

Franciszka Torunczyk With Her Daughter Ewa And Her Life Partner Filip Ben



This is my sister Franciszka. The photo was taken when she was about 30 years old, so in the 1940s in Lodz. I don't know who took it, maybe some friend?

My sister was born in 1916. The name on her birth certificate was Frajda, but later on, perhaps this started at school or in college, she was only called Franka.

My sister attended a Jewish gymnasium, which was located on Piramowicza Street. Because classes were taught in 2 languages at that school: in Hebrew and in Polish, she transferred to Hochsteinowa's before the final exams. She passed her finals at Hochsteinowa's - where I did.

She later left for Nancy in France, for university. She studied dentistry there. At that time Jews could not enter university in Poland. They weren't accepted for medicine, or dentistry, or for many other faculties.

So everyone, my sister's age and my age, studied abroad. I only know one doctor Winer, who was accepted at university in Warsaw or Poznan.

Going abroad was not a problem for my sister, because she knew foreign languages well. She knew Hebrew, Polish, German and French. Later she also learned English and Russian.

Unfortunately because of Father's bankruptcy, Franka had to stop her studies, she came back to Lodz. She didn't come to live at home, but rented a room on Gdanska Street.

I don't know how she got money for that. Perhaps someone from the family helped. She started working for a milliner. She made hats, in 1939 she ran away to the east, to Bialystok.

She got married there to an engineer named Torunczyk. He came from a family of assimilated Jews from Lodz. He was a graduate of the Lvov University of Technology. Franka went with him first to Lvov and then, when the Germans were capturing the city, they ran away to Kielce.

In Kielce the Germans were looking for her, because she was helping her family in the ghetto, so she moved to Warsaw. Then she had to leave Warsaw as well.

It was very difficult for her there, she didn't have anyone close there. She went to some country estate, where she stayed until the end of the war. For some time we knew what was going on with her, because she sent us letters.

Actually, those were letters from Bialystok, so that's how we knew she had gotten married. Later we were not in touch with her. I learned about what happened to Franka from what she told us after the war.

After the war I soon found my sister. This happened in quite unexpected circumstances. I went downtown with a physician friend of mine.

At some point she recognized some passerby as a friend of hers from the university in Lvov. He introduced himself as Torunczyk. I knew this name. I knew from my sister's letter that she had married engineer Torunczyk.

He told me his wife's name was Franciszka. I asked him about further details. I found out that got married in Bialystok and so on. This confirmed my suspicion that he was my sister's husband. He told me what her current workplace was - Office for Information and Propaganda, on Traugutta Street.

I went there the next day, in the morning. I sat in front of her door, with the other customers. At some point my sister opened the door. She saw me and she fainted next to that door. She regained

consciousness shortly and she took me to her house.

The first time I went abroad was in 1960, to Paris. I was invited by my sister Franka. When she was still in Warsaw she became involved with Filip Ben. Filip was a Jew, he worked for the French journal 'Le Monde.'

Before she left Poland, my sister worked in the radio, then for 'Czytelnik'. Filip's professional issues were the reason for them leaving the country. My sister's daughter, Ewa, went with her. My sister's husband, engineer Torunczyk, didn't object to Ewa's departure. At that time he was very sick, after his fifth heart attack.

He thought it would be better for Ewa to go with her mother. But my sister never took the name Ben. During the war Filip found himself in Palestine with Anders's army. He was exhausted, dying. An older woman took care of him there.

And he, out of gratitude for her care, married her. He never divorced her. I even suspect that he helped her all that time. When my sister was in Paris she cooperated with 'Kultura' She wrote reviews, I think she used the name Torunczyk.

In the 1970s my sister went to the USA, because Filip took a job there as the 'Le Monde' correspondent at the UN. They lived in New York. They traveled a lot all over the world. They went to Israel, their daughter Ewa studied there for some time.

Filip was also a correspondent in Eastern Europe, so they visited Russia, Romania and other countries of the region many times. And each time they were coming back from Moscow, they would stop in Poland for 2 or 3 days, in a hotel.

I visited them in the States, once. But I never went to Israel. I was supposed to go there for a distant cousin's wedding, but I poured some boiling water on my leg and couldn't go. My sister Franka died in the USA, in 1996.