

Irene Sobczak

January 28, 2015

RG-50.030.0790

Summary

Irene Sobczak was born Irena Synowiec on February 16, 1930 in the settlement of Brantoffee in the region of Bialystok to Sofia and Wawyeekytz Synowiec. She had a brother, Stanislaw, a sister, Stanislawa Synowiec Tobis and a brother, George (Urich), born in 1939. Irene enjoyed playing on their large property which her father had received for serving in the First World War. They had a large home. Irene took a while to get used to her father when he returned home in 1935. She enjoyed Christmas 1939 when they decorated a tree with lights. She had two years of Polish Grade School and then attended a Russian school. Irene's home was far from the village so her only friend was the neighbor girl. She knew the war started when she heard the airplanes overhead and the dogs howling. The Russians arrested her father twice (the second time was January 5th), took away his gun and all their photos. One soldier who assisted in his arrest was a neighbor and was deported along with them to Siberia. While her father was absent, her siblings helped her mother care for the fish in the ponds and other animals. When Irene was deported February 10th with her mother and siblings, her aunt offered to take her but she wanted to remain with her mother. They were put on a freight train at Wolskowercysk and changed trains at the Russian border and arrived March 7 in Camp Teshwava. There were several buildings, a swamp, a lake and a birch forest nearby where they collected mushrooms and wild strawberries and blueberries. Due to the land situation, there was no escape. Her mother and brother had to cut wood in the forest. For food, they were given hot soup with bits of noodles and dried fish and if they had sufficient money, they could buy some rationed bread. Irene picked cranberries after school to sell so would have money for bread. Her baby brother starved to death as he could not eat the hard bread. Amnesty came July 3, 1941 so they were free to leave for any part of the Soviet Union. On January 18, 1942 Irene left with her mother and sister but had difficulty walking on their trip to the cattle train in Porog as she was recovering from an infection in her knee from a rusty nail. At Vologda her mother left the train during a long stop to search for food and the train left without her. Irene was 12 and Stella was 13 and they were alone. The train ended at Kyrgyzstan and they were left alone with no food and no water. They lived alone for four or five months with some help from the residents. They shared a job planting plants. Then a Polish soldier took them to an orphanage where they stayed a month and were taken by ship on March 12, 1942 to Pahlavi, Iran where they felt free. There they got a shower, a hand towel and a pinafore. They were taken to Tehran where they attended school held out-of-doors. They were required to wear dresses so made them out of their nightgowns. On March 3, 1943 they were taken to Maleer, India and September 8, 1943 to Karachi where they boarded the Hermitage across the Indian Ocean to Bombay. They transferred to an American ship with 5,000 wounded soldiers to Los Angeles to quarantine in an Army Camp in the Hollywood hills. Then taken to Camp Santa Rosa in Mexico where they attended school. When the war ended, Polish Communists sent a legation to take them back to Poland. Their father and brother were residing

in Poland. They were afraid to return to Poland as might be sent to Russia so went to an orphanage in the US, the Holy Family Academy, the Holy Nuns of Nazareth in Chicago. After three months in the orphanage Irene entered a Convent without her sister. After a year Irene got sick and decided to leave. Her father took her to her sister's who was married. Irene got a job and she married Bernard Sobczak on July 11, 1955 and they had four children: Kristy, Don, Sue and Michael. Irene believes you must have faith, pray and believe in G-d to get you through hardship.