

ESTHER KOZLOWSKI

Esther Kozlowski survived the war by moving from one place to another with her baby, living by her wits.

“When it became common knowledge where the transports of the Jews were going, I decided rather to die from one bullet with my baby than to suffocate in a cattle train.”

Esther Kozlowski (née Naiman) was born in 1914 in Wodzislaw, Poland, where her father ran a lumber business. She fondly recalled times before the war living in a comfortable home with her five siblings and other family members.

Esther was married and, three months before the outbreak of the war, gave birth to a son, Moshe. When the Germans bombed the town, Esther, her husband, baby and other family members traveled to her in-laws' farm sixty kilometers away. Conditions on the road were chaotic, but once they arrived, the family felt safe for the moment.

After two months, Esther and her family returned to Wodzislaw, only to find that they could not get into their home and that the family lumber business had been confiscated by a Nazi sympathizer. The Germans were everywhere, and Esther became desperate. When it became clear that the Jews were being transported to concentration camps, Esther and her baby fled. All during the war she moved about, alone with her son, staying in some places for months, in others only for days. The Germans were everywhere. There was often chaos on the roads and Esther and the baby endured terrible hardships. She survived the Germans and finally the Russians crossing the river with their rifles carried above their heads.

In 1944, the Russians liberated the village near Treblinka where Esther was working digging potatoes and writing letters in German for the Polish women to their sons and husbands in slave labor camps. She was reunited there with her youngest brother. At the end of the war, Esther searched the announcements on the walls of the Jewish committee but found only the names of her oldest brother and his son. Her husband had been killed in 1943.

Esther and her son took off again leaving Poland, crossing illegal border and walking until they reached Germany. They lived in various Displaced Persons camps for five years until they were permitted to immigrate to New York in 1951. Shortly after arriving, she married a man whom she had known in one of the Displaced Persons camps and they eventually settled in San Francisco.