

The Calmanovici Family



This picture was taken in Sulita; I think it was 1936. These are my mother, Hana Lea Calmanovici, my father, Aizic Calmanovici, me, Rifca Segal, and my little brother, Iosif Calmanovici. I was wearing a dress made from an extremely fine silk, lacquer shoes and white cotton socks. My parents were among the richest in Sulita.

My mother was born on March 3, 1903 in Sulita. People called my mother Anuta, but officially, her name was Hana Lea. My father was born on August 8, 1900. His name was Aizic, but people also called him Mose.

My mother had a dowry, my grandfather was rich, richer than the grandfather from my father's side. And do you know how it was formerly? If the dowry were large, cousins, relatives would marry each other, so that the fortune wouldn't be estranged – such was the notion. But my mother – it's not the fact that she was my mother, yet – was both very beautiful and very smart. And my parents were cousins. You wouldn't believe it, if I told you. My father's mother and my mother's father were brother and sister. And they weren't allowed to get married according to the laws that were in force back then, during the rule of king Mihai. [Ed. note: The ruling of the Romanian kings during these decades is the following: King Ferdinand I. 1914-1927, King Michael 1927-1930, King Carol II. 1930-1940. After King Ferdinand's death in 1927 the Romanian Monarchy goes through private and political crises. Related link: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Romania]. They needed a royal exemption in order for them to get married. For the fact that they were cousins was public knowledge in Sulita. If this were to happen in Bucharest, the people at the registrar's office would have been none the wiser. And then my mother wrote a complaint – or her parents did, I can't say for sure – to the king, and she had to base her argument on the fact that they had lived together. Formerly, sleeping with a man before getting married – oh my, it was a crime. To make love – I won't say to have sex, for I dislike saying that – before the marriage, oh my, it was serious. Especially in a small town. And they were so chaste – that's what they tell me, I wasn't born at that time. And that's how their marriage was approved.

My parents got married in 1927, and I, Rifca Segal, was born in 1928. Officially, my name is Rifca, they named me after a great-grandmother, the mother of my grandmother from my mother's side. But people call me Rica, as Sulita's county chief – his name was Hotupasu – had a daughter whose name was Rica. And my parents were very good friends with the county chief.

My brother was born in 1930, people called him Ioji, but, officially, his name was Iosif. There was this custom, which I see that people in Israel don't observe anymore nowadays, of naming people after the dead. People even paid money in order to have someone named after a dead person. [Editor's note: The custom of paying to a woman to name her newborn after a dead was common. Giving the dead's name to the newborn was even considered as a mitzvah (ritual commandment or generally any act of human kindness.) And so both my aunt, and my uncle from Falticeni, and my father named their son after their father.

My brother didn't go to the faculty. He worked as an assistant in the laboratory of the Botosani mill. At first, he worked there without having any schooling, and they sent him to Iasi to a school for laboratory-assistants to follow some specialization courses and he specialized. He was held in very high esteem. The courses lasted 3 years, but he didn't stay there all the time, he came home, he went there again. He wasn't married. He had a disappointment in his love life. He was engaged to be married. His fiancée received the approval to leave to Israel with her parents, her parents didn't want to leave her here all by herself – for they weren't married, they were only engaged – he was going to leave as well, his request was denied, which is to say his departure wasn't approved. This happened in 1959. Not only his request was denied, people's requests were denied by the dozens. And he didn't leave, after all. But he was the only one of our family who requested permission to leave to Israel, for the sake of his fiancée. He lived in Botosani as well, but we didn't live together.

He died 2 months ago, on June 5, 2006. Ah, how ill he was...