

ROSE LIPSZYC



Rose was born on May 27, 1929 in Lublin, Poland. She was living with her parents and two brothers, who were three and fourteen at the start of the war. In 1940, Rose and her family were thrown out of their home by the Germans. They moved to a small shack in the Polish countryside, near the village of Osmolice, where they lived until October 1942. They survived by working in the fields. (See poem “Legacy” written by Rose’s daughter Carol, describing the family’s last Yom Kippur together).

On October 14, 1942, the Germans forced Rose and her family to go to the town square in Belzyce, where the family was separated. Rose’s father was taken to Madjanek. Rose’s mother and brothers were marched to the train station for deportation. Rose’s mother sensed they were being sent to their deaths, and pushed Rose out of the line. Rose was spotted by a German guard who ordered her back in line. A Polish farmer who was helping the Nazis transport Jews, told the guard that Rose was Polish, and she should be left behind. Due to Rose’s Aryan appearance, the German guard let her go. She ran through the fields, to the home of a Polish farmer (Mr. Yabloinska), that the family had known. Her grandmother was already at Yabloinska’s house. She told Rose that her aunt was looking for her. Rose and her aunt were to pose as Polish sisters, and escape to Germany to find work.

Yabloinska provided Rose with the birth certificate of his oldest daughter. She was to take the identity of Yabloinska’s younger daughter (although no birth certificate was provided). Rose then took the train to Lublin where she was to be reunited with her aunt. The train was filled with Poles celebrating the recent killing/expulsion of Jews. She was in grave danger of being recognized. Also on board the train was Antonia, a Polish woman who knew Rose. Antonia used her own body to hide Rose from inquisitive eyes, thereby saving her life. Within a day, Rose had been saved by two Righteous Gentiles.

After a fearful train ride, Rose reunited with her aunt in Lublin. She gave her aunt the birth certificate she had received from the Polish farmer. From this moment on, Rose would be “Helena Yabloinska” and her aunt (real name: Rose Finkelstein), would now be Rose’s older ‘sister’, “Lodja Yabloinska”. To add to their false identities, they bought necklaces with large crosses to wear at all times. Rose was just 13 at the time, her aunt was 21. They were both ‘hiding in plain sight’.

They went to a German office in Lublin, where Polish citizens could volunteer to work in Germany. The German workforce was experiencing a shortage of manpower due to the war effort. Rose and her aunt

stayed in Lublin for one week awaiting departure. They lived in fear of being recognized by one of the townspeople. After a week, “Helena” and “Lodja” took an eight-day train ride to Bremen, a port city near Hamburg. They worked in a factory making ropes for ships. It was a Polish work camp. They lived in a small house with 80 other Polish women. They had to wear a “P” (for Pole) on their clothing at all times as identification. The living conditions were terrible; cramped quarters; hunger and lice were rampant. Rose took other jobs as a way to get more food. On her way home from one of these jobs, Rose was nearly raped by one of the locals. She bit her attacker, drawing blood, and screamed for help, causing the man to flee.

Another incident: a German boy saw them on the street. Noticing the letter “P” on Rose’s clothing, he yelled out “Polish pigs!” Rose was so incensed, she yelled back in “Yiddish”, before realizing the danger of being discovered as a Jew. Luckily no one noticed, but the incident caused Rose to become so psychologically scarred by fear, she literally forgot how to speak Yiddish for a long time afterwards.

End of April/early May 1945: Liberation. One day everyone realized the factory had been closed, and the Germans were fleeing the advancing British forces. Rose and her aunt went to a Polish Displaced Persons camp, which had been quickly set up by the U.N. Rose was now 16, her aunt 24; they continued to use their false Polish identities, still fearful of being discovered.

Rose’s second cousin knew she was in Germany and came looking for her. At the end of 1945, Rose left the DP camp, but her aunt stayed behind for a while longer. Rose got on a so-called “Jewish” train out of Bremen to go to a Jewish orphanage in Zeilsheim (near Frankfurt). At first the Jews wouldn’t let her on the train, accusing her of being a Pole. The irony: Rose was hated in Poland for being a Jew, hated in Germany for being a “Pole”, and now hated by Jews who didn’t believe she was Jewish. They finally allowed her on the train, but she was quizzed on her knowledge of Judaism and Jewish holidays during the entire trip. When the train arrived in Frankfurt, the Jews on board still didn’t believe Rose, and assumed she knew Jewish customs from working for a Jewish family.

Rose stayed at the Zeilsheim orphanage until the end of 1946. It was there she became an ardent Zionist. At the end of 1946, Rose left the orphanage and travelled by truck to the border of Austria and Italy. She crossed the Austrian Alps by foot in waist-deep snow, finally arriving in Italy, with the help of a Jewish

Zionist organization named “Aliyah Bet”. Rose stayed in an Italian convent near Torino for a year, where she met her husband-to-be, Jack (Yakov), who was also a survivor.

In 1947, Rose and Jack, along with 300 other people, were taken on a small fishing boat destined for Palestine, but the boat was intercepted by the British navy, and they were sent to a DP camp in Cyprus, Greece. The British held them as refugees for three months, finally allowing them entry into Palestine in 1948. Rose and Jack arrived in Palestine just prior to Israel’s War of Independence in 1948.

Rose and Jack were married in 1949 in Jaffa, Israel. In December 1952, they arrived in Toronto. Rose worked in the McGregor Sock Factory, and her husband became a plumber. Jack passed away approximately ten years ago. Rose has two daughters, a son and five granddaughters. Rose’s aunt (her “soulmate” as Rose calls her), moved to New York. She died there several years ago.

Rose lost approximately 50 members of her family during the Holocaust. Only four survived, including Rose and her aunt. When asked by a recent audience member if she still feels ‘hate’ for what happened to her and her family, Rose replied: “I don’t hate because I refuse to give Hitler another victim.”