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Summary

Clara Zelma (née Tajchmann) Rechnitz was born February 4, 1929 in Wetter an der Ruhr, Germany. She had an older sister, Else, and a younger brother, Gerhard. Her mother, Herta Steinfort, was Protestant. Her father, born in 1900, had immigrated from Ostrowiec, Poland in 1917 to escape anti-Semitism. He was a successful merchant of various items, such as paper and scrap metal. Despite religious differences, her parents supported the marriage. Her mother converted to Judaism and the family was raised as Jews; they were the only Jews in Wetter, but experienced no verbal insults. She states Germans were not nearly as anti-Semitic as the Poles, except for Hitler's gang.

After Hitler came to power, her father had to close his warehouse for political reasons and some of his previously loyal customers asked him to stop coming. They relocated to Witten-Annen for 1.5 years to resume his business. His wife, as a non-Jew, had to do some of his sales calls. He also suffered from appendicitis complications. Without warning, her father and other non-German Jews were detained in a nearby prison. When her father was forced to leave, the entire family went to parents' home in Ostrowiec in 1938. Household communications were in Yiddish and the children were home-schooled. Living conditions were much worse.

Her father left the family for slave labor in the hope that her mother and children, all German citizens and non-Jewish, would be left alone, which was the case. Her mother eventually gave in to pressure to divorce her husband to ease their situation. Clara fell in love with a local Polish man, but she never saw him again after he left for the partisans. Clara describes one of her work assignments, which was to allow lice to feed on her for a while as part of an experiment.

As the Russians were approaching, Clara and her mother made various escape attempts, but ultimately fled to Germany with departing German troops. Russian troops eventually overtook them and they narrowly escaped assault. They stayed in a nearby Jewish community center, where she met her future husband, Miatek (Moses) Rechnitz, who had been in Birkenau. Her mother made her way back to Wetter where her father had also returned waiting for them. Clara was soon reunited with them and her brother back in Wetter. Their attempt at recovering their house was thwarted by British occupying authorities, whom she says were worse anti-Semites than the Poles.

She married in 1947 and went to Israel. Her parents visited her in Israel but chose to join their daughter who had left for the Boston area. She joined them there after leaving Israel. Her father didn't talk much about his experiences, but did set it down in writing. Clara's son also recorded eight hours of her wartime experiences. Clara returned once to visit Germany with her mother and 10-year old daughter.