



Martin's Story, Chapter 13

How did your mother get out?

My mother got out on what was supposed to be a temporary visa to France. She used various excuses for going there – she had elderly parents there and so on – but it was supposed to be a temporary stay, after that she was supposed to return to Poland. But before she could return to Poland, which she didn't want to do, the war started and it put a stop to all travel of course so she was in France. Now at first of course in France it looked as if people were reasonably safe but then in 1940 when France capitulated the Germans occupied part of France but in the southern part of France they allowed the country to be nominally independent under a government which had its headquarters if you like in Vichy and was in fact a German puppet government. Nominally it was independent but in fact it had to do what the Germans told it to do. And that lasted for some time and then the Germans occupied the Vichy zone as well so that the whole of France was under German occupation. The Vichy government in theory still existed but it was even more under German control than it had been before. Now in France itself of course many Jews were taken away to the concentration camps in Germany or in Poland or in Austria and many did not survive. But for the Germans it was a question of priorities. They first of all wanted to kill as many Jews as possible in eastern Europe, then in Holland, and France was lower on the list of their priorities so that between half and three-quarters of the Jews of France actually did survive. Well half to three-quarters is still a frighteningly small proportion because it means that between a quarter and a half did not survive. But if the war had gone on much longer then of course none of them would have survived.

Can you tell me what happened to your relatives in Poland?

Not a single one survived. The only one who was not killed by the Nazis was my great-grandmother. She lived to see the German invasion but she died a natural death shortly afterwards before the others were killed. If she had lived a bit longer then she would have been killed by the Nazis as well. No, not a single one survived. Poland for historical reasons which we can't go into now had the largest Jewish population in Europe with 3 ½ million Jews and after that a mere handful survived. Some managed to save themselves by getting out of Poland into Russia, I even knew one person who got into Russia and across Russia to Japan and then to Canada and joined the Royal Air Force and

served in Britain during the war. But people like that were few in number. Of the 6 million Jews a very high proportion were from Poland, 6 million who died in the Holocaust a very high proportion were from Poland and certainly in the Book of Remembrance that we have in the Marjorie and Arnold Ziff Community Centre on the page for my family I list 22 people.

And can you tell me as well, longer term were you able to rebuild a satisfying relationship with your mother?

Unfortunately not, no. It just wasn't possible.