

Wacek Kornblum's Father Szlomo And His Second Wife Lonia



This is my dad and step-mom in Pulawy in 1931, before my brother Borus was born.

My parents got married probably in 1921. Since I was born in 1926, I suspect they spent those few years in Warsaw and then went to Paris, where the family of my uncle, Father's brother, was living. They went there to work, because they had a place to stay there. I know that Mom died in Paris. I know she died of tuberculosis. I know that after Mom died Father gave me, a few-month-old baby, to the nuns, to some convent in Strasburg, apparently there was no one to take care of me, and probably after about half a year Father took me back and brought to Warsaw. All these memories are based on unfinished allusions, by Mom's sister, Aunt Mania Zamosc from Mszczonow, who lived in Warsaw.

Some time around 1929 Dad got married the second time, to Lonia Mileband and I used to call her my mom.

My dad was anti-religious. Never in my life did I go to a service in a synagogue, not even on Yom Kippur. There were holidays present in our life, because there were generally holidays in the Jewish world: Rudele closed her store, Dad didn't work, the shop was closed. And we went to visit the family.

I need to say that Dad was by nature a very good person. Very sincere, warm-hearted, very sensitive, and - it stuck with me since I was very young - he always helped people. He used to help other artists, kept giving to Aunt Chawcia, organized bread delivery for Jewish writers in the ghetto. In the later period in the ghetto, when there was horrible poverty, and children wandered about on streets and died on sidewalks, they used to also beg. A young boy used to come to Niska where we lived and shout: 'A stikele broyt', 'A piece of bread!'. And Father once brought him upstairs, fed him, found a flat box with a string that he could hang on his neck, and I don't know how, but bought him a box of candy to sell. And he came by a couple times, and finally he came once and said he'd eaten all the candy.

I remained in the ghetto with Dad until 1943. Then he gave me the money to pay for my girlfriend and I to escape. I never saw him again.

My mom Lonia - Lea Kornblum - nee Mileband, was born in 1900. I knew Lonia wasn't my mom, but I didn't feel it. Mom was a very smart woman. But from the time perspective, I realize I didn't experience true motherly love. I was a bit browbeaten, always very shy. I know that Mother's niece, Estusia, who stayed with us, used to pick on me a bit. And Dad would always get very upset about it, I remember. Once in a summer resort she made me a hardboiled or soft-boiled egg - not what I liked, another time in a row. When I protested, Dad got upset, he was drinking a glass of tea with milk. He didn't finish, threw the glass over the porch. Mom didn't say anything.

In our house we spoke Polish with Mom, Jewish with dad. Parents spoke usually Jewish to each other. Mom was from Bundist circles, but I can't say she was an activist. It was rather a group of friends, well-wishers of Bund.

One day an order came to our shop, that whoever has a pass must go to Majzelsa Street. It turned out there would be a selection there. It was 27th August 1942.

They set us all up in a square. Mom was a terrible coward, was always afraid of something. Dad wasn't with us there, he was in his shop on Nalewki. And Mom stood with Estusia at the back. And I stood in the first row. Two Germans stood before us. Two people from the shop management stood beside them with pieces of paper in their hands - they had lists. And they would call out a name and that person would run across to the other side of the street and a new block of people would form there. Who were staying in the ghetto to keep working in the shop. At some point I realized they read the same names twice, because they called and nobody would come up, I realized they wanted to save some people this way. And after some name there was such a moment of silence, and I jumped ahead to that other group. When they finished the selection, all those 'chosen ones' were pushed to a backyard of some building, they opened the gate, the police surrounded us, people ran up to those policemen, because they knew that among the detained were their relatives

who didn't make the selection. I had some money on me, because we all had some money then just in case, I got a hold of one and said: 'Listen, there is my mom and a cousin, take this money and give it to them'. And I gave him all I had, I'm certain he didn't pass it to them. I didn't know where to go, I went to Nalewki to the apartment near Dad's shop.

Now I think my parents knew something was about to happen with that selection, because Borus didn't go to Ogródowa then. He usually went with Mom to the shop. He slept in the apartment on Nalewki. In 'our' apartment there were still beds and bed linens, before we went to Ogródowa with Mom and Estusia on that unfortunate day, they decided that Borus would stay and we covered him with the bed linens in the bed. I remember Dad was worried he wouldn't be able to breathe.

I went back, the door was locked, the key was taken away so I couldn't get open and inside, I sat on the stairs and waited, maybe they'll open. Dad learnt earlier Mom and Estusia were taken away. Uncle tried to get something in motion, some policeman apparently went to Umschlagplatz. Too late. Dad came back, I told him how it was, we opened the door, uncovered my brother and he started to scream: 'where's Mom', but he understood. He was in despair. We went back to Niska, to the bunker. There were only: Dad, Wlodek, and me. And I remember how Dad just sat alone and cried.