



BLANCHE'S STORY

Blanche (Roll) Matusof's recollections of her family, her childhood, and her escape from wartime Europe as told to her son, Mark Matusof in 2012

PREFACE

My name is Mark Matusof. My mother, Blanche (Roll) Matusof, came to the United States as a refugee during World War II, escaping German occupation. Blanche -- along with her parents, Louis and Claire, and her older brother, Guy -- had a long and arduous journey from occupied Paris to New York, spanning nearly three years and several countries. Since Blanche is the last surviving member of her immediate family, I felt it was important to put her story down on paper for future generations. In 2012, she sat down with me and recorded her story. We have also had several subsequent conversations where she clarified or added to her previous statements.

A few editorial notes:

First, this is not meant to be an exhaustive, detailed biography of Blanche or her family, but more of a series of snapshots in the realm of a larger family history. This narrative reflects her first-hand recollections and impressions of what it was like to live in Europe before and during the war, of her tight-knit extended family, and her long journey to the United States.

Second, I realize that all the initial readers of this story will be close relatives who personally know Blanche, and knew many of the people mentioned, so I will apologize in advance for what may seem like over-explanation of who is who. But in the event this story is read by future generations or non-family members, I felt it would be helpful to indicate how all the players are related. Since most of the family members mentioned in this story are relatives from the Baron side, I have attached a simple family tree of that side of the family.

Third, this story is from Blanche's own first-person recollection. When it is in quotations and *italics*, it is a direct quote in Blanche's own words. When it is in regular print, it is my own editorial discretion to form her story into a third-person narrative, but it is still drawn from her own verbiage. Additionally, there are several places where I have taken the liberty to add outside information, maps, and photos, solely to enhance the historical context.

Also, we attempted to be as accurate as possible, but this was recorded many years after the events, so I am sure there will be some minor discrepancies regarding names, dates, places, and spellings that might not match the recollections of other relatives.

With all that said, here is Blanche's story:

Mark Matusof

February 2016

BLANCHE'S STORY

PARIS

Blanche Roll was born in 1931 in Tours, France, to Claire (Baron) Roll and Louis Roll. Claire and Louis were both originally from what was then Romania, but previously had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (and currently part of which is in Ukraine). When Blanche was six months old, she and her parents moved from Tours to Paris, and were met by Claire's mother, Zirl (Kluger) Baron who had been keeping Blanche's older brother, Guy Roll, in Romania.

"I think he (Guy) was three at the time, so I was a half a year old. He didn't make much of me. When Guy first saw me, he said, 'Oh' and that was it."



Guy and Blanche in Paris

Although Guy was born in Paris, he had been raised in Romania by his grandparents until he was approximately three years old.

When he was a baby, Claire had separated from Louis, and had returned to Romania with Guy, where she worked for a period of time. She eventually returned to France, but without Guy.



Guy with Grandma Zirl in Romania

"The times were not good times and, to tell the truth, I don't know that my mother wanted to get back to my father. His (Louis') mother and all the family were in Romania and were telling my mother to get back. So she left (Guy) with the grandparents and lots of aunts and uncles who adored him. He had a wonderful life there and she went back to Paris and of course I was born. I understand he was the happiest little boy. He had everybody because he was the first grandchild and he was not so happy when he came back to France."

Blanche and Guy's Grandma Zirl, whom Guy thought of as his own mother, brought Guy back to Paris in 1931. She stayed in Paris for about two years, before eventually returning to Romania, "... thank God without my brother."

On one particular evening, precocious Guy at four years old apparently stood up at the dinner table and delivered an impassioned speech, in German, expressing in no uncertain terms his displeasure to be in France, which brought the entire family to tears.

Blanche and Guy were raised in a multi-lingual household – French, German, and occasional Romanian .

“When Guy came, he spoke German, but immediately he was sent to school so he learned French. So I think in the house, we more or less spoke French. With my grandmother, we spoke German. They taught Guy first of all, ‘Bonjour, Monsieur-Dame’, so he was always saying, ‘Bonjour, Monsieur-Dame’. He was three years old and as cute as can be.”

Evidently, while in France, Grandma Zirl did not do too well with French. When she would go shopping, she would ask Claire, “How do you say this in French?” or “How do you say that?” She would practice, repeating her new-found vocabulary out loud to herself the entire way down to the store, but when she got to the market, she would blank out and simply point to what she wanted. No matter the language, though, Zirl was always a big help to Claire around the house.

“She used to help my mother with the kitchen, she did most of the cooking. She made clothing, she could do just about everything – except speak French.”

In 1933 or 1934, Zirl returned to Romania. Unknown at the time, ensuing world events would make it the last time Claire would be able to see her mother in person. Guy was extremely close to Zirl and Claire was worried how he would react to the absence of his surrogate mother, so to avoid a scene, Zirl departed while Guy was away at kindergarten. When he returned home after school, Claire had all the windows open and told Guy that Grandma Zirl had flown home. To say Guy was not happy would be an understatement.

Claire was from a very large, tightknit family (which continues somewhat to this day with the extended family in subsequent generations). She was the eldest of eight children and during her time in France, a number of her brothers and sisters either moved to Paris or visited from Romania.

Aunt Ly (Claire’s sister Sara, also known as Ly) came to Paris for a few years. Although she had an open invitation to stay with Claire and family, she opted to stay with a French family because she wanted to concentrate on learning French – knowing that if she stayed with Claire, they would mostly speak German. However, she visited the Family Roll often. Uncle Milou (Claire’s brother, Samuel, also known as Milou) was there as well. Blanche and Guy adored their uncles and aunts.

“As far as I know my childhood was very good. Guy was a wonderful brother. We lived in Paris and we had people visiting us. Aunt Ly visited us for awhile. I must have been about four years old when she came and I remember her well. And of course my Uncle Milou had come, which we pronounced ‘Meenu’ because we couldn’t pronounce ‘Milou’. The ‘L’ was very, very hard to

pronounce and as a matter of fact when Guy was little boy he could not pronounce 'Roll' and he pronounced 'Yoy'. So it was 'Guy Yoy' "



As good a children as they were, Guy and Blanche were not above occasionally getting into trouble.

"I think I we had just moved into Square Got - the last place we lived in Paris. I must have been maybe four, so Guy was six-and-a-half, and I guess we were left to play in the yard. There was a Gypsy camp that had camped nearby. So Guy went -- and I mean, being his sister, I went with Guy. So we went there... but he was a good brother. He brought me back. When my mother came home, she couldn't find us. When we got back and she found out where we had gone, she took Guy, and Guy went like that (stuck his elbow out), which hurt my mother, so I got both portions. And that is the only time I ever remember my mother hitting me. "

When Blanche was four and half or five years old, she was enrolled in kindergarten, which apparently she did not like very much. She remembers there was a little boy there that was bothering her, trying to kiss her. On a number of school days, she would tell her mother, Claire, that she felt very sick. On more than one occasion, Claire went to the teacher to bring her home, but as soon as they left school, Blanche miraculously felt much better.

In 1936, civil war broke out in neighboring Spain. Generalissimo Francisco Franco staged a coup against the Republican government. Franco was supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Across Europe, left-leaning radicals flocked to support the Republic, which was supported by the Soviet Union. Uncle Milou's friends convinced him that it was his duty to go to Spain and fight against Franco and Fascism.

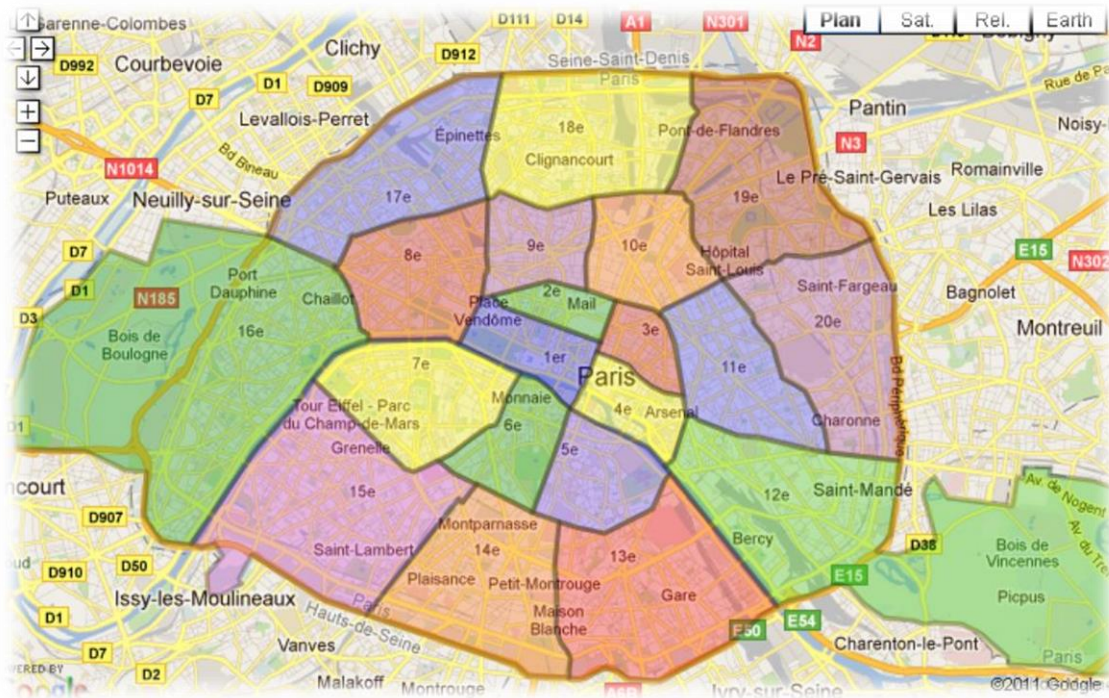
"I don't know if he was really Communist, but he went, and all his friends, very smart, stayed in France. He went. He got wounded two or three times. He was a combatant."

When Milou did return to Paris, he remembered approximately where the Family Roll lived, but not exactly. One day, by chance, Claire went to the market and just happened to run into a lost Milou and brought him back home. He lived with the Family Roll for a period of time before getting married himself.

In the meantime, Charles (another of Claire's brothers, also known as Eimu) came to Paris from Romania to finish his studies and, of course, stayed with the Family Roll. Charles was the

youngest of Claire's seven siblings, and since he was only fourteen years older than Guy, he was more like a big brother to Guy and Blanche than an uncle. Pillow fights were not uncommon.

The old city of Paris is divided into twenty municipal divisions, called *Arrondissements*. The Family Roll resided in the 20th *Arrondissement*, on the east side of Paris (see map below)



Contemporary map illustrating the Arrondissements of Paris

Before the war, Blanche's piano teacher had a country home in Balon.

"It was a tiny little town and my mother and Guy and I rented a room there. My father came down on weekends. I went to a Catholic school because that was the only good school there. Poor Guy had to go to the other school, it wasn't good but because he was supposedly starting high school. He had the priest giving him Latin lessons and the nuns were giving him the English lessons because you're supposed to have two languages and then we went back to Paris."

When the family returned to Paris, Guy was unable to get into secondary school, since he had not been there at the beginning of the term.

"There you have to pass an exam - not like here, you go to high school, at that time at least you had to pass an exam. So he was put in a private school. He had to travel. It was near the Eiffel Tower. He had to travel by subway to get to it because we were in the other part of Paris. "

WORLD WAR II



The Family Roll in Paris circa 1940

The outbreak of the Second World War was a trying time for the Family Roll.

Louis was in the French Army in 1940 when Germany invaded France. When France capitulated, the French Army was demobilized, but Louis was demobilized across the border in Vichy, unoccupied France, which in some ways, was still France, but in other ways, was a separate country.

Guy was away at school, and just prior to the German invasion the entire school student body had been evacuated to somewhere else in France -- but to where, the rest of the family did not know.

“My poor Guy... When you are a sister or brother, you feel so guilty, like maybe I did something that they sent Guy away. It’s a terrible feeling. That’s why children feel, if parents separate or something, the children feel that they’re guilty. They’re not, on the contrary, but you feel guilty. I felt it, it’s not like I expressed it, ever.”

That left Blanche and Claire alone in Paris when the Germans occupied it. They had tried to escape at the last moment, but with thousands of people desperately trying to get on the last train, they were unsuccessful, and then had a very difficult time even getting a taxi to take them home.

Blanche recalls witnessing the German Wehrmacht enter Paris.

“My mother and I were watching them come in through the door (gate) Porte de Vincennes, is where we lived... my mother said all them were talking – and she knew how to speak German – she heard them speaking and she said they spoke the lowest of low German and it was hard to understand. And the Cour de Vincennes where they came in is an enormous place. They usually

have the carnival every year they come in with the rides and all that. That's how big that thing is.



Cour de Vincennes, Paris

“They were marching ten across, I don’t know how many, it was enormous. And they were marching, and they were marching... It’s a terrible thing to see soldiers knowing that they’re occupying your town and they’re marching in. It’s a terrible feeling. Even for a child.”

The next day, Claire and Blanche went shopping for food, each going to a separate store, and both had to endure long lines for several hours. For their efforts, they were only able to acquire one egg each.

“And we were lucky. Some people didn’t get that. It was not easy. We had no heat of course because there was no (oil), but we were pretty lucky. We had what to eat more or less.”

At that time, early in the occupation, the details of how the Germans were treating the Jews in other occupied countries was not common knowledge. The Germans had not yet instituted “The Final Solution” and in France, the roundups and deportations had not yet started.



Map showing wartime occupied and non-occupied (Vichy) France

Louis, was still trapped across the “border” in Vichy France.

“Well you know one part of France was occupied the other part supposedly was free – supposedly. That’s where he was. But he crossed over once, I don’t remember whatever for and then he went back and he started corresponding with Aunt Rose (Rose Baron, Claire’s aunt in New York), I guess trying to get us there.”

Aunt Rose had already settled in New York years earlier. She was Claire’s aunt -- her father’s sister. Claire’s father, Simon Baron, was the oldest of all his siblings, and Claire his oldest child. Since Rose was Simon’s youngest sister, the age difference between Claire and her Aunt Rose was less than ten years.

Louis owned a pharmacy in Paris, and while he was away in Vichy France, separated from his family, the store had temporarily closed. Uncle Milou and his new wife, Helen, were still in Paris and found another pharmacist to work at the store. When it reopened, Claire went there every day to tend to the store while Blanche went to school.

“When I came home from school, I didn’t have a key to go home, so I was waiting outside for her. I was about nine years old. It wasn’t the best of times.”

Claire and Blanche had spent almost an entire year living under German occupation, eventually joined by Guy, when he and his classmates returned to Paris.

“And when he came back, to say the least, we were thrilled. We didn’t know where he was. He couldn’t get in contact with us.”

Apparently, Guy had been very helpful to his schoolmates on the journey back to Paris. Guy, of course, spoke German and ironically, being the only Jewish student in the group, he was the one who was able to obtain some gasoline for his classmates’ transport from a group of German soldiers when they found themselves stranded without.

Louis was now trying to arrange papers for himself and his family -- Claire, Blanche, and Guy -- to eventually leave France. Eventually, Claire was able to obtain tickets for herself, Blanche, and Guy to get close enough to cross over to the other side -- Vichy France. Claire had sent some luggage ahead in advance -- the best things she had, but it all vanished, either lost or stolen.

“My mother said to bring back the books (to school) because we’re going to leave. So I went to school. There we finished in June or July... I went to school trying to return the books and they said, ‘No, take it, if you go on vacation.’ I think they guessed perhaps what, but finally they agreed to take back the books because my mother did not want to owe books to the school. It was the time we were going to have the Easter vacation, so it might have been April that I was returning books.”

ON THE MOVE

They packed what they could carry and took a train to as close as they could to the border. Claire then asked around for the town that was closest to the crossing point.

“Everybody knew what it was and they knew what she wanted, so they sent us over two young ladies who took us across the border, and we had to pay them. We were smuggled. We were illegals going across our own country. If they had caught us, we would have been in a concentration camp.”

Their escape from Paris was timely, because by 1941, the Germans were beginning to round up French Jews to send east to the concentration, labor, and death camps.

"I understand they looked for my father for a few months. The concierge where we lived... told Uncle Charles they were looking for my father there. Uncle Charles did not come back again, either, because they would have taken him.

"So we crossed, we were very lucky. It was very long. It was eight miles, for two children it was (alot) Poor Guy. Me? I was carrying nothing. My mother had given Guy a little satchel of things my father had asked to bring. It was not an easy thing. We went to Tours, and from Tours we went to the border, I don't remember exactly where we went from Paris to Tours, we stayed there a couple of days. I remember that in Paris at one time we had the trolleys, but I didn't remember seeing them. In Tours there were trolleys still, and it was such a nice thing to watch. I'll tell you something else in Tours... We went on the merry-go-round, and they had two of the young German soldiers on it. I think they saw the Gestapo coming, you should have seen them disappear. They must have been seventeen or eighteen, very young. They were on the merry-go-round having a good time and when they saw the (Gestapo)? Pffft! They disappeared."

The Family Roll managed to cross the border to Chamalieres and rented a small house.

"It was a big place and there was a big house, and there was a little house that we rented out. And we got the kittens. It was a cat, not our cat, but the cat liked us, so she came over to us."

It was much easier to get food there than in Paris.

"In Paris, we had stamps, so Guy and I together we were allowed this much milk (gesturing a tiny amount with thumb and forefingers) on the stamps My mother used to steal a little bit for her coffee Shoes – it was a coupon once a year – if you were able to get shoes The last pair of shoes Guy got, there was a little heel, not really boys' shoes but that's what he could get. He was very good at making jokes. He said he was someone in the French royalty, 'Pepin le Bref'. We used to laugh. He had a good sense of humor, always."

After a few months in Chamalieres, the Family Roll's next stop was Nice, in the southeast of France.

"My mother was a good walker. We used to take quite a long walk from Nice into the peasant places. They had corn. But in France, the corn went to the cows, so they couldn't understand why we were buying corn. And one of the things that I remember, you know how now they are wearing those high heels, my mother had shoes -- they didn't have leather, they were made out of a cork or rubbery thing, like platforms or wedges, so when I see them coming back now, it reminds me of that. I joined the Girl Scouts, or Brownies, 'Petite Ailes' in French, which means Little Wings, so I was there one or two months..."

The family lived off whatever money they had with them and a little extra that Aunt Rose might have sent as well. From Nice, the Family Roll continued on their journey, through France toward Spain. They were aware that at any moment, they could be caught by the Germans and sent east.

"It was our country, actually. And we were crossing illegally in our own country."

They crossed into Spain and then into Portugal.

"We were in Lisbon. To tell you how my mother missed bread, we were in a hotel with good food, we hadn't had that. My mother didn't care about any of the other food, coffee and those little rolls. That's what she enjoyed."

The Family Roll had to wait several days in Lisbon for the boat, The "SS Colonial", which would eventually take them to Cuba.



Portuguese ship SS Colonial -- pictured here under its previous name, SS Ypiranga

Although their goal was to emigrate to the United States, the US Government at the time had severely limited immigration of European Jews during the war, especially those from occupied countries, due to fear that Nazi Germany would either try to slip spies and saboteurs in among the refugees, or would blackmail the refugees to perform espionage for them. The Family Roll was forced to seek refuge in Cuba. But even to obtain entry visas into Cuba, Aunt Rose had to deposit a significant amount of money as a promise that the Family Roll would not be on public assistance.

CUBA

"We took the boat, and we had a good time. There were quite a bit of children there was music, but of course the parents were worried because it was a time when there were submarines going around. It was a long trip. It was at least two or three weeks on that boat."

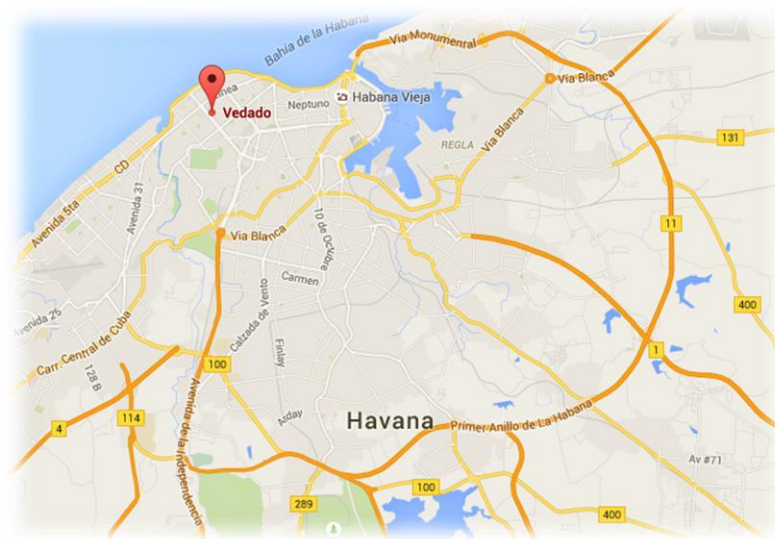
“We didn’t stop anywhere. And it was full. We were lucky to have the cabin, because there were a lot of people. I don’t know how my father managed it, but we had a first class, for two people, so we were four people. I didn’t want to sleep with anyone, so we got two of those folding chairs, so that’s what I slept in. I don’t know if Guy shared with my father, my father wasn’t as heavy as you have seen (in later photos).

“This (voyage) is the reason I can’t stand grits. Guy could have been eating with my parents, but me, being younger, they had a children’s (area), and of course, Guy was delegated to be with me, poor Guy. And they were giving us grits. Every morning. <Laughs> And I hated grits. And to this day, I hate grits... Guy wasn’t enchanted with it either.”

The Family Roll arrived in Cuba at the end of November, 1941, about a week before Pearl Harbor.

“I remember hearing, but to me it wasn’t a big deal because first of all I didn’t know the whole history so I missed all of that, but I do know that we arrived at that time.”

Upon arrival in Cuba, they stayed two to three days at refugee camp, Camp Tiscornia, sometimes referred to as “The Ellis Island of Cuba” with food brought in by a man calling himself “Moishe Pipik”. The Family Roll eventually moved into town, settled in, awaiting their opportunity to enter the United States.



Contemporary map showing location of Vedado, Cuba

“We lived in Cuba near Havana in Vedado. “

It was a fairly modest existence in Cuba. The Jewish organizations there, such as HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), helped out, providing some money, but the Family Roll subsided on two dollars a day. Aunt Rose was also big support.

In Cuba, the Jewish refugees were all known as “Polacos” among the local population.

“That must have been because that was the first group that came. So we were Polacos. Everybody was called Polaco. I assume that some people knew we were not all from Poland, but we were all Polacos. When there are immigrants, people put a name to it, then they all become the same.

“Aunt Rose came to visit us in Cuba with Uncle Max (Max Baron, another of Claire’s brothers, who had already emigrated to the US). And the story is very funny because they had our address... they came to the door and my mother wouldn’t let them in. She didn’t expect them. She hadn’t seen Aunt Rose since even before she got married. So they had to convince her that it was her brother and her aunt.”



School in Cuba. Blanche 3rd row, 3rd from left with bow in hair. Guy with the group of boys toward the rear on right.



The Family Roll remained in Cuba through the end of 1941, all of 1942, and into

1943 – approximately a year-and-a-half. Guy's bar mitzvah was in Cuba. Aunt Rose was there, and paid for Uncle Max to accompany her so as not to be by herself.

"I think it was the first time he (Guy) got long pants... I'm pretty sure that was the first time....They had some sort of a party in the house. One of their friends took the photos. But it wasn't a party for the children, it was a party for the adults. "

Family Roll in Cuba with a visit from Aunt Rose (on right)

FLORIDA

In 1943, the Family Roll finally received the official permission to enter the United States – all except Blanche's father, Louis, who had problems with his papers, so he was forced to remain behind in Cuba. Claire, Blanche, and Guy flew from Havana to Florida.

"We came by plane... It was a passenger plane, propeller plane. There were people on it, but not like today... It was a regular plane but we didn't see anything because it was during the war so they were closing up everything."

It was the first time Guy and Blanche had been in an airplane. Interestingly, Claire had flown years earlier in Romania – in an open biplane. She had been one of the first women in Romania to ride in a plane.

Claire, Blanche, and Guy arrived in Florida on May 1 – almost three years after the Germans occupied Paris. Uncle Max greeted them in Florida, and picked them up in his Ford coupe.

"One of the little Fords, with the thing in the back... a model A with the rumble seat. So Guy and I sat there. And he (Uncle Max) had a moustache then at the time, and I asked him about it and he said, 'well, it replaces the hair on here' (patting his head). So we stayed with them for a week – actually one day in their apartment, then they got a room for us."

Apparently, Uncle Max's wife, Aunt Fannie would sit up in the dead of night, in her sleep, and sing a few bars of opera, then went back to sleep. Nobody was sure which opera, but it was certainly surprising in the middle of the night.

"Ethel and Wallace (Uncle Max's children, Ethel (Baron) Altman, and Wallace Baron) were there too. They were living in Florida at that time. I was twelve, so she (Ethel) was twelve-and-a-half, and they had the army people in the park, and she and Aunt Fannie would go there and she (Ethel) would play the mandolin for them. And Uncle Max, he also played the violin."

"So this is May of 1943. We stayed a week, and it took us three days to get to New York and we arrived on the 10th. Three days and three nights on a bus. What do I remember about the bus trip? Let me tell you. We spoke no English. My mother spoke a little bit of English, and people got off the bus and sometimes the bus starts moving up a little bit, and we got scared and were running up to the bus, because we didn't know. Three days and three nights. On the bus."

There were bus stops, but no stop-stops. It was straight through... and it was May 10 when we arrived in New York. So for my birthday we arrived in New York. And it was raining."

NEW YORK

When they arrived in New York, they were greeted by Aunt Rose and Uncle Leo's (Claire's brother, Leon) wife, Aunt Helen.

"We had never seen anyone like Aunt Helen. Aunt Helen was quite an enormous woman and we were a little bit surprised, maybe more than surprised.

"They (Aunt Helen and Uncle Leo) took us home and we stayed with them about a month. After two weeks my mother went and found a job, factory work. And I got German Measles. The second week I was there. I went to school and got German Measles. That was my present. Guy was shipped off to a friend. I think it was one of Aunt Rose's friends. He was an old man. Very, very nice. I slept with my mother in one bed. Aunt Helen and Bernice slept in the other, and Uncle Leo slept on the couch outside.

"And then Aunt Rose had a house and she took us – she had tenants I think upstairs. Aunt Rose was also in Brooklyn. Same neighborhood. East New York. There was a living room where Aunt Rose would sleep. There was a bedroom where my mother and I would sleep. And there was like a bedroom where Guy would sleep. My father wasn't there at the time. He came later on. And there was one bathroom. And one kitchen. And when it was washed you put all the newspapers on the floor. Of course she was Kosher. So I learned a lot about being Kosher there. It doesn't mean that I ever became. I know about it more or less. I tried when someone came. So that gets me up to twelve years old."

Louis was still stuck in Cuba, taking a job polishing diamonds. Claire had found employment in a war factory in New York working a buffing machine that smoothed rubber materials. Then she got another job for a friend of Aunt Rose's putting stems in watches. Although Claire was doing a wonderful job, she had a boss with no people skills that constantly yelled at her, to the point where Claire could not stand it anymore and became physically ill.

"I told her, I said, 'leave!' But when she left, the lady went to complain to Aunt Rose that she wants her back. She exaggerated and then she lost my mother. That person took advantage of my mother and then she got the result."

After that, Claire got another job in a shoe factory, working long hours. Guy was always working. Shortly after they moved in with her, Aunt Rose felt that Guy could get a job washing floors at other people's home.

"He did that once and my mother said, 'Oh no. Not that!' My mother didn't raise us to go and wash someone else's floors. To help in the house was one thing. I don't remember what Guy did. He did something the next year when he was fifteen or so. My mother wanted us to go to

school, that's for sure. She didn't make much money, but she was paying Aunt Rose I think thirty two dollars a month for rent, which at that time was not such a bad thing. Guy had a job in a deli in the summertime. And he was making a little bit of money, and at the end of that, he spent it all on us. He took us to Coney Island – Ethel, me, Bernice... he was overgenerous. This is still before the end of the war.

I even got a one-day job. You'll laugh. Aunt Helen used to like to go and eat deli. To serve the food, I got a nickel as a tip. That was it. They did me a favor. So the person gave me a nickel."

Blanche went into the fifth grade, Guy entered into seventh or eighth, then he went to high school. He passed the exam and attended Stuyvesant High School, one of the premiere high schools in New York City. As an interesting side-note, Blanche's future husband, Harold, was in Guy's class. They weren't close friends in high school, but knew who each other were.

One of Guy's hobbies while still living with Aunt Rose was buying and fixing cars with his friend, Walter.

"We moved out of Aunt Rose's in 1947 I think. Aunt Rose went to Argentina to visit her sister. I don't know what happened. Aunt Rose sent a letter to someone saying things about us. She was a very nice person, but her mouth... she said things. And for some reason, it came back to my mother, and we read it, and I don't know if my mother sent it back to her. She had those words – paskudnyak, ----- all those Russian curse words, which she used very well. I was a piskavata, which means... I am not exactly sure



Blanche, modeling one of Guy's cars. Brooklyn 1947

what. It's not paskudnyak, but anyhow, that was me. She says things about me, that's okay, she says things about my mother and my brother, that wasn't very good for me."

Louis finally arrived in the US after Claire went to Washington DC to personally petition for him to enter the country. Louis got a job in a pharmacy.

Schooling was a continuing saga for Blanche. Growing up speaking French and German, she had arrived in Cuba, not knowing any Spanish, but had to learn it when she went to school there. Then when she arrived in New York, she did not speak English.

"When I came here, I almost forgot the Spanish because I had to learn English. French we spoke all the time, so I didn't forget it."

Because of all the turmoil and constantly being uprooted, Blanche was in the fourth grade, or its equivalent, three times in three different countries.

"... I lost time in my schooling. In Cuba, I went through the fourth grade, and then I was getting into the fifth grade. Then I came here and I was in the fourth grade, but it towards the end of the year. And then I went up to the fifth grade. I skipped, and in a way the skipping was good, but I missed something in the math, especially, my English wasn't that great."

"I was very lucky, I went to school here -- the fourth grade (again). Of course I was very tall <facetiously>. So when I was in the class with the nine-year-olds in the fourth grade and I was twelve, I wasn't any bigger than they were, so they never knew. So that worked to my advantage, I guess. I started as soon as I got here. I had about ten words of English. "

Back then, there were no English-as-a-second-language programs in school. Immigrant children were put in a regular class in school and it was sink-or-swim.

"You learn a little bit at a time. In science once, they asked who know the name of Vesuvius and I raised my hand and I said 'Vesuvius', and they were all very proud of me. I was very lucky. The kids in the class were very nice. Some of them stayed after school to teach me the pledge of allegiance, which we had to say in school. And then I got into fifth grade, and then I already spoke some English. It was okay. It wasn't always the most pleasant thing. I was very lucky. I was extremely lucky, because the people were not mean to me, on the contrary, they were very nice. So were the teachers."

Claire knew some English prior to arriving the United States. She had an amazing talent for languages, as did all of her siblings, her children, and most of her nieces and nephews. German and Romanian were her native languages, but she took English and French when she was in high school. She was able to recite one of Lord Byron's poems by heart. She had already written letters to Aunt Fannie in English, and it is believed that someone in the family kept those letters, they were so beautifully written. Claire was very concise in her writing and needed very few words to explain things. Claire also knew Yiddish, Spanish, and some Italian.

After Louis arrived in New York, the Family Roll moved from Brooklyn to the Grand Concourse section of the Bronx for a year in 1948 or 1949. In order to finish the school year at her high school in Brooklyn, Blanche made an arduous commute from the Bronx to Brooklyn, after which she transferred to a high school in the Bronx. Of course, the family moved back to Brooklyn shortly thereafter.

"So it was not an easy thing for me... because I was supposed to be entered into the honor society, so I didn't make it because I had to change schools."

After graduating Taft High School, Blanche attended the Fashion



Graduating Taft High School, Bronx

Institute of Technology. Nowadays, it has a modern campus in mid-town Manhattan with an enrollment of 10,000 students, but at the time Blanche attended it consisted of the top floor of the High School of Needles and Trades.

In 1952, Guy married Anita Glotzer. Among the attendees was Anita's cousin, Harold Matusof, who would eventually become Blanche's husband five years later. Although neither of them remembers meeting there, Blanche and Harold were captured in the same photo below.



Aunt Rose at Alan's first birthday.

Blanche does remember seeing Harold in 1956 at a birthday party for Alan, Guy and Anita's son. However, Blanche was at that party with a date.

"... and I got rid of the date... for certain reasons. I went out with him a few times and he had been in a concentration camp, he was one of those guys. And he had been married, he was divorced, and he had two kids. And my mother said what type of a life I would have, but she left it at that. The one time she didn't start insisting.

"So after going with him for awhile I asked him, 'Where do I stand?' I think maybe it was not the big love, maybe an infatuation. He said he was married once and he didn't know. I

told him, 'I don't know the whole story, either, so I can be just as afraid as you. I'm not asking you for now. I just want to know where I stand with you.' And he couldn't give me an answer.

“So I invited him to Alan’s first birthday party and he came with me and on the way home I told him I didn’t want to see him again. He said, ‘You waited until now?’ I told him he was invited. He felt that Guy did not like him -- he was right. Guy didn’t say anything. But I said, ‘Put yourself in my brother’s position. He’s my brother, he’s looking out for me.’

“So that was that. We used to go out in a group. So one his friends called me up and wanted to go out with me. I had known beforehand that he had wanted, so I told him, no it’s not right. I wouldn’t do that. Besides which, I didn’t want to go out with him. But that was a very good thing to say. I would never do that to anyone. I really wouldn’t. You don’t go out with a friend of a friend if you had been, you know, so he never called again.”

Meanwhile, Harold had been interested in Blanche at that time and had asked Guy if she was going with that guy. Guy said no. Blanche knew who Harold was and that he was Anita’s cousin. She was told by everyone how nice a guy Harold was, so they starting going out as Harold was coming off active duty in the US Air Force. However, immediately after they started dating, Harold was taken aback when Blanche went on a vacation.



“I had a planned vacation, you know. In one of those things you go for the summer two weeks or so. And he (Harold) was surprised. And I said, ‘I paid for it, I’m going.’ I had a good time. I had met some people there, but when I came home I started going with Dad (Harold). “

Blanche and Harold were married on March 3, 1957. And moved into a small apartment in the Bronx. Harold was working as a mechanical engineer for

Bendix in New Jersey. About a year later, they bought a house in the Morris Park section of the Bronx near the Bronx Zoo.

Claire moved in about month after Mark was born. When asked how Harold felt about his mother-in-law moving in, Blanche explains:

“(He) was very pleased. He had less work. I don’t remember where I went with my mother. We left you with Dad, and Nana (Harold’s mother, Faigl) was coming. And when she arrived he was so happy, because I guess you made in your diaper and he didn’t want to change it. I can imagine on one finger how many times he changed you. He was not a modern Dad.”

Blanche recalls a story when her son, Mark was to have a Pidyon ha-Ben. Mark was born in late October, so thirty one days later it was late November and getting dark early. The ceremony must take place before sunset and minion is needed. Harold was working in New Jersey for Bendix at the time.

“I understand they were in a meeting or the middle of the meeting and he (Harold) said, ‘I’m very sorry, I can’t stay, I have to go to Pidyon ha-Ben.’ I think that’s very funny, and he had

invited one or two guys over there to come along with him (to fill out the minion). And we had people coming after, it was an open house."

There was some friction early on between Blanche and Harold's mother, Faigl, when Blanche went back to work shortly after Mark was born.

"My mother had retired and we were talking to each other, and she said one of us has to go back to work. I wanted to and she really wanted to be home. So I asked Harold, 'Do you mind?' and he said no. My mother-in-law – 'What do you mean you are going to back to work?' "

Faigl felt Harold was making a nice living and did not feel Blanche should be working with a baby at home. Blanche brought up the fact that Harold's cousin, Charlotte works. Faigl explained that Charlotte is a doctor. Blanche did not see that that should make a difference, so when Blanche asked her mother-in-law if she wanted her son back, Faigl never brought it up again.

"She did a few things to me and it didn't take too long to find out who I was dealing with. I tried not to be mean, and I wasn't mean, I just asked her if she wanted Harold back. I defended myself from her."

There was one episode where Harold, Blanche, and Claire attended Blanche's cousin, Wallace's wedding and Faigl came over to babysit Mark. Faigl was apparently a very heavy sleeper.

"When she fell asleep, she didn't hear anything. You (Mark) usually didn't wake up, but if you did, Meme (Claire) would usually come in and all was fine. I guess Nana (Faigl) didn't hear you, and when a baby starts crying, it doesn't stop crying. And that was the only time I ever came home and she was out of her mind. I knew why. She did not hear you. I think that was the only time we let her babysit, but that was an important wedding to go to."

Claire went to Israel toward the end of 1961, returning the following year when Blanche was expecting her second son, Ronald.

"I think you came on the boat with us to say goodbye to her. I remember I had to carry you up and down the stairs because they were very slippery. And when Meme came back. She came back earlier than she was going to because she knew I was pregnant with Ronny."

"When I went to get a checkup, my doctor asked if I was going to have any more children. You know my answer – are you going to promise me a girl? He said no. I said then I was not going to have any more children. It doesn't mean I wouldn't have, but that's what I told him."

POSTSCRIPT

Blanche and Harold, with their sons Mark and Ron, went on to have good lives. In 1965, they moved to El Paso, Texas for several years, when Harold was a defense contractor at White Sands Missile Range in New Mexico. They returned to New York, settling on Long Island, before retiring and moving to the San Francisco Bay area in 1997. Harold passed away in 2007.

Guy and Anita, and their children Alan and Shari, lived in Wantagh, New York. Guy and Anita retired to southern California. Guy passed away in 1999.

Claire lived a long life, mostly with Harold, Blanche, and family. As the oldest of her siblings, she was somewhat of an unofficial “matriarch” of her family, and whenever her brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews either visited or emigrated to the United States, they generally stayed with Claire and the Matusof family. Claire passed away in 1996.

Louis and Claire had separated several times during their marriage. Louis passed away in 1967 in Israel.

Of Claire’s seven brothers and sisters, miraculously, all survived the war and the holocaust, but after the war were scattered across several countries and continents. Blanche believes that she and Guy were the only of their generation of cousins that met and knew all of Claire’s siblings.

Claire’s two brothers, Leon and Max Baron, as previously mentioned, had emigrated to the United States prior to the war and had settled in New York. Leo was married to Helen, and had a daughter Bernice. Max married Fannie and lived both in New York and Florida with his children, Ethel and Wallace.



Helen and Leon

Max and Fannie



his second wife, Matilda.

Milou, because he had fought on the “wrong” side during the Spanish Civil War of the 1930’s, was suspected of being a communist by the US Government and was never allowed to enter the United States. He and his wife, Helen, emigrated to Mexico and settled in Puebla, where his daughters, Rina and Ilona (originally named Irene and Madeline) were born. Years later, he had a third daughter, Yvonne, with

Helen and Milou

Charles (also known as Eimu) the youngest brother, fought in the French Resistance, remained in Paris after the war and settled there, marrying Susan, and raising their children, Catherine and Gerard.



Charles



Charles and Susan



children."

Ly (Sara Wisnipolski) was the last one to leave in Romania and took a circuitous route to the United States after stays in Chile and Israel. Ly emigrated to the US in the early 1960's and lived with the Matusof family. Although she was never particularly comfortable with English, she obviously learned enough to become a US citizen, picking it up when she lived with Blanche and family.

"She started learning it with my kids. Ronny was still two or three years old. She picked him up, he wanted milk. So she opened the refrigerator, and she was going to give him a bottle of milk, but no, he wanted the blue bottle. And he told her. So she learned 'blue'. It's true, you learn a lot with

Ly and Puppe

Puppe (Toni Baron) and her husband, Paul Birman, had been in Paris for awhile after the war before moving to Santiago, Chile where one or two of Paul's brothers lived. She resided for a time in the United States before emigrating to Israel and living into her late 90's.

Tuliu (Jean Baron) and his wife Sylvia also left Paris for Santiago, Chile with their daughter, Daisy (Denise). Tuliu was the last surviving Baron sibling. He settled in Israel in his latter years. He erected a small memorial stone to his parents and siblings in Israel before passing away at age 98.



Tuliu in Israel with memorial to his parents and siblings

MISCELLANEOUS FAMILY PHOTOS



Romania, prior to World War I -- l. to r. Claire, Max, Zirl, Puppe, Ly, Zirl's sister Klara, Zirl's mother, Leon,



Zirl and the three youngest - Milou, Tului, Eimu, early 1920's



Louis Roll in the Romanian Army 1920's



Claire going up in a biplane - Romania, 1920's



Zirl with Blanche and Guy in Paris, 1933



Louis (2nd from left) in the French army, circa 1940



Blanche and Guy in Cuba 1942



Guy and Anita's wedding 1952, Blanche, Louis, Anita, Guy, Claire, Rose, Max



Blanche and Harold's wedding 1957



Harold and Blanche with Mark and Ron, Bronx 1962



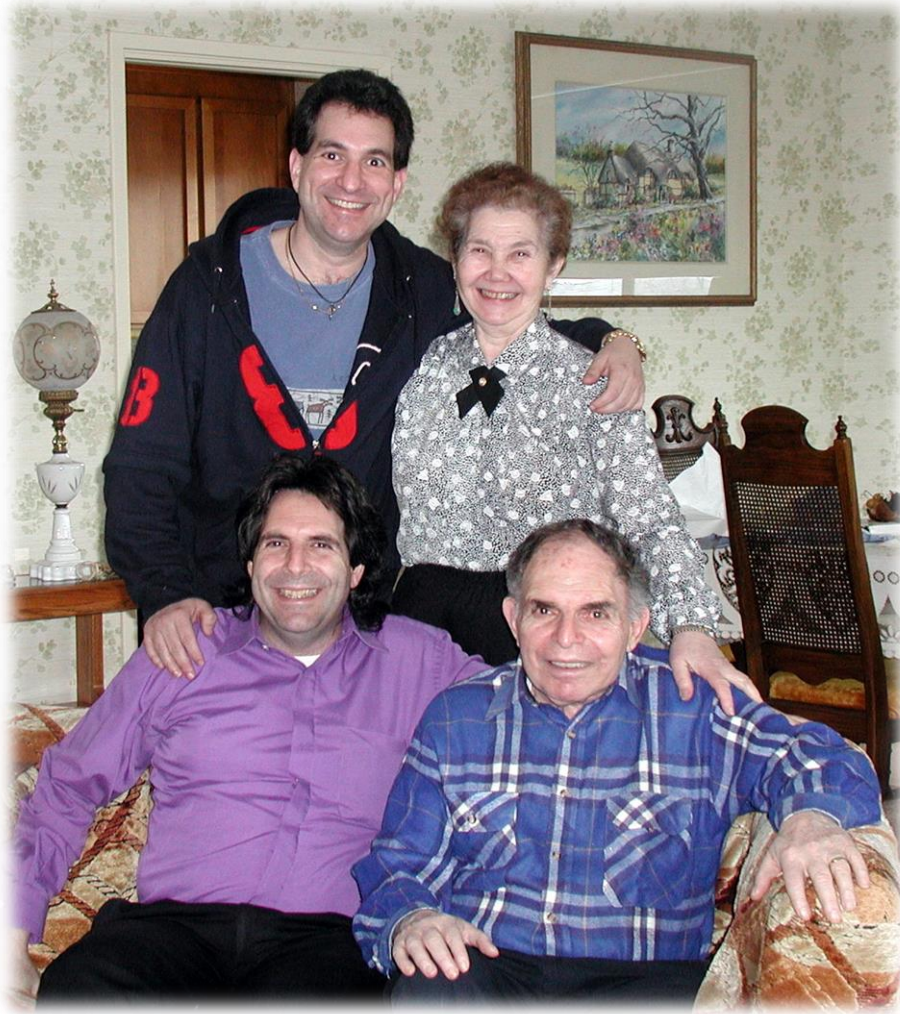
Three generations. standing - Ed Altman, Evan Altman, Ethel Altman, Charles Baron, Claire Roll, Fannie Baron, Puppe Birman, Mark Matusof; seated - Carolyn Altman, Ron Matusof, Lonnie Coleman Wantagh, NY late 1970's



Woodbury, NY, mid 1980's. Ly, Claire, Puppe, Anita, Guy, Blanche.



Blanche and Harold 1993



Mark, Blanche, Ron, Harold. 2003



Charles, Tului, Puppe in Israel



Tuliu's 98th birthday, Israel with his nieces and daughter. Rina, Denise, Ilana, Blanche.



*Claire's descendants, 2004.
standing - Alan and Shari Roll, Blanche, Mark, Nikolai, Ron and Robin Matusof, Alicia Roll.
seated - Anton and Harold Matusof, Rachel, Nathan, Anita, Marie, and Michelle Roll*

BARON FAMILY TREE

