

ABE FLEKIER



Before the war, the Flekier family lived in Bialobrzegi, Poland, just outside Warsaw, on the square in the center of town. In the mornings before cheder, Hebrew school, Abe went to the only school in town, a government-run Catholic school. Of 30 students in his class, three or four were Jewish.

“We had to stand for the Catholic prayers,” he recalls, “but we didn’t say them. There was never a time I left school and someone didn’t start fighting me because I didn’t say the prayer.”

Abe didn’t wear a kippah, a skullcap, to school because that would have accentuated the fact that he was Jewish. He wished he could belong to a Zionist organization, as his two older brothers did.

To Abe, the third of five boys, his mother was a saint. A teacher before she married, Chaya Flekier spoke perfect German. She wrote letters to American relatives for her neighbors who couldn’t read or write. Abe collected the stamps on the letters they received. His father, Eziel Flekier, was a tailor who supplemented the family’s income by helping farmers. Two evenings a week

he went to meetings as a secretary of a Jewish aid society that made interest-free loans to the needy.

At a time when few could afford the 10 cents it cost for a newspaper, Chaya Flekier read the paper every day.

“Nobody but my mother believed what was coming,” Abe recalls. “She made little knapsacks for the whole family and filled them with things to keep you alive, like sugar cubes. She taught us how to mend socks and wash shirts. She said, ‘One day I won’t be here, and you need to know how to do this yourself because if you don’t you will die.’ And that’s exactly what happened.”

When the Nazis snatched Abe off the streets of the Bialobrzegi ghetto, Chaya ran after the truck screaming. The Germans aimed their rifles. Abe never saw his mother again. He was 11 years old.

Abe was in a boxcar on a train when the Americans liberated him. A Jewish woman in the displaced persons camp took Abe under her wing and encouraged him to register to go to America. Knowing every member of his family except his brother David had perished, Abe didn’t care what happened to him.

Arriving in Kansas City by way of New York in 1947, he went to Paseo High School and started working for Barney Goodman, a prominent real estate investor. Goodman’s brother-in-law sent him to Tucson, Arizona, to work in a hotel. After three months there, he was drafted and sent to Korea.

Abe had friends in Israel. He met his wife, Yocheved, in Jerusalem. They married and returned to Kansas City in 1959. They have two children: Karen and Steve.

Recalling his troubles during the Catholic prayers in grade school, Abe opposes prayer in public schools.

When he reflects on what happened in his life, he can’t explain how he survived “But,” he says, “there isn’t a day I don’t see it. When I shave my face, these things get in front of you. The only thing I won’t ask is, Why?”



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

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

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