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Summary

Valerie Lowe was born in 1925 in Žilina, Slovakia to a middle-class Jewish family. Her father, Jacob, was a sales manager, and her mother, Leona, stayed at home with her children. Valerie had two sisters, Magda and Edith. The family was not religious and identified first as Slovak and secondarily as Jewish. Valerie lived in a mixed Jewish and non-Jewish area and her friends were Jews and non-Jews.

Valerie went to elementary and high school in her town with little trouble, but she could not go on to college because of the Nazi puppet government under Hlinka. Instead, she learned how to sew which later proved to be key to her survival. She first realized changes in her life in 1938-1939 when the Hlinka government forced them out of their apartment and her father lost his job. This forced her mother to go to work as saleswoman. Otherwise, Valerie felt free.

The big change in her family's life began in 1942. The local police chief warned the family to leave and hide in the mountains. Valerie and one of her sisters did so, but the oldest sister thought that she would not be harmed because she was marrying a non-Jew. While Jews now had to wear the Yellow Star, Valerie was not aware yet of concentration camps. The girls stayed in the mountains until Christian friends who had contacts provided help. Valerie went to stay with a peasant family who treated her very well. She helped out on farm chores and sewed. She also had false papers. Eventually, the peasant family became worried and Valerie was sent to another family, a baker, where Valerie's conditions were much better. She stayed there for one and a half years. The family baptized her, which was okay with Valerie since it enabled her to survive. But when she got sick and had to have her tonsils out, the doctor told her to leave the hospital after the operation. She then met up with her sister, who had been staying with another family, and they joined up with the resistance. Her sister, who was studying to be a doctor, helped with medical needs while Valerie sewed uniforms.

After the resistance dispersed, Valerie went with another family in very primitive conditions. But in January, 1945 the Russians liberated her part of Slovakia. She reunited with her sister and they returned to their town where they discovered that their parents and older sister had been deported and killed. They could not recover their property. Valerie's sister remembered uncles in New Jersey and New York and they eventually were able to emigrate in July 1946. She met her husband in the dressmaker shop where she worked when she joined the Czechoslovak Club. He had immigrated in 1939 and now worked for the government. They married and had a very comfortable life. At first, he served as a translator at the Nuremberg Trials.

Valerie talked about her tolerance after the war. Since she had been helped by Slovak Christians she felt very open-minded and politically liberal. She believed in God and felt Jewish, but to her all religions were equal.