

Ruth Weiner, född Landau, 1927 i Lvov, Polen. Befriad i Ehringen. Till Sverige 1963.

De första två åren var det ryssarna som ockuperade Lvov. Sen kom Tyskarna i juni 1941. Allting ändrades, då bröt helvetet ut. De gick från hus till hus och deporterade judar eller så sköts judar på fläcken. Nu handlade det om överlevnad. Det låg en stor synagoga bredvid vår lägenhet. De satte eld på syngogan tvingade in hela familjer i lågorna. Min skolkamrat, Rena, kastades också in i den brinnande synagogan. Jag hörde deras skrik. Rena var min bästa vän.

Judar arresterades på gatorna och flyttades till gettot som hade börjat bygga.

Rosa, vår barnflicka, räddade livet på mig. Jag gömde mig i hennes lilla lägenhet i tio månader. Det var givetvis farligt för henne. Hon gjorde det utan betalning. Hon ville helt enkelt rädda mig. Hon älskade mig som sitt eget barn. Senare när jag lämnat lägenheten blev Rosa förrådd av en granne och skjuten som förrädare.

Min pappas kusin var gift med en icke-judisk kvinna. Vi tog tåget till Warszawa. Jag var ljushårig och blåögd och hade satt på mig ett kors runt halsen. Hon placerade mig på en internatskola för barn till polska officerare.

Den tjeckiska kusinen ordnade falska papper åt mig. Jag blev Janina Morawski. Jag var katolik och gick i kyrkan.

En gång höll jag på att bli avslöjad. Jag var på väg till skolan och sprang ihop med min guvernant från Lvov, som hjälpte mig med läxor när jag var yngre.

"Miss Landau", ropade hon.

Jag greps av panik och hoppade på första bästa spårvagn.

En annan gång kommenterade en klasskamrat, så att jag hörde det:

"Har inte fröken Morawski judiska ögon?"

Jag stannade på internatet fram till Warszawa-upproret. Vi skulle deporteras, det brann hus över allt. En flicka i min grupp blev våldtagen. Jag såg det. Jag blev inte våldtagen, jag var för ful.

Vi deporterades till Ehringen i Tyskland, som slavarbetare i en underjordisk vapenfabrik. Den hette NSU. Vi bodde i baracker i trevåningskojer. Mitt hår var fullt av löss. Flickan som blev våldtagen i Warszawa behövde flickan ta abort, vilket någon fixare ombesörjde.

Inte långt från vårt läger fanns det en fångläger för franska officerare. Där fanns det en fransman som jag kysste för första gången. Han ville ha mer men jag sa "non".

Hur gick det för resten av din familj?

Min far och min syster överlevde liksom min farbror. Min mor togs förmodligen till ett koncentrationsläger eller så brändes hon på plats.

My surviving relatives were: my sister, who studied in Paris and who came back to the family at the outbreak of the war, which wasn't very sensible of her; then there was my uncle, a radiologist who had survived in Russia, he was in St Petersburg in the winter during the siege, they ate rats in best case; and finally my father.

the first two years after the outbreak of the war the Russians were here.

then the Germans arrived, juni 1941, every thing changed. they went from house to house and deported Jews or shot them when they opened their doors. There was a massive change; now it was a question of survival.

there was a large synagogue next to where we lived and my friend Rena from school was thrown into the torched synagogue. I heard

their screams, it was not only hers but whole families that were rounded up and forced into the fire.

Jews were arrested in the streets and transferred to the Ghetto that was being built.

At the end of the war I was in Germany, in, I had hidden as a Gentile the whole time. There was an organisation for displaced persons that brought people like me together, and we went back to Poland and found my father who actually was born in Vienna but had married my mother who lived in Poland. I found my father and my sister.

BH: Alive?

RW: Yes, both were alive.

BH: And your mother?

RW: My mother was taken in the beginning of the German occupation of Lemberg, probably to a concentration camp or burnt at the spot.

BH: You don't know exactly what happened?

RW: No, there are no records or similar.

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RW: My father was born in Vienna; he met my mother and moved to Poland. He was a businessman, quite successful; we were not super rich but nevertheless quite wealthy.

RW: Maybe upper Jewish middle-class. We socialised with Jews.

BH: What was the name of your father?

RW: Landau, Elias Landau.

BH: And your mother?

RW: My mother was a housewife.

BH: What was her name?

RW: Severa, nicknamed Sala, derived from Severin.

BH: Where was she born?

RW: She was born in the same town, in Lemberg, and my mother's parents owned a property where all her children lived in their flats. There was a general store on the ground floor.

BH: Did your father move to Lemberg to marry your mother and then you lived in Lemberg?

RW: Yes.

BH: And Lemberg is the same as Lwow?

RW: Now it's Ukraine but before I was born it was Austria, then it was Poland.

BH: Do you have any siblings?

RW: One sister, she went to Paris to study after graduating from high-school.

BH: Older or younger?

RW: Older, eight years older.

BH: What is her name?

RW: Hedda.

BH: And your childhood; how was it, what do you remember?

RW: It was carefree; my mother was a very broad-minded woman; we went down-hill skiing already back then.

BH: Were there any ski slopes in Lemberg?

RW: Yes, there was actually a small ski slope in Lemberg, and skating; I had a governess who took us, not my mother. My sister was eight years older, a big age gap.

BH: How did you get along?

RW: Not sure, I really came to love her after the war; she replaced my mother who had been murdered. She went to Israel with us and worked at Hadassah.

BH: However, I am still in Lemberg; what type of school did you attend? Was it a Jewish or a mixed school? Did you have many friends?

RW: A mixed school, I didn't experience anti-Semitism at that age, absolutely not.

BH: Were you an outgoing character?

RW: I was twelve when the war started so hard to say, I don't remember if my school friends came home after school. I spent a lot of time with the girl who was thrown into the burning synagogue because she lived very close. I don't recall having a best friend, actually; she was my best friend and disappeared.

BH: Murdered.

RW: Disappeared in the fire, burnt; I could hear their voices.

BH: Was it that close?

RW: The building next door, which was next to the synagogue.

BH: And you are in your room and can hear this?

RW: I was in the flat, the stairwell. The Germans went from house to house to clean up.

BH: How did you manage to escape?

RW: Who knows? They didn't continue their search; they stopped at the first building and threw the people who were living there into the fire but didn't continue.

BH: So it was pure luck?

RW: Yes.

BH: How many were murdered during that incident?

RW: I don't know, there were a number a number of flats in the building and my school friend was amongst those I knew.

BH: Do you remember what you were thinking?

RW: Horror, breathless.

BH: Was it possible to comprehend?

RW: You were also preoccupied with yourself.

BH: Of course, but was it possible to comprehend?

RW: My parents didn't offer any deep interpretations of the Germans' behaviour. I knew that they were after Jews and wanted to destroy the Jews.

BH: You were aware of this?

RW: Of course, German activities were taking place all over town.

BH: How did your life change in 1939 after the outbreak of the war?

RW: In 1939 life was pretty much the same because the Germans arrived in 1941. After two years of Russian occupation they withdrew, the Germans arrived and then hell began.

BH: Please tell us.

RW: I had a nanny (Rosa), a peasant from the countryside; she was quite grown up and had a child out of wedlock. My mother hired her so she left her child in order to take care of me. She saved my life because when the Germans arrived she took me to her little flat. I was hidden in her flat for at least ten months.

BH: Where in the flat were you hidden?

RW: I was in the flat the whole time.

BH: You mean that you didn't leave the flat for ten months?

RW: No, no, of course I didn't leave; maybe it was eight months, I can't remember exactly.

BH: But this must have been extremely dangerous for her?

RW: Yes, she loved me like I was her child. Her own illegitimate child was left in the countryside. It was terrible for her to have a child out of wedlock, socially unacceptable.

BH: Was she hiding you on her own initiative or was she paid by your parents?

RW: No, she wasn't paid; she simply wanted to save me.

BH: On her own initiative then? Why didn't she include your sister?

RW: Because she had a fiancée who already reacted when she took me, he wasn't happy about it.

BH: Why?

RW: Because it was dangerous to help Jews, if someone would have denounced her then it would have been the end. My sister was with my parents; after my mother was taken, my father and sister approached the nanny, who by then had been given my aunt's flat (to avoid the Germans taking it) which was quite large and centrally located in town, and who accepted to hide them as well. Nobody paid her but she paid with her own life afterwards because she was denounced by a callous neighbour. We had already left by then.

BH: What happened to her?

RW: I don't know as I wasn't there. They shot so called collaborators.

BH: So she was possibly denounced by a neighbour?

RW: Probably; she was too naïve to understand the risks she was taking by hiding my father, sister and myself.

BH: Is that what you believe?

RW: Yes, although her fiancée was very negative (to us being there) he still had to accept it. In our family there was a Gentile, she was Czech and married to my father's cousin, who transported me to Warsaw and placed me in a boarding school for Polish officers.

BH: How did the transport take place?

RW: By train. I had a crucifix around my neck.

BW: In order not to be suspected?

RW: I was blue-eyed and fair-haired.

BH: Just like now!

RW: Sure, but I am more Jewish looking now, not sure why.

BH: Who had given you the crucifix?

RW: I believe it was her.

BH: And she accompanied you?

RW: Yes, the Czech cousin accompanied me to Warsaw and placed me in the boarding school for children of Polish officers. I survived there until the Warsaw uprising when the city was torched. Then we were deported to

Germany.

BH: Had you received your forged identity documents by then?

RW: Yes.

BH: When did you receive them?

RW: At that time.

BH: Who arranged for the documents?

RW: It must have been the Czech cousin, I still have the documents.

BH: So, she arranged for the forged documents; did you get a new name?

RW: Of course; Janina Morawski.

BH: Then you became a Catholic?

RW: Yes, I was a Catholic and went to church.

BH: Did you know the prayers?

RW: I went to confession, I had to play along.

BH: But did you know the prayers?

RW: No, you didn't have to know them, I was still a child.

BH: But did you know how to confess?

RW: Yes, because my nanny (who hid me in Lemberg) had taken me to church during Christmas. I didn't know back then that I ever would need to know.

BH: So she both saved your life and gave you knowledge to save your own life.

RW: Yes, absolutely, and then she was denounced and murdered. I'm not sure, but I couldn't get in touch with her after the war even though I tried.

BH: Your father and sister were still in the flat; let's get back to them shortly, however; does no one suspect you for being "a fake" when you arrive at the school?

RW: No, I looked quite Arian.

BH: And you are at the school until around 1944?

RW: Yes, until Warsaw was torched and the Polish uprising (1944), there was also the Ghetto uprising (1943).

BH: And things were going well for you at school?

RW: I managed.

BH: Did you ever panic and feel that you were to be exposed?

RW: No, I played the role well since I had been to church and was familiar with the environment.

BH: How often did you go to confession?

RW: I don't remember.

BH: Maybe you have been to more Catholic than to Jewish services in your lifetime?

RW: Certainly, I had to and I didn't mind.

BH: How come; did you enjoy it?

RW: Not sure, I am still quite agnostic.

BH: But Catholicism is quite heavy with all its symbolism.

RW: I knew it was a way of surviving and I played along.

BH: And you were never close to being exposed during this time?

RW: Once in Warsaw; I was on my way from school and I ran into a governess who had helped with homework (in Lwow) when I was younger.

BW: Not the skier I assume?

RW: No, another one. She shouted "Miss Landau" and I panicked and jumped onto a passing tram. She stayed where she was. That was the only time. Once in the classroom one of the girls told another girl; "don't you think Miss has Jewish eyes"?

BH: And you heard it?

RW: Yes, but it didn't lead to anything.

BH: Do you think you were supposed to hear the comment?

RW: I don't know.

BH: What were you thinking at that moment?

RW: I was thinking oops!

BH: You were quite in control of your emotions?

RW: Yes, and I had no options, it wasn't like I could run away.

BH: Were things going well in school?

RW: Yes.

BH: Ok; where did you live?

RW: It was a boarding school. My father and sister, who were transported from Lwow to Warsaw, were hidden by Polish people by paying a lot of money. They couldn't get out when Warsaw was burning and my father, who spoke fluent

German, was transported to Krakow where he survived. My sister, who spoke fluent French, jumped from a train and survived. They both survived in their own strange ways.

BH: What train did she jump off?

RW: A train that evacuated people from Warsaw because it was burning.

BH: Where was it heading?

RW: Not to a concentration camp; probably a forced labour camp.

BH: And she managed to jump off; where did she go?

RW: It was close to the end of the war, only a few months left. Dad was placed with a Polish farmer; he could be taken for a German because he spoke better German than Polish.

BH: Where did your sister live after jumping off the train; haven't you spoken about this?

RW: We have spoken but remember; I was still very young when the war ended. Maybe she bought and sold merchandise in order to survive.

BH: And how are you coming along; you are at the school until 1944 or so, and after that?

RW: Yes and then we went to Munich. Warsaw was evacuated, we were walking and there were burning buildings everywhere. My friend was raped by German soldiers; I witnessed it.

BH: Which friend?

RW: A girl from the same group of evacuees. We were evacuated to Ehringen in Germany.

BH: Was it the Germans who evacuated you to a labour camp?

RW: Yes, a German weapons factory.

BH: As slave labour?

RH: Yes, it was an underground factory; we lived in barracks and slept in three story bunkbeds. My hair was full of lice. Everyone was of Polish origin.

BH: And your friend who was raped, did she come along?

RW: Yes, and she had an abortion. She wasn't really my friend; she was part of the same group. It happened when we were walking through Warsaw. German soldiers took her, not me; I was too ugly.

BH: You were lucky again. Who arranged the abortion; were there medical staff?

RW: A Polish person who acted as a fixer arranged for the abortion.

BH: How was life in the barracks and working in the underground factory?

RW: You kept your spirits up; we did a New Year's cabaret, I still have the programme. I was in the choir. We were always hungry.

BH: What was the theme of the cabaret?

RW: Different songs, one of the group members was an architect who was very creative and acted as the stage director.

BH: Were the songs newly written or more of "golden oldies"?

RW: More newly written material, causeries and those types of things. It was great fun in this tragic setting.

BH: It helped you?

RW: Yes, by keeping our spirits up, we were hungry. Once I was slapped by a German who was guarding the machine tools that produced the weapons.

BH: Why did he slap you?

RW: I made a mistake or was late, I don't remember.

BH: Did it happen often?

RW: No, it only happened to me once.

BH: So this was underground?

RW: Yes, it was an underground factory called "NSU".

BH: There used be a car make called "NSU" in the 60's.

RW: Really; but this was weapons.

BH: Was it underground to protect against air attacks?

RW: It was underground in order to hide it.

BH: How long were the working days?

RW: We were working 12 hour shifts with a break.

BH: Were you fed?

RW: Not far away from where we were living there was a slave labour camp with Poles who smuggled us food in solidarity. Not sure why they had more food.

BH: Were you paid?

RW: Maybe a symbolic sum.

BH: Who owned the factory?

RW: It was state owned.

BH: Sometimes the factories were privately owned, Schindler owned his factory; but your understanding is that it was state owned?

RW: Not entirely sure as I didn't think along those lines, I was still a young girl.

BH: Was there any place for love or romance until this point in your life?

RW: There was no place for romance at this time. The way to keep up the motivation was the cabarets.

BH: So there were no boys?

RW: I was too young.

BH: You were not that young; at 17 one can be interested in boys.

RW: Actually, you're right; not far from our camp there was a prison camp for French officers and there was a Frenchman who I kissed for the first time. He wanted more but I said "non".

BH: So you speak French? And you liked him?

RW: He was good looking and charming.

BH: Were you able to move around freely so that you could meet?

RW: He could but I couldn't. It was only on one occasion that he came to our camp.

BH: Was he also imprisoned?

RW: Yes, in a prison camp for French officers.

BH: Was he in military uniform?

RW: No, he was wearing a prison uniform.

BH: How did you make contact; had you checked each other out?

RW: It was only one occasion, my first kiss. We had no more contact after that.

BH: Did you get his name?

RW: No.

BH: So; what happens next, does the war end?

RW: I was at the labour camp when the war ended.

BH: Do you remember the day the war ended? How were you doing?

RW: I was doing ok although I was hungry, dirty and had lice.

BH: What happens next?

RW: There was an agency that helped the refugees, UNRRA, and our group was transferred to Munich. I lived in a flat provided by UNRRA and I studied for two high-school majors in order to make up for lost time. Then my uncle, sister and father found each other and they were living in Breslau, not far from Katowice in Poland. They searched and found me via UNRRA.

BH: Do you remember how it was to meet your father again?

RW: Yes, it was very emotionally charged. I was still in Germany when I found out that they were alive.

BH: How long did it take before you met?

RW: A couple of months.

BH: Where did you meet?

RW: Breslau.

BH: Did you travel there?

RW: Yes, my uncle was working there as a radiologist.

BH: Who greets you at the platform in Breslau?

RW: Do you think I remember; I am 90 years old!

BH: I am sure someone met you; not your father?

RW: I actually don't remember.

BH: But do you remember meeting your father whether on the platform or not?

RW: I loved my mother more than my father who always was busy.

BH: And your sister who was like an extra mother; when did you meet her?

RW: Together with the other two, I remember that my uncle opened the entrance door; they had a large and beautiful flat in Katowice where I eventually lived. Then I left for Breslau to study medicine where my uncle was the faculty dean.

BH: Did the longing for your mother increase when you met the rest of the family?

RW: You know; so many traumatic things had happened after my mother was taken in 1943 that the trauma and longing was muted.

BH: Has the longing for your mother returned later in life?

RW: No.

BH: Nowadays you are referred to as "Survivors" but back then it was "DPs", Displaced Persons or refugees; which label do you think is appropriate?

RW: Isn't it possible to be both?

BH: Absolutely.

RW: I don't feel displaced in Sweden where I have lived since 1963 and most of my life. Ironically, I have assimilated to a degree where I feel so at home in Sweden. I am surprised by this, I don't think I would feel at home in Poland; Sweden is my home after all the turbulent years.

BH: What is your identity today?

RW: I'm a human being, a citizen of the world.

BH: That's a nice response.

RW: I regret that so many years were lost during the war, surviving wasn't enough.

BH: How can you regret something you're not in control of?

RW: I regret in the sense that so many years were lost; until 12 years of age my life was good, but then it was hell and even though you survived it was a struggle. We had nothing, only sacrifices.

BH: How did losing your youth affect you?

RW: I am quite reserved and don't make any deep friendships, I am cynical.

BH: You have certainly hidden those traits during this conversation.

RW: It's a shame one only has one life.

BH: But some people believe in reincarnation; maybe we'll return as cats.

RW: I don't believe in all those sects; do you?

BH: Certainly not; I believe there is one life and one has to do best with it.

RW: One simply disappears.

BH: Maybe a stupid question but; do you still speak to your mother?

RW: To my mother; in what sense?

BH: Maybe a dialogue; what would mother had done or thought?

RW: No, I was so young when she disappeared.

BH: Do you think of her?

RW: No, I think of myself and my children.

BH: Yourself; what are you thinking then?

RW: I don't think of myself.

BH: But you just said that you're thinking of yourself and your children.

RW: I am thinking of my bloody computer that always breaks.

BH: Let's have a look at it.

RW: It was announced on the screen that updates are in process and then it says that it wasn't possible to do the updates; do you know anything about computers?

BH: A bit...

RW: Ojojoi!

BH: Let's have a look, but let's finish this.

RW: I am a time millionaire.

BH: Thanks for letting me visit and talk to you, it was great fun. I hope you had a good time as well.

RW: Thank you.