

Fela Szwarc With Her Parents



This is an informal snapshot of my family - first from left is my mama, Maria Szwarc, nee Biber, second from left is my papa, Benjamin Szwarc, and my stepsister Fela Szmulewicz, nee Szwarc, is sitting second from left.

I do not know who took this picture. It survived the war due to a fortunate incident: before the war, my mother had mailed it to her sister, Ruth, who lived in the USA.

My mother was my father's second wife. The first wife had died. I don't know anything about her.

My father had three children from that first marriage: Sala, Fela and Hersz. These children were all placed in an orphanage in Lodz - apparently, my father just couldn't manage on his own with three children.

It wasn't until after my parents got married that these kids returned home. And I was raised together with them. All three completed elementary school.

These were schools for Jewish children, and the only difference from Polish schools was that Saturdays were free, and that Judaism was the religion taught at school.

My older stepsister was named Sala, and the younger one was Fela, and the step-brother's name was Hersz. We were step-siblings, but this did not make any difference, we didn't feel it that way. They addressed my mother as 'auntie.'

Fela, was twelve years older than me. She was a seamstress. Before the war she fell in love with Henryk Szmulewicz, but she left him and married a Jew from an aristocratic family, meaning that they were educated and wealthy.

His name was Pawel Merenlender. People called him 'Polek.' I suspect that she did it partly out of snobbery. Pawel's brother was a lawyer, and there were a few doctors in the family, too. Pawel worked in an office.

Fela gave birth to a child, but from the very beginning it suffered from epilepsy. This child died in the ghetto in 1940, when it was less than two years old.

Fela stayed with her husband for another year or two after that, but she'd had enough. She left him, and went back to her first love, to Heniek. And she was with him until his death.