

MINA NISENKIER



Deborah and Samuel Markovich had five children, of whom Mina was next to the youngest. Mina's father, a former clarinetist in the Russian Army, was a tailor. The Markovich home in Lodz, Poland, consisted of one bedroom and a kitchen. In the summer, to escape the heat, they spent three months in the country.

On Shabbat, Samuel walked several miles to synagogue. On motzei Shabbat, the evening after Sabbath, the family ate herring and potatoes at grandmother's where, Mina remembers, the children were expected to be very quiet. At Hanukkah, her grandmother made wine from raisins and gave extra raisins to the children.

Mina went to public school with non-Jewish children. A tutor came to Mina's home to teach her and her sisters Hebrew. Mina's favorite pastimes were reading and trading books with friends. Often, she "stole" her sister's books to read them first. Sometimes, she went to the movies.

At Easter, Jewish people in Lodz were afraid to go outside. That was when accusations that the Jews killed Jesus often led to death and destruction.

During the war, when the Markoviches were in the ghetto, one neighbor tried to bring them bread. "We were scared because if she was caught it would be very severe for her," says Mina, "so we told her not to come anymore." Mina was deported from the ghetto to Auschwitz.

She was liberated from Bergen-Belsen. A month later, she traveled to Landsberg, Germany. There she met her husband, Abe Nisenkier, a tailor and the sole survivor in his family of eight. Abe went to Paris a month before Mina to find a job and an apartment.

Mina and Abe lived in Paris eight years and had two children: Henri, born prematurely, and Danielle. Abe eventually bought his own sewing machine and worked out of their apartment. Mina learned to sew so she could help him. Her brother and sister left for the United States, but Mina loved Paris and wanted to stay. "Mina," Abe told her, "you will never be happy here, even if you have everything." Besides, Mina knew she might never have another chance to leave.

Yet the apartment at 38th Street and Troost Avenue in Kansas City was not Paris, "I looked down the street and didn't see anyone walking," she recalls. Henri, with his long curls, short pants and French accent, was teased so badly that he refused to speak for several months. Jeffrey Martin was born in 1959.

Abe started his own business in 1963. Mina ran it alone for 13 years after he died in 1978.

Her Holocaust memories still cause her to shake, especially at night. In the camps, she didn't believe she would survive.



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

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

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