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Interview with Julio and Nusha Gotlib

Language: Spanish & English

Summary

Julio and Nusha Gotlib share some of their memories about Shmerke Kaczerginski, who died in Argentina in a plane crash in 1954.

Julio arrived in Argentina in 1946 and met Kaczerginski in 1951-2, in a cafeteria in Buenos Aires called "Comercial." Many Jewish immigrants used to go to this cafeteria. Life was hard for Kaczerginski in Argentina, economically. He used to write and give lectures to Jewish communities around the country.

Kaczerginski told Julio anecdotes about World War 2. He told him that he hid in the forest in Poland with Russian partisans and begged for money. He didn't know Polish well and pretended to be deaf-muted. Sometimes he slept in a stable with horses. This happened before Kaczerginski went to the ghetto.

The last time Julio saw Kaczerginski was in 1954. Kaczerginski was giving a lecture in San Juan, 150 km North of Mendoza, where there used to be a relatively big Jewish community. Julio was also in San Juan that day, selling clothes, and they had dinner together. They also met a few days later in Mendoza, where Kaczerginski had to give another lecture. The Jewish community of Mendoza had around 2000 people at the time. Julio was supposed to go back to Buenos Aires with Kaczerginski by plane, but changed his mind in the last minute and took the train instead. Julio found out that the plane had crashed and that Kaczerginski had died in the crash when he arrived to Buenos Aires the following morning.

Nusha thinks that Kaczerginski's death was fate. Nusha had a sister. They were both in the ghetto, and Nusha survived but her sister didn't. Nusha spoke perfect Polish and learned Yiddish in Argentina. Kaczerginski used to talk to her in a very bad Polish.

Kaczerginski was from Vilna and was among partisans who were mostly Russians. Julio was also with mostly Russian partisans, and was the only Jewish in his group.

Julio and Nusha went to Kaczerginski's funeral. Kaczerginski was highly-regarded among the Jewish intellectual community in Argentina.