The photo was taken in Zilina in the 1930s. My grandfather, Zigmund Donath, worked in the Ganz factory in Budapest. He found a wife in Budapest, my grandma, who he brought back to Zilina. Grandma came from a family of eleven children. Her family lived in very, very modest circumstances. This I can judge, because grandma even worked as a servant for one family in Budapest. About her siblings I only know that one of her brothers was a 'kalauz' [conductor] on a streetcar. They were very proud of him, that he had made it that far. The beginnings of my grandma's life in Zilina were very hard for her, because she didn't know even a word of Slovak. My grandfather tried to help her learn Slovak as best he could, but somehow it

didn't go very well for her. He also brought in a young maid from Liptov, so she could learn Slovak from her, but the opposite happened and very soon the maid spoke better Hungarian than my grandma Slovak. There was one cute story about my grandmother that was told in Zilina. When my grandmother could already get by with her Slovak, she went out to the market. In those days, fowl pest was common in the Zilina region. It used to be a custom to bring live poultry to the market. Well, and she saw some farmwoman selling a goose that had already been killed and cleaned. She became suspicious, whether that goose hadn't died of the pest. She tried to find out with her broken Slovak, and began to ask the farmwoman, 'Lady, does that goose kick?' Meaning did it kick the bucket, that's how she meant it. And the woman answered, 'Well, my lady, I'm old, gray, but I've never seen a goose kicking!' So this was a story they told about my grandma in Zilina.