

HELEN ROTHSTEIN

Family:

Parents names were Fega and Chaim Rosenberg. Mother's maiden name was Holtzman. She had a brother named Moshe" and a sister named Rifka. She was born in a small town called Vishkov, Poland. Her date of birth is February 19, 1930.

German Arrival:

Upon their arrival the Germans took first group of Jews and burned them alive in the Synagogue. She ten years old and didn't realize impact of what was happening. Her family was outside of town in trenches because bombs were falling and guns were shooting. When discovered by Germans, they were separated from Poles. They were told to dig trenches because there might be more bombings. Actually they were digging their own graves. After digging for two hours the German Wehrmacht officer told them he was giving them the "gift of life" and that they should get out of town and go anyplace else. They walked out of town and never went back. Left with nothing on thir backs and the winter of 1939 was very cold.

Leaving Home:

They learned that Poland was divided into two parts: German and Russian. Father tried to get them to Russian side because he felt they would be safer. He went alone to try to get to the other side and didn't return for three weeks. Learned that the Germans wouldn't let them cross the border and the Russians wouldn't permit them to enter. People froze to death on the border. The family remained in area of German occupation. Stayed in one room of a house occupied by a Polish family that father was doing business with. The village was called Drusa and was not far from Warsaw.

Warsaw Ghetto:

In 1940 they rounded up Jews from all surrounding villages and towns and created the Warsaw Ghetto. When they got to the ghetto there was no place to stay. Conditions were horrible. Five families stayed in one room. They had to sleep in shifts. There were roaches mice and lice. "It was Hell." Helen was eleven years old and was already the business lady. Used to take things out of the ghetto to sell and bring back food until it got too hard to get out. Her Mother and sister were taken first. Before the next selection her father said "Save yourself. If we survive we'll meet again someday." She had no documents and snuck out of the ghetto to try and get some for the family. She was pointed out as a Jew and was to be taken to Gestapo. The Pole would get a reward of food. First he asked her if she had any money or jewelery to give him. She didn't. She was so terrified she jumped out the window and fled.

Evading Capture:

She found that her father had sewn a one hundred dollar bill into her skirt; However, she couldn't cash it. She decided that she needed Polish papers - birth certificate or baptism certificate. She had a Christian friend in a town so she went there and went to the church. She kneeled before the priest, kissed his hand and explained she was going into Warsaw to school and Needed papers to avoid any problems. She looked polish with blond hair and blue eyes. She pretended to be her friend. She didn't want anyone in Warsaw to think that she was Jewish, she told the priest. He gave her the baptism certificate but she was still afraid in case anyone would recognize her and turn her over. Her father told her to survive and tell the world. So she decided to go to the part of Poland that was occupied by the Russians. At age thirteen (1942) she went looking for jobs as a maid. She found one position but the people were abusive. The next position worked out better and she went to church and communion every Sunday. She worked seven days a week but one night they heard her speaking Yiddish in her sleep and asked her about it. She said she was dreaming that she was fighting with a German and was speaking German. She said that she came from a city called Posyn where many Germans lived with Poles. She worked very hard both inside the house and out in the fields. She slept in the main house but didn't speak much or discuss anything. One day they told her she worked like a Jewess and she was petrified that they knew. When she heard of the uprising in the ghetto she knew nothing of her father or brother. She stayed with the family until 1944. She told them her father and brother were in the army.

Liberation:

Liberated at end of 1944. The family which she worked for rejoiced that they were finally getting rid of the Jews. There was no feeling of guilt as they agreed with what the Germans were doing. When she realized the teachings of Christianity she thought that if she had been born under other circumstances she would have the same feelings. Felt need to tell them that Jesus was a Jew and was killed by the Romans but was afraid to make them suspicious of her. She had to be a good Christian in order to survive. She had been very lucky to be taken in as a maid. Farmer /Employer went into Austrolenka, a nearby town, and met some of his Jewish friends who had been partisans. He came back home and said "They didn't kill all the Jews. There's still some of them left over." When shooting ended she told them she had to go find her father and brother. Never told them that she was Jewish. When she came to her town, which took her three days hitch-

Liberation (continued)

hiking by horse and wagon. She found that she was the only survivor of her immediate family. Her Father told her if she survived to contact his sister in America and she'd be taken care of. She was fifteen years old. She lived with other survivors in a small house in Buzza. She bought Russian clothing and sold it in the nearby villages. While she was gone the Poles attacked the house in Luckoff and killed two children. Poles still hated Jews and said Hitler didn't do the job. Many survivors were killed after the war by the Polish people. Her aunt and cousin both were killed by Poles after the war.

Placement in DP Camp:

There was a Jewish Brigade in English army to take out surviving Jews - especially the children who had no one. They went in camouflaged boxcars from Poland to Czechoslovakia and from there to Hungary, Rumania, And finally Gratz Australia. Went to DP camps on English side. Many Ukrainians were there who were big anti-semites who said they were afraid of Communism. Actually, they were afraid of Russians because they had conspired with the Germans. They were transported from Austria to Italy and was in a DP camp there for two years. Wanted to go to Palestine instead of Cuba or America where she had relatives. She did go to visit an Aunt in Cuba for a few weeks. She finally came to the United States in December, 1947 and lived with a sister of her father's whom she had never met before. She came and got a job in a department store earning thirty dollars a week and paid her aunt ten dollars room and board. She worked in the day and went to school at night to get her high school education.

Life in America:

She shared a room with her cousin. Her aunt wasn't really as an aunt to her because they had never met before. Aunt went to America before her father was ever married. She felt like a stranger. Her aunt felt under an obligation to take her. She married an American just discharged from the Army - they were both looking for someone to belong to - and they had four children. One son graduated from West Point and is a major in the army. Her second child is a daughter who has a masters degree in education. Third son is a doctor and the fourth is still only seventeen. She has no pictures of her family except one given to her by a great-uncle of her mother at age seventeen and one picture of her father. Has nothing and no one else.. contacted many Jewish organizations but found no one. Sponsored three cousins to come. She has become a travel agent and a real estate agent. Must keep her mind occupied and tries to go forward. Has experienced love, birth, grandchildren. Never used a psychiatrist. She came from Hell and now lives in Heaven. Her problems are minor by comparison.