

Luba Stachel

Wartime Experience: Sent to Ghetto

I was born in Minsk, Byelorussia, in January 1923, and lived with my mother and father, Raisa and Isaak Bakscht. In June 1941, I graduated from high school. Minsk was invaded by the Nazis, and the city was taken over by German paratroopers. We tried to escape deeper into Russia but Minsk was surrounded, and we had to return to the burning city. Along the way we walked over dead bodies. Upon our return, we discovered that all Jews had to register and go to the ghetto near the Jewish cemetery. My father was taken away with other men in the professions, and we never heard from him again.

My mother and I spent three long years in the ghetto. Each time there was a pogrom, which was very often, we hid. My mother worked in the ghetto kitchen; she served the watery soup, and she distributed the rations of bread. I worked on the railroad. I shoveled snow and chopped ice from the rails at the depot; I also cleaned bricks from the burned ruins.

Shortly before the liquidation of the ghetto I was able to contact Gentile friends who helped me, and I arranged for my mother to join the partisans in the nearby forest. I stayed with the Gentile family for over a year, until Minsk was freed by the Russian army in 1944. I greeted the first tank to come into the city. I ran toward it with tears in my eyes and I held flowers for the liberators.

I had not heard from my mother from the time of our separation, and I awaited her. The partisans began to return; they left the woods, and fortunately my mother was among them. You cannot imagine our meeting. From that time on, we were together; our lives were intertwined, and that is why I have her picture with me in my portrait.

When the schools reopened, I entered a medical college and studied for two years. I also worked as a volunteer in a hospital, where I met a wounded Polish soldier--Felix Stachel, who became my husband. All of his family had been killed in Lvov, Poland. In 1946 we were able to leave Russia for Lodz, where we joined the Shomer Hatzair Kibbutz. We left for the American zone in Germany and spent three years in a DP camp, where my daughter was born. Through an advertisement we placed in The Forward we were able to trace and contact my mother's three sisters in New York, New York, and they sent us papers to come to the United States in 1949.

After a short while we left for Petaluma, California, where my mother had a sick sister. We lived there for sixteen years and rented a chicken farm, which we eventually bought. My husband died in 1972. We had a daughter and two sons. My mother passed away at the Jewish Home in San Francisco in 1992.