

Dr Benjamin Orenstein

Felicia Wallace (Wrocławska) RIP



Felicia Wallace, the daughter of Reb Józef and Klara [*née* Ufner] Szaja, was born in Częstochowa. The Szaja family was very prestigious and constituted one of the most prominent families. They were industrialists [in the field] of celluloid manufacture.

The late Dr Jakow Szacki, in his historical monograph titled *Jews in Częstochowa to the First World War*, published in the book *Czenstochover Yidn*, which appeared in New York in 1947, relates an interesting episode regarding the Szaja family:

In 1902, a Russian-Jewish economist, named Khorosh, arrived in Częstochowa to investigate the financial situation of the Jews. After carrying out the investigation, in his report, he declared that [one] Reb Szaja was considered the pioneer of the celluloid industry in Częstochowa¹.

The Szaja family, which belonged to the well-to-do echelon of Częstochowa Jewry, broadly and generously supported the multitude of charitable institutions in town, and particularly excelled in the honourable tradition of giving charity in secret. The Szaja family consisted of religiously-nationally² oriented Jews, and it contributed to the development of Jewish life in Częstochowa in a positive and constructive manner. Reb Józef and Klara Szaja had six children - four daughters and two sons. They were raised in a traditional and national Jewish spirit. It is in this atmosphere that Felicia RIP was educated, and this left its spiritual mark on her short path in life.

In 1934, Felicia married Adam (Abram) Wallace (Wrocławski), who founded the Omega fountain pen factory, which developed into one of the largest factories in Poland. In 1935, the Wallaces had a son, Mordche, who was the joy of the whole family.

On 1st September 1939, the Second World War broke out which, immediately upon its first days, brought commotion and disturbance into the Jewish life. Like savage locusts, the Nazi barbarians set upon the property, goods and lives of the Jewish populace. This uncertain state of affairs forced Jews, from smaller shtetls and also from larger cities such as Łódź, to flee their established homes and seek some new place somewhere, to temporarily shield themselves from destruction. Masses of refugees arrived in Częstochowa. At the time, the Wallace family lived in their pre-war dwelling on ul. Piłsudskiego. Felicia was amiable towards the refugees - both distant relatives and common Jews - who had been left without means of sustenance. She, personally, cooked for them and fed them, stilling their hunger and saying

¹ [TN: No mention is made in the original article of Reb Szaja being a pioneer of the celluloid industry, but of the toy industry in general.]

² [TN: In this context, "national" is likely to mean Zionist.]

words of comfort words to them, awakening in them hope and confidence. Felicia was always ready to do favours and help those suffering need.

The terror and repressions took on gruesome forms. The Nazis instituted a ghetto. The Wallaces were driven out of their splendid home on ul. Piłsudskiego and into a miniscule apartment inside the ghetto area, on ul. Krótka.

During the times of the mass slaughters and deportations, parts of the Wallace and Szaja families perished in sanctification of the Name [of God] and the People [of Israel], the same as thousands of other Jewish families. Among the annihilated were Felicia's father, Reb Józef Szaja RIP, her brother Rafał and her sister Frania. Their mother had died before the War.

The Wallace family, who by some supernatural means hid their child from barbarous Nazi hands, sought a way to save their only son, Mordche. At the time, citizens of neutral countries, who happened to be, by chance, in Poland, were interned by the Nazis and sent back with an *étape*³. "*Machers*" emerged, who created such papers for huge sums of money. The Wallaces ordered such papers for their son Mordche. This was in 1943, when he was barely seven years old. He was taken from the "Small Ghetto" to Warsaw with a Uruguayan pass and a visa. The internment point was in Warsaw, at the Hotel Polski on ul. Długa. As it subsequently emerged, the whole thing was a ruse by the Gestapo, and all the internees were taken away to Auschwitz and annihilated. The affair of the visas and the Hotel Polski has been documented, in detail, in an entire series of Holocaust era books on the Warsaw Ghetto. To the last minute of her life, Felicia agonised and grieved over the misfortune of the death of her seven-year-old son Mordche RIP.

The Wallaces, like all the other Jews, were barracked at the sorrowfully renowned HASAG-Pelcery concentration camp, which was a constant wrangle between life and death.

Following the liberation of the concentration camp, the Wallaces could no longer bear staying in Częstochowa, where they had lost their nearest and dearest. They emigrated to Canada, arriving in Montreal in 1947. That same year, their little daughter, Susan, was born.

Felicia Wallace was active in the Ladies Auxiliary and, with her respectable appearance, innate intelligence and cultured demeanour, she contributed a great deal to the activities. She particularly distinguished herself in the money showers, which were and are the main source of income for the *Landsmannschaft*, with which to aid the *landsleit* in need.

With her premature demise on 13th August 1961, she not only left, in sorrow, her husband Abram, young daughter Suzy, her brother Mark from New York, her sister Helen Wiener, who managed to emigrate from Częstochowa to New York back before the War, and her sister Rena, who lives in Warsaw - but also the entire *Landsmannschaft* in Montreal and all her friends and acquaintances.

May her name and memory be everlasting.

³ [TN: Word that was used mainly in Russian, meaning transport of prisoners or inmates.]