

## How Paula Forman (G.G.) came to America

*This is the story of the immigration of Paula Forman from Kiev, Russia (later Ukraine), to the United States. Paula was born October 14, 1909 and passed away on August 30, 2003. She was later known as “G.G.” (for “great-grandmother”) by her grandchildren.*

About 1889, in the town of Radomsyl, Russia, Wolf and Mariam Torchinsky had a son. They named him Abraham. He grew to be a tailor like his father, and married Pesach Friedman, the daughter of Micha Friedman in 1909.

In the winter of 1909/1910, the young Jewish tailor Abraham left his home in Kiev, Russia, and made his way to New York. He was 20 years old at the time and left behind his young wife to make the trip. He probably didn't know that his wife was pregnant with their first child at the time of his departure.

Abraham's migration came near the end of the exodus of Russian Jews, which had started in the early 1870's and which stopped completely with the outbreak of the Great War (World War I). Life was restrictive for Jews in Russia – being confined by law to permanent residence only in special areas (known as the “Pale”) in 15 provinces including the Kiev Province and the Polish Kingdom. The Provisional Rules of 1882 forbade them to take residences outside towns and settlements, or to purchase or lease real estate there. Rural communities were allowed to evict Jews who had taken up residence there prior to the passing of the law, to start criminal proceedings against children of Jews residing in rural areas on charges of illegal residence, and to evict them from the villages when they came of age.

Restrictions were also enforced against the Jews who sought to enter educational institutions (only fixed percentages of Jews could be accepted in gymnasium secondary schools and universities). Jews were totally banned from such institutions as the Institute of Communications Engineering, the Electrotechnical Institute, the Military Medical Academy, the Galagan Collegium in Kiev, the teacher-training seminaries, the theatrical schools in the capital, etc. Jews were also prohibited from studying law as a profession. Jews were not permitted to participate in the work of local government.

The difficult financial position of the majority of the Jewish population caused by unemployment, low wages and the unbalanced economic situation in the settlements were other factors contributing to emigration. During April-May of 1881 the first pogroms (essentially riots to destroy homes, businesses and religious centers and violence against Jewish people directly) occurred across southern Russia. These continued sporadically over the next 35 years.

Between 1881 and 1908, over 1.5 million Jews emigrated from Russia. In fact, during the 1905 to 1909 period the number of Jews who left Russia was greater than the number of the Jewish newborns in the country. During the time that Abraham Torchinsky emigrated

- from June 1, 1908 till June 1, 1913, about 900,000 Jews left Russia for the United States.

In early 1910, Abraham probably made his way south from Kiev to the great port city of Odessa on the Black Sea. From there he would go by ship to Liverpool, England. In Liverpool he secured passage on a ship headed for New York, and left Liverpool on February 12, 1910.

The ship Abraham found himself on was the *Umbria*, built in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1884. While the ship won the Trans Atlantic Blue Ribbon in 1887, by 1910 it was near the end of its life and was probably in quite bad shape (it was scrapped later that year).

The *Umbria* sailed under the British flag for the Cunard line and held 1,350 passengers. Like virtually all Jewish immigrants, Abraham traveled in “steerage.”

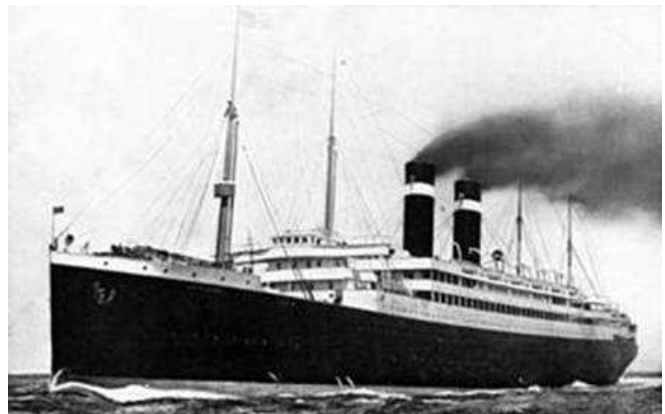


The ship traveled at 19.5 knots and arrived at Ellis Island 10 days later on February 22, 1910.

Abraham appeared on page 21 of the ship’s manifest for alien passengers, with his surname spelled “Terczynsky.” We know from this record that he was 20 years old, in good health, 5 foot 6 inches with a dark complexion, black hair and brown eyes. He could read and write, he paid for his own passage, he was from Kiev but was born in Radomysl (about 50 miles west of Kiev), and his father’s name was Wolf (still living in Kiev). Abraham arrived with \$50 in his pocket. He planned to live with a friend at 1230 Brook Avenue in the Bronx (just north of 167<sup>th</sup> Street in the Bronx).

Abraham found an apartment in Manhattan tenement on the upper east side at 308 East 102<sup>nd</sup> Street (just east of 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue). Once settled there he sent for his wife and daughter.

Abraham’s wife, Pesach (Pesic) emigrated in the summer of 1911. She was about 19 years old at the time (although she gave her age as 23 to the immigration officer), and with their infant daughter, Beile, made her way from Kiev to Antwerp. They gained passage on the ship *Laplant*, a much newer vessel than her husband’s *Umbria*. Built in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in 1909 the *Laplant* was 620 feet long and could carry 2,536 passengers.



Arriving at Ellis Island on August 7, 1911, the young mother and child passed through immigration (their names were recorded as “Torcinski” at the time) and joined her husband on 102<sup>nd</sup> Street on the upper east side of Manhattan. Abraham had paid for their passage from Antwerp to New York, and they arrived with no money of their own. Pesach became Pauline Torchinsky upon arrival in America. She was 4 feet 11 inches with brown hair and brown eyes.

Eventually, Abraham and Pauline Torchinsky moved north to the Bronx, to 1656 Washington Avenue. In addition to their daughter Bella (born March 23, 1910 in Kiev), they later had Bessie (born February 7, 1913), Morris (February 20, 1916), Lillian (born 1919), and Sidney Fred (born March 2, 1925). They appear at the Washington Avenue apartment in the 1920 and 1930 census.

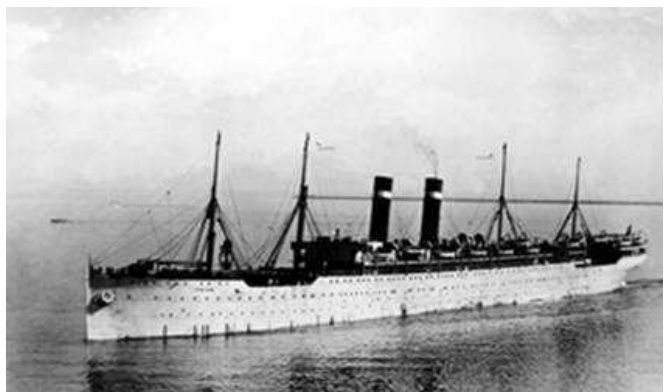
Before the move to the Bronx, Abraham’s father Wolf emigrated from Kiev – arriving in New York on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1914, on the same ship that brought his daughter-in-law and granddaughter 2 and half years earlier (the *Laplant*). He left behind his wife, Mariam, in Kiev when he made the trip. Wolf was 51 at the time. Wolf’s son Sol (“Shmia”) emigrated at that time also, but due to a respiratory condition was denied entry. Sol settled in Havana, Cuba until about 1952. Wolf visited his son in Cuba in the 1920’s, and he and Mariam returned from there in 1924 when they are recorded in the U.S. immigration records. Wolf died December 14, 1928, in the Bronx.

While Abraham and Pauline Torchinsky were still living on East 102<sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan, they served as a destination for another immigrant. Their cousin, Taube Frankel, born about 1887 in Kiev, also wanted to come to America. Taube’s father and mother were Pinnie Frankel and Rivke Honig. Pinnie had probably died by this time, and Rivke had remarried to a man named Blume and was still living in Kiev by the time Taube emigrated at the end of 1912.

Taube (also called Taubela) had married Morris (probably Moishe) Rosman, a young engineering student who came from a family of Rabbis. He had been conscripted into the Russian army, and died at age 27 in 1912, leaving his widow and a young daughter, Paulina.

Taube and Paulina made their way from Kiev to Antwerp, where they booked passage on the ship *Finland*. Built in Philadelphia 1902, the ship could carry 1,162 passengers.

Boarding the ship on November 30, 1912, Taube and Paulina crossed the Atlantic in 12 days and arrived at Ellis Island on December 12, where their names were recorded by the



immigration authorities as “Rozenman.” Taube was 25 at the time and was a millineress (hat maker). She had paid their own passage, arrived with \$35, was 5 feet 5 inches and had brown hair and brown eyes. According to their immigration record, they initially resided with Taube’s Torchinsky cousins on east 102<sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan. (Exactly how Taube was related to the Torchinsky’s is not known. She may have been related to Abraham Torchinsky’s family or to the family of his wife, Pauline Friedman)

Once in America, Taube adopted the name “Tillie.” She was well educated and spoke Russian and Yiddish fluently. Tillie Rosman became a strong supporter of the women’s suffragette movement, and subscribed to the thoughts of Emmeline Parkhurst, leader of the WSPU (Women’s Social and Political Union) in the UK. Tillie even adopted the style of the suffragettes, wearing the “mannish” navy blue top hat with the wide 2 inch band – despite the embarrassment of her daughter when they walked down the street!

Tillie soon met a handsome young man and cigar maker named Isador Shkoornik (later to be called “Uncle Izzy”). The family story is that Isador frequented a park on the lower East Side of New York, and encountered a little girl that spoke the most beautiful Russian (that would be Paulina). Isador was born March 15, 1886, in Vallin, Russia (unsure where that village/city was), and immigrated to New York about 1908. He and Tillie were married in Manhattan on 20 April 1915. On September 12, 1918, Isador had to register for the World War I draft. He was living at 548 Grand Street at the time, and gives his wife (“Tillie”) as his nearest relative.

Isador and Tanya had a daughter, Lillian, born in October of 1918. In the 1920 census, the family was living in Harlem at 232 114<sup>th</sup> Street.

Less than a month later tragedy hit when Tanya died of influenza (in the Harlem Hospital). The influenza pandemic of 1918-1920 was a global disaster and the most devastating epidemic in recorded history, killing as many as 50 million people. It infected 28% of all Americans, and an estimated 675,000 of them died during the pandemic. After the death of Tanya, Isador was left with a young step-daughter, Paulina, and their infant Lillian.



Harlem Hospital, about 1920

During the 1920’s Pauline spent time in the Bronx living with her “Tante Lena” and step-cousins, the Messondznik’s. Isador’s sister Lena was married to Jake Messondznik, and

they had 4 daughters and a son (Jennie, Bella, Anna, Pearl and Joseph). This family was always known as the “laughing cousins” in family stories.

Pauline also had 2 other “father figures” in her life during the 1920’s and 1930’s – Dr. Louis Joseph Lilienblum and Moe Ignatoff. Both men were from Kiev and both were close to Pauline – they were known as the “bachelors” (even though Dr. Lilienblum married Etta Luria in 1925). It’s unclear if there was a family relationship between Pauline and these men or if the families knew one another in Kiev. It is believed these men were cousins of one another and they were originally from the small town of Brusilov, Russia. Pauline would shuttle back and forth from the “laughing cousins” to Dr. Lilienblum’s - spending time with each family.

In the late 1920’s Isador applied for naturalization. At the time he was living on the lower east side at 26 Ludlow Street. On his petition, he lists Lillian as his only family member. Isador was naturalized on February 4, 1929. Sometime after 1930 Isador married his second wife, Ida Cooper. Ida had a son Arthur from her first marriage. In 1942, Isador and Ida were living in Brooklyn at 296 South 4<sup>th</sup> Street when he had to register for the World War II draft. He was 56 at the time and gave his birthplace as “Vallin, Russia.”

Paulina (Paula) Rosman Shkoornik was born October 14, 1909 in Kiev. As described above, she immigrated to New York in November of 1912 with her mother. About 1927 she met Benjamin George Forman, son of Harry and Rose Forman (and a good friend of Dr. Lilienblum). He was born in New York April 28, 1907. They were married in New York City on October 14, 1928 (she is listed as Shkoornik on her marriage certificate). Paula was listed as “Pauline” in both the 1920 census (with Isador) and the 1930 census (with her husband Ben).

After their marriage, Ben and Paula lived with his parents in an apartment at 1176 Walton Avenue in the Bronx (at the intersection of Walton and Tudor Place). This was about a mile southwest from the Torchinsky’s on Washington Avenue at the time. Their first child, Thelma, was born August 19, 1929. Harry, Rose, Ben, Paula and Thelma all appear in the 1930 census on Walton Avenue. Their son Samuel Felix was born Dec 25, 1935.