

Artur Simko



This is a picture of my father Artur Simko, taken when he was in the army during World War I.

My father was born in 1892 in Dolne Chlebany, a village in western Slovakia, which belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time. He served in the army during World War I. He made a lot of good friends in the army, but many of those fine young men died on some cruel and senseless front, somewhere in Europe. My father survived, thank God.

He studied in Budapest. That's also this little curiosity. Jews were usually faithful to the regime that was in power at the time. Back then it was Austro-Hungary. My father was somewhat of an exception, he didn't fit into the usual Jewish stereotype. He got into Slovak society, and was a pan-Slavist. Sometimes he even had problems because of it, as my grandma, his mother told me that once some people came to see her and said to her: 'If you don't do something about that Artur of yours, if you don't rein him in, we'll have to put him in jail.' Actually, he was a dissident even back then. A Slovak against Hungarians. That's really quite atypical among Jews.

As I've mentioned, my father was already a pan-Slavist during the time of Austro-Hungary. Then after the front, after World War I, also atypical for a Jew in Topolcany, in Koruna, he founded the Slovak National Council [Slovak National Council: the name of several high-level organs of various types during the history of Slovakia. See also - Editor's note]. Koruna was the most elegant place there, a café. There were lots of Jews and Hungarians in high functions in Hungary, who were saying goodbye to Austro-Hungary and were still singing the Hungarian anthem. In the 'next room over' my father was founding the Slovak National Council. My father's entire tendency was pro-Slovak, I'd say. For example, when during the war they wanted us to save ourselves from the Holocaust in Hungary, my father was against it. That was one line. The second line was social democracy [Czechoslovak Socially Democratic Labor Party - Editor's note]. He was on good terms with the minister of justice, Deder. My father was probably the only leftist judge in the region. It wasn't usual for judges. They were all national socialists, in short they were in the 'butcher parties', they weren't in leftist parties. My father was this solo player, this black sheep. During the First Republic the Social Democrats were very active.