

AGJHS

SONIA PASTERNAK

Family:

Sonia's maiden name was Zlotnick. She was born in Radom, Poland which is centrally located and is between Warsaw and Cracow. Her father was a Rabbi, a writer of Jewish newspapers and Hebrew books. She had two brothers and there were five sisters. She was the oldest of the three sisters that still remained at home. Radom was a town of 35,000 Jews, most of which were poor.

German Arrival:

Life changed dramatically. Felt constant danger and the more traditional Jews were ridiculed. All those who had no job were in danger. Father had to go into hiding. Parents sent her to Lemberg to take wedding trossseau to her sister in January, 1941. Germans followed her tracks in the snow and confiscated the trossseau, except for her sister's fur coat which she was wearing. The coat saved her life as she passed for a non-Jew because of it. Sonia stayed in Lemberg until 1942 when Germans entered. Father sent for them with a truck full of leather. They hid themselves under leather and returned to Radom.

Life in Radom under German Occupation:

By then Germans had organized the town and everyone had to work. Father was hidden as unable to work. There were two ghettos fully working. In September, 1942 organized the biggest transport of people to Auschwitz and Treblinka. She had a job working in a Faience factory.. She brought the rest of her family there to avoid transport and hid them there. People were notified by large announcements posted stating that "tonight there would be a selection" but they stayed hidden and didn't go. Knew from other cities what was going on in regard to death camps - that the older would be destroyed before the younger ones. It was so scientifically conducted. Owner of factory received a letter that Jews were hidden in his factory and should be brought to the ghetto. Two days later the family entered the ghetto. Smaller selections occurred and there was constant attrition. Intellectuals were eliminated first. On March 14, 1943 to celebrate Day of German Heroes they marched Jews thirty miles away from Radom. Germans went to Jewish headman and requested fifty Jews with small sacks. The Jews thought there would be an exchange for English prisoners so many more than fifty volunteered. As they left the ghetto they realized no exchange was to take place so 140 people all decided to run in different directions. One German commander collected eleven

young girls and said he would save them so long as they didn't tell what happened. After that they heard shots. They returned to ghetto but everyone knew what had happened anyway. Her father had told her to try to get a Polish passport as she looked and spoke Polish.

Passing as a Pole:

(Side 2) Sonia's two sisters were sleeping and working on premises so it was fairly safe for her to work for a leather company which made boots and coats for German army. She then worked in a garden place and finally ran away. Germans interrogated sisters and boyfriend looking for her. A Pole hid her and her girlfriend. Her friend had worked in an armament factory and knew someone who was connected with the underground. The underground kept them hidden for one week and then bought them tickets (train) to Warsaw. Arrived in Warsaw in 1943 at age 26 and found work living in and working at their store. She had attended Polish high school so it was easier for her. She posed as a Pole, going to Church and doing what the priests said. When she arrived the Warsaw Ghetto was still in flames. In 1944 the Polish uprising occurred. Warsaw was left uninhabited. She worked where she could. She swore to a Polish gendarme that she was not Jewish and gave the sign of the cross. She lived in Ursus, a small town thirty miles outside of Warsaw until January 13, 1945 when Russians March in. Then she returned to Radon. She was once followed by Polish policeman and luckily was near the store where she worked and they knew her. Another time, walking to work, noticed that everyone was being stopped - so she turned around to avoid it.

Conclusion:

Both sisters survived. One had been in Ravensbruck and the other had gotten shelled by Russians near Berlin. She ended up in Stuttgart working for the American Distribution Committee. Sonia came to the United States in 1946.