

Dora and Max Neselrot Interview      5-22-89

DN:        I was born in 1922. My parents were not observant. They were Zionists. He was also a philanthropist. In Skarzysko-Kamimena, about 10 percent of the people were Jewish. I was in Maidanek, and then in a munitions factory. I was in Maidanek just a few hours. My father was killed in Buchenwald. My mother was paralyzed, but survived, and died three years ago. We came to the U.S. from Poland in 1962, together with my sister. I married my husband and he's a chemist and we built up an electroplating business.

WH:        Where were you born?

MN:        In Wladowice, Poland, west of Auschwitz. My family was also Zionist. I had six sisters and three brothers. Three children made it through the war. I spent the war in Russia.

DN:        We get the Kiplinger Letter and in it they write that the government here can know everything about you, especially the IRS. This is scary. This newsletter is for people who don't want to think too much. It gives you everything in concentrated form.

WH:        Can a Holocaust happen here?

DN:        Oh yes, but the Jews here in Birmingham, they don't believe it. And when they had a Holocaust commemoration, only the survivors and the rabbis came. In other words, about 50 out of 4,000 Jews came. I tell people if I can convince one Gentile to like one Jew, it's a lot. If we had had more friends among the Poles, we could have saved maybe 100,000 more Jews.

WH:        Why did you come to Birmingham?

DN:        I was afraid of the crime in New York. My husband's company had work here.

WH:        How do you feel about religion?

DN: Well, after the war I saw how the Poles pray to God and I was crying. I thought, “Why can’t I believe in something like they do?” But I couldn’t understand how God could let this happen to the Jews. But when I came here I wanted the children to believe in something. So I joined an Orthodox synagogue. And the children used to say to me, “Mother, you’re a hypocrite. You don’t believe and you belong to an Orthodox synagogue.” But they were very nice to us, the people in the synagogue.

WH: Are the Gentiles here different than the ones in New York?

DN: They are very polite. You don’t know if they want to kill you or not. Where we live here it’s not Jewish. But we moved here because we didn’t know about neighborhoods. Schools here are walking distance. We’re two blocks from the highway. It’s very convenient.

DN: People asked me how did you raise the children that they didn’t marry Gentiles? I tell them that when they asked me a question, I was here to answer them. When they came home from school, I was here. I always told them how I felt, good or bad. My daughter asked me for a dress. She said all the other kids have nice dresses. I said to her if you ask me for a book, I buy you because that stays in your brain, but a dress you could rip it tomorrow.