

# Present Memories, Janet Applefield

0:01

During the first few days of the war, my father and his brothers joined the Polish army to fight the Germans.

0:09

My mother, baby sister and I, I was 4, went to stay with my maternal grandparents in the village of Wadowice.

0:18

Realizing the imminent danger, my grandfather put us on a horse drawn wagon and we joined a moving caravan heading east toward Russia.

0:29

There was incredible fear, uncertainty and confusion.

0:33

We hid in ditches by day, travelled at night.

0:38

After weeks on the road, we arrived near Lwow, a city on the Polish Russian border.

0:45

The Polish army was no match for the Germans and within a few days surrendered.

0:51

My father did not know where we were.

0:54

He took the only escape route, which lucky for us was toward Lwow, and was able to find us through a newspaper ad.

1:02

Life in Russia was very difficult.

1:05

My little sister, only 18 months old, became critically ill with diphtheria and died because we could not get any medicine for her.

1:14

As Polish nationals, my parents decided they would be safer fleeing Russia and returning to Poland.

1:23

A grave mistake.

1:25

As soon as we arrived home, we were rounded up and with all other Jews forced to move to the ghetto.

1:33

The conditions were deplorable and our families suffered daily indignities.

1:39

One time I recall seeing a sign reading kosher meat pinned to the coats of two elderly Jewish men who were hung in the town square.

1:50

When news spread that the ghetto was to be liquidated, my father planned our escape.

1:56

He put us on a train bound for a small village of Niepolomice and then hid in a Polish friend's attic until he was able to join us.

2:06

Not long after, we learned that the Jews in this town, too, were to be liquidated.

2:12

Once again, we fled in the middle of the night.

2:16

With no place to go, we hid in potato fields.

2:20

The Polish police, who were collaborating with the Nazis, caught us, beat us with clubs and returned us to the village.

2:28

The next day.

2:29

My parents made it an agonizing decision to give their remaining child away.

2:36

One of my cousin's nursemaids agreed to take me for a short time.

2:42

I left with her by train for Krakow the following day.

2:47

My parents and thousands of others were ordered to report to the stadium.

2:52

They painfully separated, hoping to maximize the chance of at least one of them surviving.

2:59

My mother was sent to the left.

3:02

She was taken to the forest on the outskirts of the town and brutally shot to death.

3:08

My father was sent to the right.

3:11

He was taken to Krakow ghetto and then to the partial concentration camp.

3:17

Staying with the Polish woman, I had many frightening experiences.

3:21

Once a Gestapo came looking for Jews and hiding.

3:26

After ransacking the apartment, he looked at me, held my blonde pigtail in his fingers and left.

3:33

I still remember his chilling smile and black leather knee high boots clicking as he descended the stairs.

3:41

My father, who was still in the ghetto, knew my stay with the Polish woman had to be temporary.

3:49

He managed to buy the birth certificate of a deceased Polish girl for me from a Catholic priest, and I became that girl.

3:59

I had a new identity, a new name, Christina Antoshkievitch.

4:05

He then contacted a cousin with false Polish papers who agreed to take me.

4:11

One day, my cousin went to meet her Polish boyfriend in a Krakow cafe.

4:17

She instructed me to stay in the church across the street.

4:21

Though I waited for four hours, she did not return.

4:25

I saw that the street was cordoned off.

4:29

The Gestapo had arrested everyone in the cafe.

4:33

It was May 21st, 1943.

4:37

There I was, seven years old, walking the streets and crying, completely bewildered and terrified, not knowing what to do.

4:47

I was alone in the world.

4:50

An older woman walking by asked me what was the matter, seeing that I looked like a typical Aryan child with my blonde hair, blue eyes and up her nose.

5:02

She placed me under her large cape and quickly whisked me into the cafe building.

5:08

She took me upstairs to her friend Alicja Gotab.

5:13

I answered her questions with a well rehearsed response.

5:17

I come from Warsaw.

5:19

My parents were killed in a bombing raid.

5:22

My father.

5:23

My father was an officer in the Polish army.

5:27

Because it was too dangerous to remain in that apartment.

5:31

Alicja's son Staschek took me 4 kilometers to a farm owned by the Catholic Church.

5:39

The people there treated me like family and asked no questions.

5:44

One day, right after slaughtering a pig, a criminal offence punishable by death, we were alerted that the Gestapo were on the way.

5:54

We quickly cleaned up and hid the evidence in the attic.

5:59

When the Gestapo came, I am told that I said "give them vodka" and I started to sing and dance in order to distract them.

6:08

They were amused, they laughed, joked and left.

6:13

I remained with this Polish family until the end of the war when my cousin's father came for me.

6:19

I was sad to leave.

6:22

The family was wanted to keep me but felt that it would be ethically and morally wrong.

6:29

I was placed in a refugee center with other malnourished, frightened Jewish children until Lena Kuchler, a wonderful woman looking for her family, found us and made a commitment to do something with our broken lives.

6:45

Against great odds, she started 2 orphanages and became our mother.

6:53

When Lena Kuchler realized that the extreme anti-Semitism in Poland threatened their lives, she miraculously smuggled hundred of her orphans to Israel.

7:04

I was one of the very few lucky ones, for my father had survived.

7:09

When I first saw him after 2 1/2 years, I did not recognize him and I was terribly frightened.

7:17

He weighed 80 lbs and looked like a skeleton.

7:20

I too was malnourished and had a problem walking.

7:25

My father decided to rent a room near the orphanage while he recuperated and we became reacquainted.

7:33

I soon agreed to return with him to my grandparents house.

7:37

I was the only Jewish child from that town to survive.

7:41

Our lives were threatened daily.

7:44

Several of my father's friends were murdered

7:46

after the war. We found notes posted on our door saying Hitler did not complete the job.

7:53

We will kill you.

7:55

The police chief told us that he could do nothing to help us, but he gave my father a gun, which he kept under his pillow when he slept.

8:06

It did not take us long to realize that we had no future in Poland.

8:11

We came to the United States in March 1947.

8:16

My husband, Jerome, and I have three children and five grandchildren.

8:21

My rescuers are the genuine heroes.

8:25

They risk their own lives by simply responding to the cries of an abandoned child.