

The Story of Holocaust Survivor Janet Moskowitz: An Excerpt by Ida Moskowitz Margolis

Every Holocaust survivor has a story to tell, a unique and very important story. I am the daughter of two Holocaust survivors, Janet Moskowitz (nee Zuchter) and Max Moskowitz. With great pain and difficulty when they were asked to tell their stories to students, they were finally able to do so. My father, died soon after beginning to tell his terribly sad story, but my mom was encouraged to continue to tell her story to students so that they would learn about the horrors that people did to other people and the consequences of prejudice and hatred.

Janet was born in 1921 in the cosmopolitan city of Bedzin, Poland. She was the eldest of three children and she always took pride in being a good student, as did her little brother, but not her sister, who was more interested in having fun with friends. Her father was a candy wholesaler, and although they had little money they enjoyed their life, especially because they lived close to a warm and loving extended family. They had 140 relatives who they would visit and spend holidays with. Janet never thought it would all disappear. She never thought she would not be able to continue living what was her normal life or realize her dream of becoming a nurse or teacher. She often said, "So quickly it was all over."

After events in September 1939, her life would never be the same. That is when the Germans overran Poland. By October, the Nazis burned down their beautiful synagogue and by November, they were sending young people to slave labor camps. In 1942, Janet and her family were forced into one ghetto in Bedzin. Then her newly married sister Gucia and husband and Janet's little brother Shy were sent to a labor camp. In 1943, after being sent to the outskirts of Bedzin to another ghetto, thousands of Jews, including Janet, her mother, aunts, uncles and cousins were rounded up and sent to Auschwitz Concentration Camp. Separated from all but an uncle and cousin, Janet struggled to survive in the most horrific conditions. Starved and beaten, forced to work outside in freezing cold weather with little clothing, she was surrounded by illness and death. In 1945, after a death march to Ravensbruck Concentration Camp, Janet was sent to a Neustadt Gleve, a subcamp of Ravensbruck, where she was forced to work in an airplane factory. It was there in May of 1945 that Janet was finally liberated. It is hard to imagine what it was like when the emaciated prisoners heard soldiers say, "The war is over. You are free." After liberation, Janet returned to Bedzin, hoping to find family. Only her sister and two cousins survived. The returning Jews were met with anti-Semitism. It was hard for her to believe that after all that they went through they were met again with hatred and had nothing of their former life. Janet married Max Moskowitz in Bedzin, but because of the anti-Semitism they went to Germany, where their only daughter was born in 1948. In 1950, they were fortunate to be able to immigrate to the United States, where they bought a farm in South Jersey. Max became very ill, and Janet cared for him for many years until his death in 1994.

Janet and Max were always grateful to live in the United States. They appreciated the freedoms that freedom to express oneself and the freedom of religion. Janet was especially impressed with the opportunities people could have in the U.S. - especially the opportunities to get an education. Janet volunteered for many groups in her community, in addition to speaking to students. She was asked to tell her story for a memoir, *The Miracle of Survival: Angels at My Back*. Just before its printing Janet died

of heart failure. My dear mother did not live see her book or to know that she was honored by the State of New Jersey in a book, Words for All Time: Students' Letters to Holocaust Survivors but her story and words will live on. Janet wrote, "I hope that my story inspires students and others to be more inclusive, especially of those whom they consider different. Instead of fearing difference, people should make a difference by fighting hatred and prejudice."

