

Kochavi, Judith
OGA-BOSTON
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My name is Ada Grossman, born in a small town in Lithuania in 1911 named Vilkit near Kovora. Now her name is Judith Kochavi because she went to Israel as a Halutzah in 1933, married and changed name to a Hebrew name.

When I left Lithuania in 1930, I left behind my father, mother, my maternal grandfather and aunt, 4 sisters and 4 brothers.

After the war, I was lucky to find 1 brother and 2 sisters. My sister died in Israel in 1977; my brother died in Lithuania in 1978. My sister is still living in Bertha Guttfraund, the wife of a cantor in Atlanta.

Father was a regular workman, like most Lithuanian Jews. He replaced/repaiored steamboats that carried passengers, food, cloth.

People had little money then. They saved a little to send the sons to Hedar to study Hebrew.

Germany and England bought wood from Lithuania's plentiful forests. In the winter, the farmers who couldn't work the fields in the winter, were paid by forest businessmen to cut the trees. In the spring they brought horses to the river. Her father put the logs together like a raft and rode them down the river in the summertime.

In winter they didn't make much money and the grocery man used to give them food "on the book". When it came before Purim, and the river defrosted, he could work with the trees and could pay up. We had money for Passover. The family from American sent a little money too.

They were very pious religiously. Everyone observed religion strongly.

Lithuania had been occupied for over 400 years by the Csar. 99% of the Russians didn't read or learn alphabets. The Jews in Lithuania had all the rights of the Christians and went to school with them. She went to a Hebrew School and learned Yiddish, Hebrew, Lithuanian, Russian and German. She had 10 years of schooling. She also studied the Bible.

She grew up in a shtetl. There was 1,000 families; 300 were Jewish. They never suffered from antisemitism until the Nazis came.

When her grandfather died, the family moved to Memel, the boundary line of Lithuania and Germany. The Germans occupied Lithuania, they occupied Memel too. Her mother with her small children returned to previous town because it was still Russia. As soon as they'd heard the Germans were burning the synagogues, they dropped their utensils and got on the steamboat for home. Later, they were killed.

She was in Paris when the war broke out; she was 29. She read it the newspaper about Germany occupying Poland.

In 1, 2 or 3 days, all grocery stores were empty in Paris and you felt a shortage of food. She had a little child. The Jewish people were so scared that the Nazis were coming to France, that they didn't run to the stores and when they did they were empty.

The war came in September. She was working in the Ort School; it had to close then. Most students were German refugees who were wealthy and well educated. They were eager to learn any job to earn a living in France.

Her husband was the superintendent in their apartment and she took care of the cooking. In November the school reopened. The war wasn't advanced much because of the cold. Each night, planes flew overhead and they went to a shelter in the basement. Her son was 2 years old.

In Spring, the Germans occupied Belgium. They could've run to Cherbourg and perhaps escape by boat but they didn't believe the Germans would come and stay in Paris for years.

When the Germans occupied all of France, all the problem began. The German soldiers began to come into a Jewish cafe and the underground killed him. Because of that they arrested all the Jewish men. Paris was divided in 20 zones; this was the 11th zone. Some went into a barracks. In December 5 they arrested all British citizen and she was arrested too.

During WW1, a German soldier married her aunt. He was from Alsace; they moved there after the war. She left in 1920; before then she moved in with her aunt living in Alsace. She liked this better than a shtetl. Her uncle in America gave her the money to go to France because she wrote and asked him for it.

In France she continued membership in Zionist organizations. She would go to Israel for meetings. She changed her name to an Israeli one. She lived in Israel until 1937 and had Palestinian-British passport. She and her husband went to Paris as British subjects. That saved their lives.

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The Germans put them in a British camp when they invaded. The police had come to their apartment. They were given 20 minutes to go. They went to the city hall of the 19th zone. She had one dress and one pair of shoes. The women and men were separated and they went into trucks to a train. She suspected they were going to be taken to Germany. But the American Embassy interceded and they were sent to a place in France near the Swiss border, Bersenson, near Dijon.

There were 40,000 American soldiers there in the barracks in the camp. They sent a lot of the French soldiers off to Germany.

There were no modern toilets. 300 older prisoners were left behind with them to clean up the camp.

The prisoners told them stories about what was happening.

She asked, "Where are our husbands?". She was told "We are running a concentration camp not a maternity". The men had been left in Paris.

She stayed in a room with 6 beds for her child and 2 other mothers and 2 kids. The Germans allowed them to have a lot of wood if they let the Germans take propaganda photos of them to show how well they were treated.

After 2 months the American government got them out. Many of the other women stayed to the end of the war.

Her husband was in a concentration camp outside Paris until Paris was liberated at the end of the war.

In February 1943, Germans arrested all Jewish and British women and then she went into hiding. As a British she didn't have to wear the yellow star. She had to put that she was Jewish on her papers. If she was found without some Jewish I.D., she'd be sent right to Auschwitz.

During the occupation, she'd have at least a dozen people sleeping in her place. Just one woman didn't make it. Everyone else she hid survived.

They knew everything about the camps and the exterminations from 2 sources; French youths were asked to come to Germany to work and receive good fringe benefits. When they went, they had contact with the Jewish or French prisoners who told them what was going on and the underground sent over spies.

She knew a blond Jewish boy in France who had an Alsace passport and took pictures of what was done to the Jews in the camps.

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She was in a group that helped find apartments and food for the hidden Jews and to leave underground newspapers around that told the truth.

She was the head of one group of Jewish women to give first aid from the barricades against the Nazis.

She was liberated in Paris first by the Americans. Gen. DeClerc came after him. Before this was the Normandy landing by Eisenhower. They were hiding in attics with other people working in the underground.

2 weeks from the Normandy invasion there was no food such as eggs, butter, bread, as it used to come from Normandy. She knew the American army was in the Place d'Eticle; all the Jewish people took off their yellow star. She was standing in line as the Germans were running away. Next to her stood a Jewish girl of 17-18 still wearing her star. She said, the Americans are here, you will be safe so, let me take off your yellow star. She took off her star. She told her to go home and if she finds friends or family with the star, take it off herself.

She got typhoid from the food after the war.

After liberated, she went back to her apartment. The apartment was empty because all the Jews apartments were emptied; the antiques were sent to Germany and the lesser furniture went to stores. She stayed in Paris until 1950 and then went to Israel. She remained working at the school in Paris. She had a little girl after the war.

She dreamed one night that her 2 sisters were alive. Right after the war, there was a committee in Paris to help find family. Her husband went and looked at the lists of survivors and those looking for family from all countries each day were there. He ran across a woman from Kouno (where the sisters had lived) who had obtained a Palestinian passport during the war and therefore was under protection. She told a story of 2 children who were hidden after their mother was murdered and the rest of the family sent to Treblinka. Those children were brought out after the war and sent with Judith to Israel.

She sent a letter saying she was looking for her sister to Italy and received a letter back from a man who read it. He told her he'd seen her in Poland or Berlin and suggested she write there to look for her. The letter was mailed in Berlin and a few weeks later she got a card from her sister who had survived.

She found her other sister also.

In 1957, she began to suffer from the heat in Israel. Her daughter disliked the heat. They lived on a farm. The doctor said she should go to a European climate. They returned to France in 1957. Her sister in Boston arranged for a job for her there to work as a Kosher cook. After a year she got a visa.

Her husband was killed by accident in 1962. Both children have been educated. She then became a homemaker for Yiddish speaking people. She developed arthritis and couldn't work so well. She then worked in a library for 9 years.

The war influenced her because she got smarter and she never lost courage and she hated the German regime but not necessarily the German people; there shouldn't be reverse discrimination. She's not mad at anybody; whom she still can help, she will help.

She has pride about being Jewish; Jews started the Bible, medicine and jurisprudence. She talks sometimes with people about her war experience. She thinks American people don't want to hear about it.

She tried to transmit to her children to be good to people, to like to work.

She can share here experience with other survivors. She didn't join survivor organizations because she felt she didn't survive or suffer anything like the Holocaust survivors did.

She applied for reparations; she got \$1,900 and to pay \$400 to the lawyer and \$200 to the offices in France for paperwork.

In her home she spoke Yiddish with her husband, French to the children in France and English in America.

She told her children about what her experience was. She didn't have to tell them atrocities because she did not experience them. She told about many of the killings and arrests and circumstances of people she knew.

She was once arrested by the Germany in Paris with a group of other Jews but was released because her arrest was a mistake. She didn't know whether to stay with them or go home.

She thinks the Holocaust made the Jews stronger but also that it is weaker because it diminished the number of Jews and changed the values. She feels she is snubbed in America because she worked as a maid and has an accent.

She then talked about under what circumstances Jews were arrested by the Germans in France. She told of the different restrictions.

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Sometimes when by herself she thinks about what happened in the war so it's good for her to talk about these things. Because now somebody else will know how it was.

We should teach our children as soon as they can learn that it is not a shame to be a Jew and that everyone is equal who is rich or poor so never again people will do what they did.