

Wacek Kornblum With His Relatives



This is me, my dad, Szlomo Kornblum, my stepmom Lonia and Beniek Tygiel, Lonia's nephew on our first vacation together in Miedzeszyn, in 1931. My little brother Borus wasn't born yet. I think this was my first photography ever. It was sent to Paris and there it survived the war and came back here. And there's a dedication on the backside. Written by Stefa, my cousin, to Mania, her aunt: 'On this picture, as you recognize, there's Lonia, her husband, who you supposedly dream of (Is he similar?), and our Beniek - you can see how adult is he. And this charming kid is the little son of Lonia's husband.'

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.

Dad was a writer and he wrote a few books. It's not big literature, but it's prose with a large poetic load, so descriptions, accounts of events. He also used to write to Jewish magazines, to Folkshtime, to the newspaper Haynt, to the newspaper Radio, that was an afternoon newspaper, and to the newspaper Moment. He belonged to a Union of Jewish Writers in Warsaw, on 13 Tlomackie Street, where he used to take me to as a child, where Itzik Manger also used to come. Some of Itzik Manger's poems I remember today, and when Father took me there, I used to sit in his lap and recite. I met Itzik Manger later in Israel on 'Di Megle' show, but he was quite old then already and didn't remember anything.

When he was in Paris, he learnt how to make women's handbags. He was very good at it, he used to come up with styles himself. He had a shop that throughout various periods of life was located either in our house or in some rented apartment. For some time even in the house of Aunt Chawcia - Father helped them this way by paying rent, because they were not too well off. Father used to sell [finished] purses to various stores, on Aleje Jerozolimskie, on Marszalkowska Street, where I used to go with him often. But there were various periods, too, sometimes it was better, sometimes it was worse. [When it was] better, [Father] had three, four apprentices.

Before the war Daddy used to obtain leather always from some place in Nalewki, where there were warehouses, we had to bring it and I used to go with Dad, the leather was rolled up in rolls in a brown paper wrap. At home Dad would cut the leather, according to design, and then this leather had to be taken to a special shop where they had special machines that scraped the endings of those pieces so that it was easier to fold and glue them. In the ghetto the leather was cut by a craftsman's widow, who lived on 33 Niska Street, with two children, in very bad conditions, and Dad used to send me there. Whenever I went there, Dad, despite the fact that we didn't have much either in that period, always gave me something to bring them.

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.

My mom Lonia - Lea Kornblum - nee Mileband, was born in 1900. Dad got married to Lonia some time around 1929. I don't have information what school she went to, but she was a teacher before she got married, a home room teacher, and she may have also taught Polish at Korczak's, on

Krochmalna Street. When I was little she didn't work, but later, when we weren't doing too well, she learnt how to make corsets, there were two additional sewing machines at home for Mother. I learnt how to sew and used to help Mom to sew bras, so called full ones, you had to put the cups in first. Later Mom realized it would be better for her to open her own store instead of providing bras to other stores. And she opened a store on Rymarska Street, in the other part of the city there was a dressmaker or a haberdasher. It could have been in 1936, didn't last long. We used to go there some time to visit Mom, My brother Borus was nuts about those visits.

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.

Out of parents of Mom Lonia Mileband I only remember Grandmother, her name was Bube Gele. She was born in Warsaw, I don't know which year. She came from a religious family. I remember her as if through fog, only in bed, because she was sick. Not a small woman, dressed traditionally, in dark colors, she had a white collar. She treated me rather coolly. When I was a very little boy, I remember that whenever she was to visit us on Friday, Mom would quickly light candles, which I couldn't understand, because it was so unlike Mom. I think it was about 1933 when she died. Mom's father's name was Ber Wolf Mileband. I know nothing about him.

In our house we spoke Polish with Mom, Jewish with Dad. Our 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.

Almost every year we used to go for holidays with the family, usually to the so called Linia - a row of tourist-health resort towns located on the line Warsaw-Otwock. We went to Otwock, Falenica, once to Swider, many times to Miedzeszyn, once to Jablonna - summer resort towns near Warsaw. And once to Kazimierz. We usually took a train to the Linia, but we took a ship to Kazimierz on the Vistula River, from Warsaw. And our things, because we used to bring everything, we used to send by a horse carriage. I remember we would load things up at 6am and the horse carriage would get to the destination by night.