

Laszlo Ringel's Wife Lea Ringel's Family



The family of my wife Lea Ringel (nee Helman). From left to right, 1st row: my wife's sister Rieva Helman, my wife's grandmother, her mother's mother; my wife's mother Baila Helman; my wife's father Moishe Helman; my future wife Lea Helman. 2nd row: my wife's brothers Mehl, Laib and another brother, whose name I don't remember. This photograph was miraculously preserved in their abandoned house after my wife's family was taken to a concentration camp. My wife's sister, who was the first to return home, found it. This photo was taken in Bogdan village Rakhov district in 1939.

After WWII I went to work in the furniture shop in Uzhgorod. I learned to work on the wood treatment lathe. I lived in a room in the shop. I had meals in the town. There was a Red Cross 'Social care' organization in Russkaya Street where they had a canteen to provide meals to those who returned from concentration camps. I met girls and courted many of them there. It was there that I met my future wife Lea Helman, a young girl with big back eyes. We began to meet.

Lea came from Bogdan village [175 km from Uzhgorod, 560 km from Kiev] Rakhov district in Subcarpathia. She was born in 1927. Her Jewish name was Laya. My wife was born Lea, later the Ukrainians made Helena of her. Although in the town some called her Helen at home she was always called Lea. Her father Moishe Helman was a farmer and her mother Beila Helman was a housewife. There were 11 children in the family, but before WWII 9 of them were in Subcarpathia. One died in his teens from a disease. One of Lea's older brothers escaped to England after the Hungarians came to power, during the war he served in the Czechoslovakian Legion in the British army and returned to England after the war. When he got to know that his brothers and sisters returned from the concentration camp he decided to visit them. Soviet authorities arrested him accusing him of espionage and sent him to the GULAG where he perished. The rest of the children were taken to the ghetto in April 1944 and from there they were taken to Auschwitz. Lea's mother and father were exterminated in Auschwitz immediately, and Lea and her brothers and sisters were sent to different concentration camps. They were young and managed to survive and returned to Subcarpathia. Lea was taken to a labor camp in Schlanitzsee town in Germany. She met an Austrian Jewish girl and they became friends. When in January 1945 evacuation of the camp began,

Lea and her friend managed to escape. They both spoke fluent German. Some kind people helped them to get Aryan documents and certificates of baptistry and they lived till May 1945 with these documents. Lea worked as a servant for a German family. When American troops came to the town where Lea lived, she went back to Subcarpathia. Once my wife and I went to Bogdan village to visit the graves of her relatives. I saw the house their family lived in before the war. It was abandoned. A little decayed house. Lea came to Uzhgorod where she entered a medical school for medical nurses. In Uzhgorod she met with her brothers and sisters who returned from concentration camps. I don't remember all of them. I don't know how religious my wife's parents were. Of course, the young generation was not so religious, but they celebrated Jewish holidays.

Shortly after establishment of the Soviet power in Subcarpathia, before Soviet passports were issued and before registration of the population, my wife's brothers and sisters moved to Israel. There is only one sister living now - Sarra. The rest of them have passed away. Their children and their families live in Israel. Lea didn't go with them. She wanted to obtain a diploma of the medical nurse and then follow them to Israel. I also thought it was right to move to Israel having a profession. It never occurred to us that we would live behind the 'iron curtain' for so many decades.