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Summary

Barbara Firestone (née Spielman), born in Cracow, Poland on February 14, 1939, was an infant when the war began and escaped from Europe when she was ten. Her father, Shimon, was from Slovakia but had family in Germany, Slovakia and the United States. He came from a large family of nine sisters and a brother. Along with several cousins some of his siblings perished during the Holocaust while others had come to the United States. Her mother's name was Chana and lived in Cracow. In what was probably an arranged marriage her father came to Cracow to marry her mother. Ms. Firestone had a brother who was ten years older and a sister who was eight years older. Her father was a successful shoemaker and supported the family in comfort, if not luxury. The family was very religious. They spoke Polish and Yiddish at home. Ms. Firestone remembered little about her years in Europe during the war. What she knew about the family's experiences came from her older brother and some from her father, who did not like to talk about their experiences. She attributes the family's survival to luck and the perseverance and resourcefulness of her father. Since her father had Slovakian citizenship the family was not put in the Cracow Ghetto until 1942. The family stayed there for about a year and a half when the liquidations began. Probably because of his craftiness and Slovakian citizenship her father and the rest of the family were able to escape deportation, and her father also helped others to escape. Although she did not remember, Ms. Firestone was told that the family then made their way to Hungary and had a difficult crossing. Apparently after they arrived in Budapest, her father sent her to a convent for a few months. She hated it, and her father sent her brother to bring her to Budapest. Her brother also rescued a few cousins from an orphanage and brought them to Budapest. The family lived in Budapest as gentiles until the war ended.

After the Russian liberation of Budapest Ms. Firestone's father went back to Cracow to see what was left of their home and of the remaining Jewish community. They found nothing left so they returned to Budapest. The family stayed there a while and then went to a DP camp in Germany where they waited close to three years for a visa from the United States. She remembered little about that experience. The family then came to Brooklyn where they socialized with family and other survivors.

Ms. Firestone wished that her parents had told her more about what happened, but they were reluctant to talk about it. That has also been true of her husband, also a survivor.