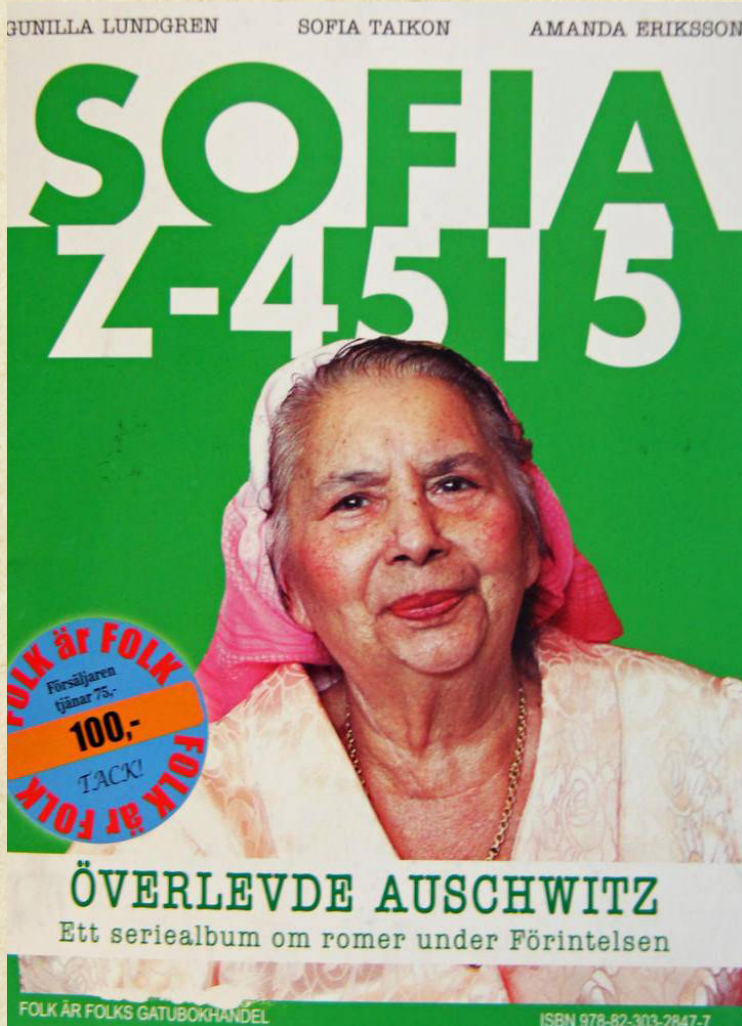




SOFIA TAIKON (born as Brzezinska)

(Poland, 1931 - unknown)



© Magazine cover Sofia Z-4515, Folk är folk (2015)

Sofia Taikon was one of only two Roma Holocaust survivors, besides her cousin Hanna Dimitri (see separate biography), who at the end of World War II managed to defy Swedish immigration policy prohibiting Roma. **The Swedish Living History Forum published her life story** in 2006 as part of a major education project.¹

Taikon's story was published in the form of a graphic novel in Swedish and Romanes. It is based on the memories she shared with Gunilla Lundgren, author of the graphic novel, and with her grandchildren. Further background would require archival research. Taikon's story is partly intertwined with Hanna Dmitri's. However, oral records of the two cousins never mention one another.

Taikon describes her early childhood as content and secure. This changed at the beginning of the war, as her home region was invaded by German Nazis.

Her family was cautious and managed to

avoid being captured up until 1942, when they were taken in for "racial examination" and then sent back home. When the Nazis returned again, the parents sent the children out to hide in the woods, but they were set betrayed by a traitor, captured and transported to a ghetto, where the parents were already being kept. However, one of Taikon's sisters was missing.

Taikon was deported to Auschwitz in March 1943. She recalled that they were not registered on arrival, only sometime later. This explains why Taikon and her cousin Dmitri's concentration camp numbers were so close (z-4515 and z-4517), despite having been deported on different occasions.

In spring 1944, Taikon was transferred to Ravensbrück. During the chaos shortly before the camp's liberation by the Red Army on April 30, 1945, she managed to avoid the deadly evacuation marches and instead she was picked up by the "White buses" of the Scandinavian Red Cross. As stated in the biographical essay of Dimitri, there is nothing to support the

¹ Lundgren, Gunilla & Sofia Taikon, illustrated by Amanda Eriksson (2006), Sofia Z-4515, Forum for Living history: Stockholm.

common statement that they would have “pretended to be Jewish” in order to defy the immigration ban against “*zigenare*”. It would have been impossible to hide the identifications on the arms, and most likely, simply nobody checked, since it was a humanitarian rescue action, assumes Gunilla Lundgren.²

Taikon’s first stop in Sweden was a provisional sanatorium set up in the old castle of Malmö museum. Due to contagious diseases, the sanatorium was in quarantine. She recalls that **friendly Swedes would throw cigarettes and sweets over the fences**. Later, Sofia was invited to stay with a friendly family in the city of Jönköping. One day the police came and took her since her right as a “Gypsy” to stay in Sweden was questioned. But the deportation could not be carried out, since there was nowhere to send her. Later, she met Swedish Roma who helped her, and she married into the Taikon family in Stockholm.

Later, she successfully applied for **compensation from the West German state**.³ Her life story became widely known through the graphic novel, which was published by the Living History Forum shortly after her death in 2005. In 2015, it was re-published as a magazine and sold by Romanian Roma performing informal street work in Sweden, produced by The Norwegian solidarity group, Folk är folk. So her life story became widely known and connected to the current situation of Roma, concerning the racialisation of poverty in South-East Europe. The edition received a prize from the foundation *Artister mot nazister* [Artists against nazis] Less well known, is that Katarina Taikon told Sofia’s story in a fictionalised format in the **children’s book Katitzi Z-1234**, published in 1976.

Sources:

1. The graphic novel by Lundgren, Gunilla, Sofia Taikon and Amanda Eriksson, Sofia Z-4515 in Swedish and Romanes, free accessible at the Swedish Living history Forum as well as supporting teaching materials: <https://www.levandehistoria.se/klassemmet/seriealbumet-sofia-z-4515>.
2. The graphic novel is also available in English (Sofia Z-4515, 2012, translation by Janna Eliot) with a foreword by Dr. Adrian Marsh and in a bilingual edition Romanian-Romanes, translated by Arina Stoenescu.

This biography has been written by Jan Selling

2 Telephone conversation with Gunilla Lundgren, August 2020

3 Stensson, Tommy, “Fyrabarnsmor får skadestånd för fem år i tyska fångläger” (Mother of four children gets indemnity for five years in German prison camps), Expressen 17. August 1964.