

Anna Mass' Sister-In-Law



This is my husband's sister, Emilia Mass. Her 'Aryan name' was Helena Marganiec.

My husband's name was Borys Mass. His family, though seemingly assimilated, cared more about religion than mine. They were rather poor. They lived in Warsaw at Leszno Street. It was such a large apartment that if the phone rang in the anteroom, they were seldom in time from the living room to pick it up. I don't know why they didn't install the phone in the living room.

My husband had three sisters, all younger than him. The first sister, Emilia Mass, completed a gymnasium run by nuns. And by mistake, when filling out the graduation certificates, instead of 'Mosaic denomination,' they wrote 'Roman-Catholic.' She didn't continue her studies, she started working as a seamstress. Her name after the war was Helena Marganiec. It's an interesting story.

Under her own name, as Emilia Mass, she was pulled out of the Warsaw ghetto. And she was caught by the Germans in a street round-up. And when she sat in a cell waiting whether they'd send her to Germany for forced labor or anything else, she sat with a Polish woman. And that woman cried that she wanted to go to Germany so much, that she'd have it good there, but she had epilepsy and they wouldn't let her. So they swapped their papers. That woman went to Germany as Emilia Mass, and my husband's sister became Helena Marganiec.

The second sister, Marysia - my younger daughter is her namesake - studied in Warsaw and became a bacteriologist. She was murdered in Bialystok. When the Germans entered [in 1941], they didn't look at who was Jewish and who wasn't but killed everyone at the hospital - doctors, everyone - and her too.

And the youngest one, Wanda Mass, she started her studies before the war but earned her psychology degree only after the war. She left the ghetto using the same ID as her elder sister. And she became Emilia. Mass they changed to Majewska, so Emilia Wanda Majewska. The oldest one and the youngest one survived. On the Aryan side, thanks to Wladzia. Our Polish 'sister-in-law.' She pulled her out of the ghetto, but she wasn't in time to pull out the parents. They spoke poor Polish, so they would have been conspicuous anyway. But she tried. But the mother had been taken to Treblinka and the father didn't want to leave the ghetto, wanted to join his wife. So my husband's parents both died.

My husband believed that the eldest one, Emilia-Helena, had survived. She had brown hair and didn't look like a Jewess, plus that Roman-Catholic school diploma... Yet the second one survived too, thanks to a Pole, and he didn't know that. They survived the war and neither married, they lived all together and were happy. At first they lived in Gliwice [industrial city in the Upper Silesia region, 300 km south-west of Warsaw], then the younger one got a job as teacher in Warsaw. They found a burned-out house at Narbutta Street in Warsaw, took a part of an apartment they renovated with our help, and moved in there. And after they had renovated it, the pre-war housing cooperative showed up and took over the house.