

ISER CUKIER



Iser Cukier was born in Czestochowa, Poland, home of the Shrine of the Black Madonna and, before the war, 25,000 Jews.

Moishe Dov Cukier, Iser's father, served seven years in the cavalry of Tsar Nicholas II, during which time he was forced to eat treyf, non-kosher food. For that transgression, he fasted every Thursday for the rest of his life.

Moishe Dov was 27 when he married his 15-year old bride. He and Rachel lived in Skulkof, a small Polish village where, like their parents, they were farmers. But the lack of Jewish teachers there prompted the family to move to Czestochowa.

In Czestochowa, the Cukiers employed eight people to run a bakery that produced pretzels and crackers. The bakery occupied the same building as the Cukiers' apartment, which included two bedrooms, a kitchen and a living room. A live-in maid made it possible for Rachel to work with her husband. By the time her seventh and youngest child, Iser, was born, Iser's older sister, Esther, had an infant of her own. When Rachel Cukier was at the bakery, Esther occasionally helped care for her younger brother.

Iser was a child when his father died, by which time his siblings, except for a brother, had left home. Iser wanted to go to high school, but his brother in the United States urged him to learn a trade. Iser became a men's tailor but wanted more challenging work. He moved to Lodz to learn women's tailoring from an uncle and later to Warsaw and Katowice to attend schools of design. He had his own shop in Zawiercie, employed 10 people and supported his mother. He married and took his new wife skiing on a six-week honeymoon.

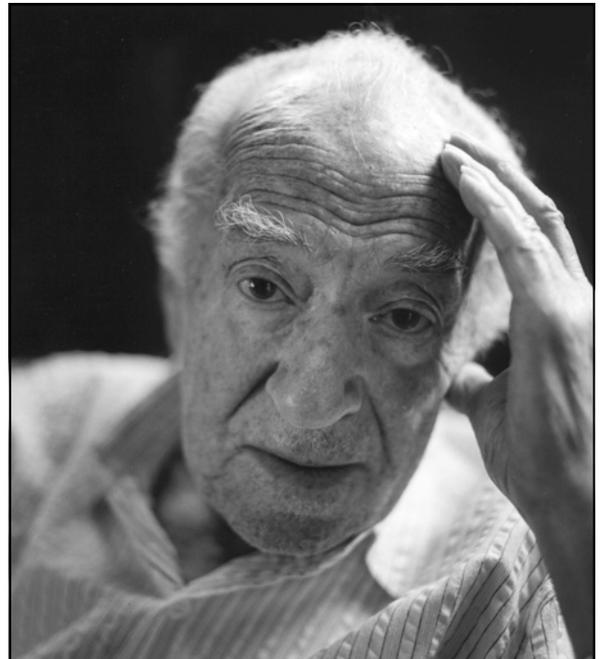
The Nazis appreciated Iser's skills enough to let him live and supervise 300 people making uniforms. His wife and 18-month old child, having no such value to the Nazis, were murdered, as was the rest of his family except for two brothers.

After liberation in May 1945, Iser's brother in America sent immigration papers. Iser went to Paris intending to go the American consulate. In the meantime, he worked for a designer, took classes and married Tola Gottlieb. Their son, Jeanot, was born in 1948. The French government offered Iser a job teaching design at the university and they stayed seven years. Only in 1952, when the American consulate said it was their last chance to emigrate, did they finally leave.

Two months later, Iser owned a store on Seventh Avenue in New York. Tola visited family in Kansas City and liked it so much she wanted to move. Iser agreed and found work immediately, eventually working 18 years for Youthcraft.

Iser thinks everything is relative. He didn't suffer as much as his first wife, as Tola, or as his family, so in some ways he feels fortunate. Nevertheless, he says, "This is in our heart and our mind."

"We live with it, we sleep with it, we think of it, and we pray that it won't happen again."



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein
Excerpt from *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust ~ A Mosaic of Memories*

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