

## THE FELDMARK PART OF THE FAMILY

Soon after Josy's parents first arrived in America, they began searching for relatives. Those on her mother's side were numerous and rather easy to locate – there were many in Chicago, where they first settled. But it soon became apparent that her father's relatives would be harder to find.

Any time a friend or acquaintance traveled to another city, Josy's parents would make the same request.

“Do us a favor,” they would say. “Look in the telephone book when you get there for the name of Feldmark. See if you can find anybody listed by that name.”

The answer always came back the same, “Sorry. No one. No Feldmarks in the phone book there.”

So years later, in 1971, when her daughter Malva was about to leave for a summer in Israel, Josy put the same request to her. Not expecting much, she was startled some weeks later to receive a letter with interesting news.

Malva wrote that soon after settling in at the University of Tel Aviv for her two summer courses (these would be accredited back at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute when she returned there as a junior in the fall) a street sign caught her eye. A Feldmark Clothing Store was going out of business.

Alerted, she tried to call the number, but found the Israeli telephone system at the time so complicated that she was unable to get through. After a few unsuccessful attempts, she decided to write a letter instead. A week went by and nothing happened. Her daily routine at the University was broken only by Wednesday night visits to the suburb of Ramat Gan, where José's cousin Ann Moskowitz and her husband Mac lived. Ann had made it a point to invite Malva for dinner every Wednesday evening, so taking a bus to Ramat Gan soon became a familiar routine for her.

One Wednesday night when she returned from the Moskowitzs, her three dormitory roommates greeted her with an announcement.

“Malva, you had company while you were away,” they told her. “A man of about thirty – he spoke broken English – and an old lady – she spoke no English at all – were here to see you. They left this box of chocolates for you.”

On her bed she saw a box of chocolates with a paper on top displaying an address. It was in Ramat Gan, the very neighborhood she had just come from.

Jumping on a bus, she immediately retraced her route. Returning to Ramat Gan, she found the house at 7 Miriam Street. The door was opened by a man about thirty, and sitting inside was an older lady. She spoke no English, so Malva, in slow English sentences, addressed the man, trying to explain who she was.

“Suddenly, Mom,” she wrote in her letter, “the old lady got up, walked over to a bureau where she opened a drawer and took out a letter. I couldn’t believe what I saw. It was in your handwriting, Mom, and it was dated 1948! The envelope had an address I didn’t recognize. It was somewhere on Eighth Street in Philadelphia. And from inside the envelope she pulled out a newspaper clipping, a picture of you and Daddy in caps and gowns, graduating, getting your masters degrees together!”

Slowly Josy pieced together the information. She recalled that back in 1945, immediately after World War II had ended, her parents got word from an organization called HIAS, that the daughter of Jacques’s brother Heniek Feldmark had been located alive in Poland. She was Krysia, Josy’s first cousin, the one who had been her pen pal until war had broken out, at which point all correspondence stopped. Krysia, it now turned out, was the only survivor of their entire family. Her parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins – some thirty people – had all perished in the holocaust. But she wrote that there was one cousin (Jacques’ nephew Chaim, son of his half-brother Shaul) who had left Poland before the war and was now living in Israel. HIAS had located him. In future letters Krysia passed along his address.

Josy’s parents had immediately started arrangements to bring Krysia to the United States. (It would take three years, and in the interim Malvina died, but one of the last things she did when already in hospital was to sign papers with Jacques, beginning immigration proceedings for Krysia.)

It was 1948 before the address of Chaim Feldmark in Israel reached them. Josy was already married to José, and they lived in an apartment at 1715 North Eighth Street in Philadelphia. They wrote to Chaim, as did her father, but no reply ever came. In the years that followed, this was all forgotten. The family’s attention settled on Krysia, bringing her and her husband to America (she had married suddenly while waiting for the papers to clear). Other problems followed, and the Israeli side of the family, never having written, faded from memory. Now, so many years later, that letter Josy had written so long ago was what the old lady presented to Malva that night in Ramat Gan. It had lain unanswered all those years.

Now they found out why. It turned out that Chaim Feldmark (husband of the old lady) had died just around the time the letter arrived. Not understanding English, she never wrote back. It came as a heart-warming

surprise that Malva, in such a roundabout and unexpected way, had managed to put the two sides of the family in contact once more.