

ANN FEDERMAN



Miriam and Abraham Warszawski had nine children, all born at home in the Polish city of Bedzin. Anna was next to the youngest. The Warszawskis' apartment building was next door to a ladies ready-to-wear shop. A sweets shop was across the street and a men's shop a few doors down.

The great room served as living room, dining room and bedroom for the entire family. The parents had one large bed and the children doubled up in other beds. Mother served the main meal from 1 to 3 p.m., and sometimes a sandwich and buttermilk snack at bedtime.

The Warszawskis were strictly observant Jews. Miriam wore a sheytl, a wig. Abraham never went out without a hat. On Shabbat, the family often walked an hour or two to visit aunts and uncles in nearby shtetlekh, or small towns. The children huddled under their mother's shawl for warmth.

Well known for their hospitality, the Warszawskis had few Shabbats without a traveler or needy guest spending the night on their black leather couch. Abraham Warszawski, a real estate dealer, was a member of the chevra kadisha, the Jewish burial society. If someone needed a bank loan, he would vouch for him. All the boys played instruments. Anna's brother, Moishe, was an accomplished violinist. Anna went to public school. She felt little overt antisemitism but was asked to leave the room during prayers.

The war started in 1939, and in 1942 Bedzin's Jews were ordered to report to a football field for deportation.

Anna was 20 when she and her older sister, Gutcha, were liberated from a labor camp in Czechoslovakia. The sisters returned to Bedzin, then to the displaced persons camp at Bergen-Belsen, where Anna met Isak Federman.

In June 1946, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and United Jewish Appeal arranged for them to settle in Kansas City. Anna, now Ann, got a job lining trunks and later sewing. The hardest part of her new life, she says, was learning English. Ann and Isak were the first Holocaust survivors to marry in Kansas City. To their amazement, more than 500 people attended their wedding.

Ann became a citizen in 1951, at the very courthouse where Arthur, the son she was carrying, would be sworn in as federal judge four decades later. The Federmans have two other children, Rachel and Lorie.

Ann doesn't dwell on the war, except for what happened to her little sister, Laika, who also made it to the Czech labor camp. When Laika became ill, Ann and Gutcha sent her to the camp sanitarium, which had always been safe. Laika was taken away in a surprise raid by the SS.

In spite of it all, Ann believes in God and America.

"In Poland or Germany," she says, "you could wake up during the night and not know who's going to knock on your door."



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

Excerpt from *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust ~ A Mosaic of Memories*

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