

RG-50.407.0219

Summary

Zina Edelstein was born one of four girls on February 27, 1924 in Daugavpils, Latvia. Her parents were Mendel and Sonia (née Aduse?) Golda. Her father was a *hittelmacher* who made caps for farmers; he was religious, attending shul every morning. Yiddish was spoken at home. Their citizenship had been suspended creating complications with the authorities. She felt little antisemitism before the war and had Polish and Latvian friends.

The Russians took over in 1940 and sent away some rich people and undesirables, such as prostitutes. Just as the war with Germany started on June 22, 1941, Zina's sister was giving birth. Most Jewish adult males were separated, including her father and brother-in-law. She heard they were all shot, aided by Latvians; she never saw them again. A ghetto was created at a local citadel, but Zina's family was delayed in joining due to the recent birth. A Judenrat was formed, cooperating only reluctantly with the Germans. Her former school headmaster, a man named Stallus (?) whom she knew well, had some local authority and was able to intervene on her behalf sometimes.

On Nov. 8 or 9, 1941, a Russian holiday, SS troops surrounded the ghetto. A Latvian SS guard offered to let her escape in exchange for a rendezvous. Zina's mother begged her to save herself. Zina avoided the guard for a while but as he pursued her, a Latvian helped find a hiding place to counter the murder of his Jewish wife. Zina never again saw her mother as the ghetto was virtually emptied a few days later. Executions of families hiding Jews pressured her collaborator to return her to her sister and cousin, now moved to the citadel controlled by the Wehrmacht.

Zina changed her name to Dora for a short while. In Spring, 1942, the SS returned causing panic and some suicides. Zina and the rest were sent by train to the Kaiserwald Concentration Camp near Riga. She and her sister took on responsibility for an orphaned girl, Hava, considering her as a sister. In 1943, they were moved by boat to Stutthof Concentration Camp. They experienced brutal work, mostly unloading ships at Gdansk, barely avoiding extermination. In March 1945, all prisoners were sent on a death march. Poles met along the way did provide some food and guidance. Zina read aloud the testimony of her liberation by the Red Army on March 11, 1945.

The Russians treated her typhoid for about three months, then Zina, her sister and Hava traveled to Warsaw and then onto Łódź by train, where Zina met her future husband, Jack. Zina found work as a seamstress with a Russian company through the Jewish Committee. Hava left them for Latvia in a successful effort to find some family. Zina, Jack and a new daughter were at a displacement camp in Föhrenwald, which assigned them to go to Australia from Marseilles to Sydney and onto Melbourne, arriving on Pesach.

Zina and her husband were treated well. She learned hired out as a seamstress, while her husband was in business. They had another daughter in 1948. After renting a room in a kosher household for a while, she remained kosher after leaving. Her husband died of cancer at age 57.