

Holocaust Survivor Biography: Belle Lewkowiez Ostroff



Belle Lewkowiez Ostroff was born in Paris, France in 1925. Her parents, both Polish Jews, had moved the family to France for a better life. Eventually, Belle and her family moved to Reims, a city in northern France, where her father found work as a tailor to support his wife and seven children.

In May 1940, Germany invaded northern France. Fourteen-year-old Belle and her family fled Reims and settled in southern France, the Free Zone, where they thought they were safe from Nazi persecution. However, the Vichy regime that governed unoccupied France viciously collaborated with the Nazis. The family was in danger again.

A friend's sister betrayed the family to the Nazis who then arrested her brother and father. Both were sent to concentration camps. Belle and her family lived in constant fear of capture and death. They were always hungry, eating rotten apples that fell from the trees and potatoes with worms in them, anything for something to eat. The remaining members of the Ostroff family sought safety by moving from one hiding place to another until Allied troops liberated France in 1944.

After the war, Belle and her family returned to Reims to collect their past, but their home was gone and all their possessions were lost. While in Reims, Belle met an American soldier. She later married him in a gown her father made from a silk parachute donated by the American Army. After her father's death and shortly after her wedding, Belle moved to Philadelphia in October 1945 where she and her husband raised three daughters.

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Witness to History Project:

The Witness To History Project is designed to further the message and lessons of the Holocaust by direct interaction between students or interested adults and Holocaust survivors. Participants "adopt" a survivor by learning his or her unique account of via listening to the survivor tell his/her story, asking questions, writing a biography, reviewing a videotape, and memorizing and re-telling the story to others. Ultimately, the participant will have the lifelong job of educating others about the Holocaust by sharing this personal narrative. Contact the Holocaust Awareness Museum to participate.

Holocaust Awareness Museum and Education Center

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