

Summary of Oral History: Oral History Interview with Janet Appelfield

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(May 22, 1982)

Part 1 (Summary)

Janet Appelfield, born June 4, 1935 in Krakow, Poland and raised in Novita (?), a village with 2,000 Jews about 20 miles from Krakow; whose father and brothers inherited the grandfather's hardware/housewares business; tells of a happy traditional Jewish life surrounded by relatives and no experiences of anti-Semitism; sister, Sarinka (?), born in '38, died in '41 of diphtheria; war started in '39 and people were shot; the Gestapo arrested her father for questioning and took some of their belongings; her father took the family to the grandparents in Veneveza (?); then they drove in a caravan of horses and buggies towards Russia ending in Woof (?); traveled on to Woodak (?) and reached Venicky (?) in the Ukraine; the entire family were required to obtain Russian passports to work; grandparents, aunt and uncle obtained them and were sent to a labor camp in Siberia; Janet's father obtained a special passport as reported to authority that Lenin had been given refuge at his grandparents; tells how her family returned to Poland in '41 and were placed in the Novita Ghetto; when the family saw that Jews were being deported, they tried to escape via horse and buggy but turned back when Polish police stopped them; each hid separately which Janet understood was necessary; Janet was placed with Pfalz Dentel (?), a family nursemaid, her mother was deported to Belzec and her father was placed in the Krakow Ghetto and daily shipped to a cable factory; when the nursemaid no longer desired to care for Jane, she was sent to a Polish cousin who obtained Polish papers for the two of them from a priest; when the cousin, who was in the underground, was arrested by the Gestapo, an unknown woman in the street took Janet home; when bombing got severe, Janet was sent to the Goam (?) family farm in Bonavista (?) near Krakow owned by the Catholic Church; they took good care of her and she posed as Catholic and attended school and studied catechism; after the war, her uncle took her to the Jewish committee in Krakow and she had jaundice; after a few weeks a volunteer took some children including Janet to a resort in Sakapana (?) close to the Czechoslovakian border in the Carpathian Mountains; Janet's father found her in late '45 and rented an apartment nearby; Janet learned that many relatives including her mother had been killed; the two moved to her grandfather's house in Novita (?) and her father's friends moved in; area not safe as severe anti-Semitism so slept with guns under their pillows; her father had been transferred from the Krakow Ghetto to Camp Pashoo (?) and then to Terezin; she occasionally attended school and had no friends; March '47 the two traveled to the US on a visitor's pass and were permitted to remain as her father had married an American citizen; they resided in New Jersey and she was placed in 5th grade and soon promoted to 7th grade; she returned to Poland last summer and

visited places where she had lived and saw descendants of people who knew her who showed her photos of her as a child; through “EST,” she recently experienced the anxiety and fear she had blocked out during the war when she had two fearful experiences: 1) locked in a dark apartment, and 2) when the Gestapo searched her apartment.

Part 2 (Summary)

Janet Applefield relates her experiences in the US; she had been sponsored by her father’s cousins; she and her father received reparations from Germany; Janet made friends including boyfriends; she responded to questions about her experiences during the Holocaust; the family were minimally religious and only celebrated religious holidays; they only spoke English in the US; after two jobs, her father was able to get back to the hardware/kitchenware business; her son is a writer and encouraged her father to write his memoir; her father died in 1978; Janet married at 19; lived in Massachusetts for six years and Toronto for five years; they had three children: Daniel, now 26, Debbie, now 22 and John, now 15; David visited Poland on his own and last summer the entire family made the visit where everyone was friendly; visiting Israel made her feel Jewish; she still feels somewhat numb regarding the Holocaust; does not believe there will ever be another Holocaust.

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