

## **RG-50.407.0136**

### **Summary**

Joseph Rubinstein was born in Kalisz, Poland January 28, 1921 to upper middle class parents, Israel and Miriam (née Ismach). They ran a grain exchange business with his father's brother, Aaron, and owned an apartment house; Aaron was married to Miriam's sister. Joseph had one brother, Ignatz. He considered the family to be assimilated Jews, attending temple only for the major holidays. Joseph claims his politics as an atheist Socialist, perhaps an Anarchist.

The Depression led the collapse of his father's firm. They moved to Częstochowa to lease a flour mill. Aside from his Uncle Aaron, his father's siblings (totaling four brothers and five sisters) survived the war by moving to America before the war. Joseph was a cousin of pianist Arthur Rubinstein. Joseph's father and uncle had set up a transport business and continued struggle financially. As tensions rose, plans were made to send Joseph's mother to a town east of Pinsk (Kolby?) now in Belarus via Warsaw, but the war's outbreak trapped the family and uncle in Warsaw except for Joseph's brother who had been called into the army. A few days after the surrender of Warsaw, his father drove a truck back to Częstochowa, re-occupying their apartment which they had to share with German officers for a while.

References are woven into many of Joseph's descriptions of a close friend, Stefan Niekrasz, an atheist (Catholic) Pole, who would only socialize with Jews.

In November, 1940, before the ghetto was created, increasing German oppression led Joseph to decide to escape to Russia via Krakow. But, he contracted food poisoning and hepatitis and could not join the group which now included his brother. While recovering, they were joined by Richard and Stefi Zielger and their daughter, Rita. They were affluent Jewish Poles living in Germany as "foreigners", but not identified as Jews. Joseph and Stefi began a relationship, as did Stefan and Rita (then 17). When the ghetto was formed in April/May 1940, new identity cards were issued; the Ziegler's cards did not identify them as Jews. The Częstochowa ghetto was not as brutal as Warsaw, and Joseph began to apprentice in various steel fabricating shops. Joseph eventually became an experienced machinist. Through friends, he was able to improve his work assignments until the liquidation of the ghetto, the last of which was outside the ghetto. Stefi and Rita Ziegler decided to move into the ghetto as well. During this time, Joseph's parents were sent to an extermination camp and did not survive.

For four to five days following Yom Kippur, 1942, the Nazis began a large deportation, then stopping abruptly. Joseph then convinced Stefi and Rita to leave the ghetto to hide with Niekrasz. The deportation then resumed removing thousands, confining those who remained. Using his machinist's skills, Joseph was specifically sought out and brought back to a work site residing in special barracks, then into a "small" ghetto of about 4,500 people, where conditions were bad. Joseph's friend, Yanick Pinkus, arranged a false ID card under the name of Leshnick

with plans to join the partisans in October 1942. Niekrasz joined him, but their contacts for the partisans became compromised; they instead went to Warsaw.

After a failed attempt to pay off an extortion attempt where his papers were confiscated, Joseph and Stefi fled to Częstochowa, then on to Gmina Konopiska (?) meeting up with Rita and Stefan. Still lacking papers, Joseph managed to pilfer someone else's papers, named Johann Opalka, when using a recruiting office finding volunteer workers for Germany.

Joseph was sent to Lignitz, then on to the Arado aircraft plant in Wittenberg near Berlin, living in barracks, passing as a Pole, but avoiding showers so as not to expose his circumcision. Stefi had also arranged a transfer to Wittenberg as she was carrying Polish papers, though she and Joseph could see each other rarely. Meanwhile, Stefan and Rita had arranged a transfer through a friendly labor official in Częstochowa to a labor camp in Bregenz near the Austrian-Swiss border as a ploy to escape over the border. Finding it too brutal, they arranged a transfer back to Częstochowa. Transiting Wittenberg, they encountered Stefi and Joseph, and, again, prevailed upon the friendly labor official to gain re-assignment to Wittenberg.

In December 1944, he was arrested for black marketing and sent to a German prison camp called Millgate, with horrible conditions. He was released without explanation and returned to Wittenberg.

He was liberated by the Russians in April 22, 1945. The four of them – Joseph, Stefan, Stefi and Rita – stayed in Wittenberg until 1946 and in Germany until 1949. During that time, he visited Częstochowa but returned to Germany. His relationship with Stefi was cooled, and he met another quarter-Jewish woman, Elizabeth, and married. A daughter, Sonia, born in 1949 in Ulm to which they were evacuated during the Berlin blockade. They moved to Ethiopia for 11 years. In 1960, they moved to Australia.