

RG-50.407.0300

Summary

Vera Steiner (née Iechels) – Born December 12, 1919 in Constantinople/Istanbul. Parents married in 1914. **Father** – Pierre born in Jaffa, Palestine. Father's family left Russia in 1880s; went to Palestine. After paternal grandfather died, paternal grandmother took family from Palestine to Constantinople. **Mother** - Victoria born in Constantinople (Ottoman Empire) Maternal grandfather lived near Odessa. When nine, Cossacks came to town and took all Jewish boys. Took mouth organ with him and that led to him being in the Tsar's band. Learned clarinet and flute as well. In his early 20s, when Tsar vacationed near Black Sea, he and other Jewish band members ran away to Constantinople where Jewish men were waiting to rescue them. Then he became musician in the Sultan's military band. Married Sarah Wolfman from Austria. She had gone to Constantinople to find Jewish husband. Stayed in Constantinople; had 12 children (six grew up there, then many went to France). Vera detailed what happened to her extended family (Timestamp: 00:01:30 to 00:01:45). Sister – Sarah, five years older. Went to Palestine with mother in 1947. 47 members of Vera's family died.

Before the War - Good life in Istanbul. Friendly with many Muslims. Father was an electrical engineer. Had attended German schools and university. Family celebrated important Jewish holidays, but not religious. Growing up, Vera went to a convent school so had little Jewish education. In 1932, when Vera was 12, family moved first to Tabriz, then to Tehran, Persia/Iran. Persians did not know they were Jewish; just foreigners. She attended convent school, Little Sisters of Charity. Father helped build Anatolian railroad from Tehran to Caspian Sea. Then decided to go into business for himself. Had trucking business. Was killed in truck accident in February, 1935. Family left in dire straits since sister's fiancée offered to take care of finances, but took their money and disappeared. Formal education ended but still learned French. (Ultimately, Vera spoke 9 languages.) Vera learned how to type and got a job – her only other option was to marry a much older man. Noted that after Hitler took power more Jews came to Persia. Met her husband in 1938, and married on Sept. 1, 1940. He was from Czechoslovakia. Named best student in Czechoslovakia. Had degrees in commerce and law. Worked for Skoda, large company. Mentioned a lot about how Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews did not mix in Iran. Also mentioned how they helped bring some Jewish families to Iran.

During the War – Czechoslovakian government went into exile in England when war started. Husband was already in Tehran. Was asked to join diplomatic corps as commercial attaché because of all the languages he spoke. As wife of diplomat, entertained a lot and met diplomats from other countries. Had her first child in 1943, a son. Noted that Iran's sympathies at the beginning of the war were with Germany at first, but when Russians allied with western powers, Iran's sympathies changed. Husband wanted his parents to come to Tehran, but they did not. They were put in Warsaw ghetto and died. His identical twin survived because he went to Shanghai

After the War - Great relief that war ended. Had a daughter in 1946. She was born with hair lip and cleft palate, so looked for doctor who could operate. None in Tehran, so went to Prague in

1947 for first operation and for husband to search for info on his parents, then they went back to Tehran. Noticed that foreigners were not as welcomed now. Knew that they had to leave Iran, but husband did not want to go to France or Istanbul (worried about antisemitism in Turkey). Spoke with British ambassador and met embassy doctor, Dr. Levy who suggested they go to Australia because daughter needed second operation and there was an excellent doctor there. They moved to Sydney, then Melbourne where husband got a university job. She found Melbourne "strange" since she had never lived in a western/European culture. Belonged to Temple Beth Israel there.