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Summary

Marsha Sipolovich Botwinik was born February 15, 1907, in an area now part of Poland but was then in Russia. Her parents' names were Israel and Bela; they had four children. Around 1917, they moved deeper into Russia to escape Cossack harassment. After settling in better circumstances in Tambov (Russia), the children attended Russian schools. Their area became contested between the Bolsheviks and the Cossacks. Though the Cossacks were still randomly killing Jews, Marsha's family was safeguarded by neighbors and their blond features. Conditions became worse and food more scarce.

Her father died from pneumonia after a long confinement by Russians in a cellar, whereupon they moved in with the Ostrowski family, also Jews. In 1920, after the formation of the Poland nation, they successfully applied to leave for Poland with their citizenship there as a birthright. They returned on freight cars to Baranavichy (now in Belarus) in bitter winter weather traveling about two months. She relates a variety of difficult and dangerous hardships.

With help from her mother's sister, the mother and four children are relocated (exact location unclear but still in Poland). Next door was a man whom she married in 1932 and they raised four children. They owned 40 acres (maybe hectares which she uses a moment later) that they farmed. In 1940, German persecution, assisted by local Poles, against the Jews became common. They were moved into a ghetto where one night about 500 Jews were assembled, killed, and burned. The ghetto inhabitants were routinely pressed into work gangs; her husband was working with local farms.

After a series of persecutions, they attempted to escape to Russia about 15 miles away. In the confusion of trying to connect with her husband, she became separated from her mother and daughter, Rose. Arrested when she returned to the city, and while awaiting execution, she broke through a brick chimney in her cell and escaped. Locating her husband, they fled together and unexpectedly came across her sister. After rejoicing over their reunion, they set off towards Russia aided by partisans. Betrayed by locals, her sister was shot as they scattered when the Germans came, and she was separated from her husband. She continued to suffer further severe hardships while hiding in the forests in the winter. She despaired over the whereabouts of her mother and daughter, though she had again found her husband.

Marsha found both her mother and daughter at the end of the war, though her mother died shortly after reuniting. Rose had been in a Soviet orphanage but became successfully reunited though with difficulty. Her other three daughters were never located and were presumed to have been killed or starved. She and her husband came to America in 1947 aided by her husband's brother from the refugee camp they were in near Berlin.