

MOLLY NAGEL



Molly, born Malka, was the fifth of Bleema and Yankel Kopec's six children. She is not sure what year she was born, but believes it was 1918, in Rozan, Poland, about 75 kilometers or almost 50 miles north of Warsaw. The Kopecs lived near the big synagogue and several small *shtieblach* – prayer houses. Her father owned five *Sefer Torahs* – Torah scrolls – and prayed at the Rozaminer *shtiebel*.

The Kopecs vacationed at a spa and, Molly says, always ate meat. Like most Jews in Rozan, their home was near the market in the center of town. It included a dining room, living room, office, bedrooms, and rented rooms upstairs.

Molly finished seven years of public school. Jews were not allowed to attend high school, so Yankel hired rabbis to tutor his children at home. For socializing and recreation, most Jewish youth in Rozan belonged to clubs. "We danced, we sang, we played, and in wintertime, we rode sleighs," Molly recalls.

Yankel Kopec owned a grain company. He also owned a farm but sold it in 1935 when Marshal Jozef Pilsudski died. Pilsudski, a military man who led Poland, was supported by many left-wing groups and minorities. With Pilsudski's death, Polish Jews became targets. "The Polish people started fights and broke our windows," says Molly, whose father helped provide food and coal to needy Jews.

After the war began, Molly was in the synagogue with her family as the Nazis were searching for Jews. Her father covered everyone with a prayer shawl, preparing to die martyrs' deaths for the sanctification of God's name. Instead, a bomb exploded at a door near Molly, injuring her leg. The Kopecs were able to flee to Bialystok. So hungry that she ate grass, Molly was fortunate to eventually find a job sorting potatoes. Her father died in 1940.

Molly met and married her husband, Sam Nagel, in Siberia.

"We put up a *chuppah* [bridal canopy]," she recalls. "My husband brought me 10 eggs, and I got a bit of flour and made cookies." Beverly, their first child, was born in the Caucasus.

Released from Siberia, the Nagels returned to Poland, only to have rocks thrown at them. From there, they stayed in a displaced persons camp in Germany, where Jack was born in 1947.

Affidavits from Sam's uncle brought the Nagels to Kansas City in late 1949. Sam earned \$40 a week, saving enough in 18 months to buy a house. Molly took a job with the J.B. Toy Company and later worked as a salesperson in Sam's shoe shop. Beverly teaches gifted children in Iowa. Jack is an engineer with Black & Veatch. Molly has three grandchildren. Sam died in 1994.

Molly celebrated 50 years in the United States in synagogue with an "*aliyah*," the honor of reciting blessings over the Torah.



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

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

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