

ROMA BARNES

Roma Barnes survived several slave labor camps. Her parents and brother were killed in Sobibor.

“... I came back to the town. I saw friends, people I knew, dead, ...the doorways, the well, blood was streaming out. My parents and brother were gone. I was nine years old and I was alone.”

Roma Barnes (née Rozenman) was born in Demblin, Poland in 1930. Roma's father's family owned a sawmill in the town, and she had a happy childhood with a large, close, extended family nearby. When the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, they hid in the nearby forest. When they returned the town, it was occupied. Roma believed that for a while, her family was not as threatened as other Jews because of their sawmill which was half owned by a Pole.

But At Passover 1942, all the Jews in the town were rounded up in the town square. Her mother told her “Run. You have to survive!” Roma hid in a Polish farmer's outhouse, and when she returned to the town, her family was gone. Roma's survival depended on not looking Jewish and not having an accent when she spoke Polish.

She escaped many roundups but eventually was captured with some of her relatives. Roma was sent first to a labor camp where she worked with other young people in the fields. Roma was transferred to other camps and remembered how the Germans took some of the children and threw them into a hole they had dug and then threw grenades in. At camp Hasag, an ammunitions factory, she worked making shells until being liberated there by the Russians in January 1945.

The Jewish Refugee Committee was responsible for children who survived the war. They placed Roma in an orphanage in Lodz, Poland and sent her to Czechoslovakia, Scotland and finally to England where she went to school and worked for seven years. There she met and married an American eventually moving to California and raising a family.

Roma learned that her parents and brother had been taken to the death camp Sobibor along with 2000 Jews from their town in one of the first transports and were all gassed. Of her large extended family, only a few aunts and cousins were alive after the war. The Menorah in her portrait has been in Roma's family for 300 years. Buried for protection, it was found after the war by her Aunt Eva.