Chapter 1. Poland

I

Joseph Feldmark lived in the Polish town of Lodz in the late 1800s. He was the grandfather after whom Josy would be named. An ancestor of his (either his grandfather or perhaps his great-grandfather) had purchased the surname of Feldmark to replace Orlofsky, the original family name. By the mid-1800s a large number of Jews in Eastern Europe were buying Christian names, often from families with only one son (this exempting the boy from military service). "Feldmark" turned out to be an unusual name. Later Josy's parents, in looking for family, would ask friends traveling to other cities to look up the name "Feldmark" in the telephone directories there, but never did they find any.

The only story about her own great-grandfather that Josy remembers hearing came to her from her father Jacques, who in turn had heard it from his own father Joseph. As a very small boy, Joseph once accompanied his father and a few older men on a trip. They all rode inside a closed carriage. Eventually it began to snow. The winds whipped furiously and as the hours passed, the storm turned into a blizzard. By twilight it was impossible to see even an arm's length ahead.

A couple of the men suggested that they plow onward till they found lodging. Others warned that to continue even one step further would be disastrous. They finally agreed to stop then and there. Covering the horses with blankets, they all climbed back

into the wagon and spent the night inside. Next morning when it grew light and they came back outside they discovered, to their horror, that they were teetering on the edge of a precipice. Had they continued even one or two feet more, horses and the carriage with everyone inside would have plunged over the edge. Fervently they praised God that Divine Fortune had been watching over them.

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Josy's grandfather Joseph grew up to become a prosperous building contractor, well to do, highly respected in the town, and loved by everyone. From what her parents (especially her mother, who would eventually become both his stepdaughter and his daughter-in-law) told Josy, he was the most generous, thoughtful, and warm-hearted of men.

Upon arriving at the home of a friend one evening he was taken aside in the entryway while removing his coat. Confidentially and in whispers his host explained that another guest, (a fellow he could see sitting alone in the corner of the living room, to whom he had not yet been introduced) had recently come upon hard times. The man, his host confided, had just suffered a family tragedy as well as a severe business loss. Now he was completely destitute. Before entering the living room, Joseph wedged a twenty-ruble note into the palm of his hand. Then as the man rose for introductions, Joseph reached out to shake his hand. Into his palm he unobtrusively passed the twenty-ruble note. Nobody noticed. A spontaneous act of generosity performed in a way that spared the man's dignity while addressing his financial need, it was, apparently, typical of his usual behavior.

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While she was growing up, Josy was unaware that her grandfather had been married three times. It was not until she met her Polish cousin Krysia when they were both already young adults that she learned of this. Krysia, growing up among the large family remaining in Poland, was acquainted with the details. Joseph's first wife, she explained, had died very young, leaving him with a daughter and a son named Shaul to raise. He married again, to a woman named Pearl, who bore him three sons: Leon, Jacques, and Heniek. (Jacques would later become the father of Josy, his younger brother Heniek the father of

Krysia.) Joseph's first two children, particularly the daughter, never got along with their stepmother Pearl. Neither did they care much for the three boys from this second marriage, something the age difference did little to improve.

Joseph and Dina Feldmark, Josy's grandparents.

Time passed, and when the boys were five, seven, and nine years old, their mother Pearl grew ill and died. The middle one (Jacques), just seven at the time, would remember her only vaguely: that she had auburn hair, that she had died at home, and that her screams during the final days of her illness had echoed through the home.

The children turned into hellions. Jacques especially, he would later admit, was the worst. With no mother to manage them, and a father preoccupied with business, they got into continuous mischief. One time, along with a gang of other boys from the apartment house where they lived, they goaded the janitor into cranking up the building's water system beyond its limits. The janitor (or "*stroge"* as they called him in Polish) was a stupid and suggestible fellow. On this occasion he stood placidly on the roof, eagerly taking directions from the boys on the ground down below. Grinning proudly he continued to crank the handle of the machinery connected to the roof's enormous vat while the boys, standing well back from the building, deliberately misdirected him. Cheering him on loudly with applause and shouts of encouragement, they urged him to crank harder, even though water was already spilling down the walls. To the consternation of neighbors and passers-by who suddenly noticed what was going on, sheets of water came cascading down from the roof, tumbling over the sides of the building and into open windows and doorways.

Still the boys kept shouting, "Harder, *Strooge*, harder! More, *Strooge*, more!"

As inhabitants and others on the ground got drenched trying to intervene, the water poured into apartments, damaging floors and furniture and even parts of the building itself.

Another episode almost led to tragedy. As a child Jacques loved to read, especially the books of Jules Verne. These he devoured passionately. He was captivated by the story lines, as were young people all over Europe who regarded this author as the prophet of exciting future inventions, most of which (like the phonograph, the submarine, rocket ships, travel to the moon) actually would materialize in coming decades. Jacques as a young boy would often take a lighted candle into his room and read well past his bedtime.

He completely ignored the constant scolding of the servants and warnings from his father once he shut his door.

One night, to prevent anyone from catching him, he took his book and a candle into a large wooden wardrobe cabinet. Locking himself in to avoid discovery, he lit the candle and settled down to his reading. So absorbed did he become that he failed to notice the clothing at the far end catching fire. When the flames began to spread, he suddenly found himself unable to push open the doors. Fortunately a servant happened by and, hearing his cries, sprang forward and released him just seconds before it was too late.

The constant fighting and squabbling among the brothers became a nuisance to everyone. Most of the disputes occurred between the two older boys, Leon and Jacques, becoming ever more intense as the boys got older. This was the situation when Joseph married for a third time. By now Jacques and his brothers had reached their early teens.

II

The widow that Joseph married came from the nearby village of Ozorkow, about twenty miles northwest of Lodz. Her name was Dina (Dorothy or Dorota, as her close friends called her). She was the daughter of Moishe-Elio Margolius and Eva-Raizel Shymkiewicz. Moishe-Elio, an ardent and well-known Zionist, was a personal friend of Theodore Herzl, the father of Zionism. The two exchanged letters from time to time.

Malvina's grandfather (a friend of Theodore Hertzl).

Dina had grown up in the town of Nishava near the German border. She was the third of seven children, the second of the four daughters in the family. After marrying her cousin, Mordecai-Joseph Margolius, she had come to live in Ozorkow.

Her second sister, Gucia, had married an extremely wealthy man named Leshcinski (or Leshcinska) who raised horses in Western Poland. Although she was now wealthy, this sister became extremely stingy. Her house looked more like a furniture shop than a home, its rooms crammed with odd pieces she kept collecting without having any use for them. A cat always lay curled up on top of her piano.

Her husband, it was said, flirted outrageously with all the women of the town.

Roza, the youngest of Dina's sisters married a David Jakubowitz, a handsome lawyer sporting a handlebar mustache. They had a boy whom they named Mietek, an exceptionally bright child. But Dina was left with bitter memories of her sister Roza. This came about because of an incident when Roza and her husband were preparing to entertain an important business client.

They planned a lavish dinner-party and, as preparations moved along, Roza became increasingly nervous. She got into such a state of anxiety that Dina offered to help. For weeks she came daily to Roza's house, arriving early each morning, remaining all day and sometimes late into the night, working alongside the servants, cleaning, arranging, scrubbing, cooking. Finally, the day of the great event arrived. Last minute touches were added to the table, huge vases of flowers placed around the rooms, and the host and hostess changed into their finest clothes.

As the guests began to gather, Roza turned to Dina and remarked offhandedly, "Fine. Everything looks ready. You can go home now." Dina never forgave Roza for dismissing her so disparagingly, treating her as a servant, excluding her from the festivities. It is not clear if she ever spoke to Roza again.

There were several other relatives of whom photos remain, and about whom anecdotes have come down through the years. One was a cousin who married a professor of Yiddish, Steinmauer. He taught in a girls high school in Lodz and was a man of very fixed ideas, especially concerning what he called "the propagation of the Jewish race". Once, happening to meet Josy's father on a train, Steinmauer cornered him and lectured at length and in detail about his theories on this subject, never stopping for breath until the train finally arrived at their station.

Another time, shortly after the Steinmauer house had been painted, his wife (Dina's cousin) got lost on the street outside. It was said that she was unable to locate her own home for several

Dina with her sister Roza Jakubowitz, Roza's husband, and their son Mietek.

hours. Years later both her brother and one of her daughters would eventually settle in Detroit.

Malvina (right) and her brother Ben.

Mordecai-Joseph Margolius, Dina's first husband, was the son of Matthias Margolius (from the town of Nishava on the German border) and Malka (from the town of Ozorkow). Matthias was the oldest of the six children born to Hudess and Behr Margolius, the first recorded ancestors in Josy's family tree. Matthias and Malka had seven children. Mordecai-Joseph was their oldest. He was considered the scholar of the family, learned and deeply respected by everyone. He had the reputation of being the wise man of the village.

He and Dina produced seven children. Their fourth, born June 5, 1889, was Malvina (called Mala by her friends and Malcha by her parents). She would eventually become Josy's mother.

In the mid-1890s, a typhus epidemic ravaged Poland. Three of the seven Margolius children died within one week. Those remaining were Malvina, not quite six years old, and three younger siblings: Ben, Jacob (nicknamed Stashek), and a crippled infant girl named Helcha (also spelled "Helcia").

Soon afterwards a friend of Mordecai-Joseph also became ill with typhus. A bachelor who lived alone, this friend had no one to take care of him. Mordecai-Joseph insisted, despite Dina's pleading to the contrary, that he must go stay with his friend and nurse him back to health. The friend recovered, but Mordecai-Joseph caught typhus and died. Now Dina was left a widow with four small children to raise alone.

Malvina's sister Helcha.

She struggled desperately, finally going into business as a dressmaker and seamstress with a friend named Gucia (who would eventually come to the United States, settle in Philadelphia, and outlive both Dina and Malvina). With dressmaking, Dina managed to eke out a meager living, though she was barely able to cope. The youngest of her children, Helcha would die before reaching the age of twelve.

When Malvina was not quite seven, Dina sent her out on a cold rainy day to run an errand. She had to pass along some of the muddiest roads in the area. This presented a formidable challenge

to the seven-year-old child. Malvina fell, and lost both her boots in the deep mud along with the money she was carrying. She returned home shaking with cold, barefoot and empty-handed. In a matter of hours she grew feverish and came down with rheumatic fever. It was a condition that almost killed her, and it left her with a permanent heart condition that would give her problems throughout her life.

Dina (seated) with Stashek and Malvina.

Meanwhile Malvina's two brothers were growing into ruffians. Ben especially was unruly and unmanageable. When he was about eleven, Mordecai-Joseph's sister Etka with her husband Abraham Ruzycki (their name was changed to "Rosen" on entering the United States) was preparing to leave for America with their three small sons Jack, Morris, and Hymie. Etka offered to take Ben along, convincing Dina that it would not only make life more manageable for her, but would also give the boy better opportunities. Reluctantly Dina agreed, and Ben left for America with his aunt, uncle, and cousins. He must have considered this a rejection by his mother, for his relationship with her remained bitter ever afterwards, leaving him a quarrelsome and resentful man.

III

It was at this point in her life that Dina married Joseph Feldmark. Taking Malvina, Stashek, and Helcha with her, she left for Lodz. There she placed Stashek in an orphanage (later he would be moved to a local boarding school where he would remain until his late teens), and with Malvina and Helcha, she moved into the Feldmark household. Malvina must have been about fourteen at the time. This was where she first met Jacques, her stepfather's middle son, whom she would later marry. Years later Josy would sometimes delight in telling people that her parents were brother and sister. After allowing time

for some shocked surprise, she would then explain that Jacques and Malvina had really been only *step*brother and *step*sister, through the marriage of her paternal grandfather Joseph to her maternal grandmother Dina.

Jacques was about a year younger than Malvina. His older brother Leon had seemed interested in her, but she never liked him. Relations between Leon and Jacques had never been warm, and now they grew even more strained. Jacques had always been close to his younger brother Heniek, and Malvina soon grew fond and protective of this boy just a few years younger than she. But to Leon (and also the children from Joseph's first marriage) both Malvina and her mother Dina remained cool and distant. As for her stepfather Joseph, Malvina grew especially close to him. From the beginning he treated her with extreme warmth and kindliness. She became particularly attached to him, admiring him intensely. Remembering her own father only slightly (she had been less than six when he died), she soon came to accept Joseph not only as parent, but a dear friend as well. So great was her love for her stepfather that she would eventually name her only child Josephine after him.

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Malvina attended school in the town of Piotrkow, not far from Lodz. The place was an all girl institution where students were required to wear brown uniforms. Because of this, throughout her lifetime she hated the color brown, and later refused ever to consider dressing her daughter in that color while Josy was growing up.

In the Polish schools, Russian language and literature were taught. Thus Malvina became proficient in several languages. Like Jacques she learned Polish, Russian, German, and Yiddish (Jacques had also studied Latin in school). Later when they left Poland, both would become fluent in French, which they would continue to use between themselves, especially when trying to keep Josy from understanding. Eventually, when they moved to the United States, they also learned English.

The girls in Malvina's school were sometimes taken to dances where they would meet students from the local boys' school. Malvina always remembered feeling shy and somewhat afraid at these dances. She was an extremely beautiful girl, but when the boys learned she was Jewish, many spoke insultingly and derogatorily to her. Sometimes they would make sexual innuendoes, which deeply offended her, overly modest as she was, and she desperately avoided these fellows as much as possible.

The teacher she most admired, and whom all the girls in the class revered, was Vera Ravetz. She was the young woman who taught Russian literature. Vera was slim and flat chested. Every girl in the class, Malvina included, strove to flatten down their own bodices in imitation of this high-minded and serious young woman they so venerated.

Malvina's high-school roommate was Anuta Maletzka. She came from Piotrkow itself, the town where the school was located. Although Anuta came from an extremely wealthy family, she lived at school. Years later she would become anorexic, and it was said that she eventually died of hunger.

Malvina's dearest friend was a classmate named Regina Hertz. Photos remain of Regina and some of her fellow classmates. One of them, Vera Tannenbaum, was a short girl who liked only tall fellows. Later, Vera's sisters sailed to Bordeaux on the ship *Ile de L'Areon*, where another passenger on board was the great Yiddish writer Sholem Asch.

The telephone was a relatively new luxury at the time. One of the richer girls in class came from a family that owned one. The girls would often congregate at her house to play pranks, delighting in what a later generation was to call "phony phone calls". Ringing up a number at random, they would wait until somebody answered and asked, "Who's calling, please?" Then one of the girls, assuming a falsetto, would squeak out in a high-pitched voice, a string of rapid nonsense syllables, which they had all previously concocted and painstakingly memorized, "Hal-ee-foos-ee-ca-po-la-mi-no-see-kos-ka!"

"Who?" the other party would cry out.

They would repeat the contrived name, ever escalating in pitch, each taking a turn at the telephone.

Meanwhile the other party would again and again shout into the phone, "Who? Who is this?" before finally slamming down the receiver while the girls giggled and squealed with delight. It was a game they never tired of.

Malvina once recounted some of her experiences while traveling by train through Europe. In the first, while crossing Germany, she happened to be seated alone in a

Malvina (hugged by Regina) with two other students in Lodz, 1907.


Malvina in 1911.

railroad car when two young men entered. Taking seats across from her and completely ignoring her, they continued a lively conversation they had started earlier. They spoke in Polish, but Malvina, shy as she was, sat with her eyes downcast, saying nothing. Eventually they exhausted the topic and turned their attention to her.

Still speaking in Polish, one remarked to the other, "Look at that young woman. Isn't she the most gorgeous you've ever seen?"

The conversation continued in this manner and, when Malvina raised her eyes and sat staring at them unmoving and apparently uncomprehending, their remarks grew even more personal and crude. Guessing that they might soon try to engage her in conversation, she began to plan her answers. Since they seemed to be rather well traveled, she reasoned, they would probably also speak German, as well as French and English.

"Therefore," she thought to herself, "I must tell them I am of a different nationality whose language they don't understand. They might possibly speak Italian, but in this eastern part of Germany, it's even less likely that they speak Spanish."

She continued to gaze innocently at the two until one of them finally switched into German and addressed her. At first he spoke of pleasantries, the weather and travel, and she answered demurely in German. Then he finally inquired, "What nationality are you, Miss?"

"Oh," she replied quietly, "I'm Spanish."

"Spanish?" exclaimed the fellow. "How unusual! A Spanish young lady traveling all by herself!"

Then, after a pause, he inquired, "And where might you be going?"

"Oh," she replied innocently, "I'm going to Szczecinek, Szczezinski, Székesfehévar, Czestochowa, Kedzierzyn-Kozle, Ostrowiec, Mszozonow, Swietokrzyski..." and with inimitable accuracy and staccato, gun-fire rapidity she shot out a stream of excruciatingly complicated, nearly unpronounceable names of tiny remote villages that only a native speaker would be apt to know, let alone pronounce correctly.

The young man jumped to his feet, flushed, and shouted, "You're not Spanish!"

"No, indeed I'm not!" retorted Malvina in Polish. Then as he stammered in embarrassment and confusion, she continued severely, "In the future you should be careful before speaking in such a personal and insulting way, especially when it's somebody you don't know!"

Both young fellows apologized profusely, much to her satisfaction and amusement.

On another train trip, this time inside Poland, a young soldier in uniform entered her compartment. Before long they struck up a conversation. Since he spoke with a Slavic accent Malvina inquired guilelessly, "Are you Bulgarian?'

Springing to his feet, he drew back his shoulders in anger, and with a shout, spat out the words, "No! Serb!"

Even then Bulgarians and Serbs were bitter enemies, and Malvina had inadvertently guessed the wrong nationality, which the soldier took as the most extreme of insults.

IV

In 1909 Joseph Feldmark sent his son Jacques to Germany to begin his college education. It was then that Jacques began using the middle initial *O*, henceforth signing himself as "Jacques *O*. Feldmark". When asked what the *O* stood for, he explained, "For nothing. Everyone else has a middle initial, and since I don't have one, I use the letter 'O' for zero."

Jacques in 1911.

He later told stories about that year away from home. Once, Jacques determined that the answer to a complex question in a mathematics exam came to "three and a half men". Unable to accept that there could be such a thing as half a man, he reworked the problem over and over, always coming up with the same answer. In disgust, he finally got up and turned in his answer sheet, leaving the examination hall positive that he had gotten the problem wrong, yet unable to know where his mistake lay. Later, when he got his paper back, he learned that he and only one other classmate, a Chinese fellow who was the top student in the class, had been the only ones to get that answer right. It *was* three

and a half men!

"I wanted to see how clearly you were thinking and how accurate your mathematical skills were," the professor told the class.

Jacques also noticed the faculty's frustration with student cheating. One professor, in desperation, asked for the largest lecture hall in the school and placed each student five seats away in every direction from the others. Despite this, Jacques noticed that some still managed to communicate, and cheating still went on under the nose of the professor monitoring the exams.

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Once on a short visit to a small town in Germany, Jacques and another classmate, both about seventeen, checked into a small hotel. As they registered at the desk the receptionist asked them, "Do you want the room with or without?"

Wanting to appear experienced and worldly, and both hoping for the most comfortable accommodations, they suavely answered, "With, of course."

Then after placing their luggage in the room, they went out to a nearby restaurant for dinner. When they returned, to their surprise they found two tawdry ladies waiting there for them in their room.

"Aren't you in the wrong place?" they asked.

"Oh no," came the reply, to the consternation of the inexperienced boys. "You did say that you wanted the room 'with', didn't you?"

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A few photos of the friends Jacques made during his school days remain in Josy's photo album. One is of a fellow named Zachary Morgenstern, shown wearing a Russian student's uniform, taken January 6, 1911 in Poland. Another is of Jacques's roommate, a man named Fuxon, also in a Russian soldier's uniform, from January 9, 1912. Later, in a picture taken in Nancy, France, there was a student friend named Gavric Rubin. (He would visit Jacques and Malvina in Philadelphia in the 1930's.) Also among the photographs appears a student friend who, years after their school days together, went to volunteer in

the French army in Bordeaux at the same time that Jacques was volunteering in Paris.

Jacques sent Malvina a photo of himself taken by a photographer named H. Petri in Lodz (address Piorkowska 46). On the back he wrote the following inscription in Latin: "Carissimae et pulcherimae Mali in memoriam, Tui amans, J.F. Lodz 17/vi - 1908 an" ("Thinking of my dearest and most beautiful Mali, Your loving J.F.") There were also other photos, one taken by a photographer in the studio of J. Caren, Ch. Suc. Muthmannn Nancy, at the address of 32 Cours Léopola, and inscribed in Jacques's handwriting "A ma chere Mali," ("To my dear Mali").

By this time he was already enrolled at ENSEM (L'Ecole Nationale Superieure d'Electricité et de Mécanique de Nancy), one of the leading engineering colleges of Europe. He had the first of two photos taken in that city on January 27, 1910, the second at the same studio January 20, 1911. The latter he sent to Malvina just a few months before their wedding.

When he finally returned to Lodz after two years of study outside Poland (one in Germany, the other in Nancy), he and Malvina were married. Their wedding took place on July 12, 1911. They went to the town of Fitznau in Switzerland for their honeymoon. Here, they took a small apartment on the first floor of an old three-story house in the Alps. They later recalled a group of girls living in the same building with whom they got acquainted and took photos together. What they especially remembered was how these girls, after washing their supper dishes, would dry them with sheets of newspaper that they had saved expressly for that purpose.

Throughout their lifetimes, Malvina and Jacques would continue to rhapsodize about the incredible scenic

Malvina and Jacques (on balcony) on honeynoon in Switzerland in July 1911.

beauty of Switzerland, how the views of the countryside would change dramatically with every few steps they took up and down the mountains. Malvina often described a scene she recalled from high up in the Alps, a white ship passing slowly across Lake Lucerne far below, the smoke coming from its chimney resembling a cigarette moving across the water. Until she would visit Mexico years later she would continue to claim that Switzerland was the most beautiful country she had ever seen.