

## Nechama Shneorson, Jewish Survivor

### Survival and Loss

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Nechama Shneorson was born Nechama Santocki on May 29, 1929, in Kovno, Lithuania, to Jacob and Ethel Santocki. She had three sisters, Zlata, Ida, and Genya. Her father owned a butcher shop. The family lived an observant Jewish life, including keeping kosher, and Nechama went to a Jewish school. Life began to change for Nechama and her family when the Soviet Army occupied Lithuania in June 1940. A year later, Germany invaded the Soviet Union and occupied Lithuania. The family tried to escape to the east but were caught and sent to the Seventh Fort, a military facility on the outskirts of Kovno.

In August 1941, after a harrowing week at the Seventh Fort, where Nechama's father survived a mass execution, the family was sent to a poor area of Kovno, which had been walled off and made into a ghetto. Nechama and her sisters were forced to work at a mill, and her father worked as a butcher for the Gestapo. Liquidation of the ghetto began in July 1944. If Jews refused to evacuate, the Germans burned their houses. Nechama's sister Ida, who was at a cousin's house, was killed by one such fire. The rest of the family was taken to the train station and packed into cattle cars heading toward an unknown destination. On the way, the train stopped and all of the men, including Nechama's father, were taken off. Nechama never saw her father again.

In July 1944, Nechama, her mother, and sisters Zlata and Genya arrived at Stutthof, a concentration camp east of Danzig. They were processed as prisoners and then Nechama and Zlata were selected as being fit for labor, while Genya and their mother were sent to Auschwitz and killed. Nechama, meanwhile, was separated from Zlata and taken to Thorn, a subcamp of Stutthof, where she performed forced labor and lived mostly in tents despite the bitter cold.

In January 1945, with the Soviets advancing, the Germans forced everyone in the camp on a death march. After four days and hundreds of casualties, Nechama and others were abandoned in a forest. The next morning, the Soviets liberated them. Nechama learned that Zlata had also survived, and after a time they were reunited in Lodz. Later, the sisters, along with Zlata's husband, went to Landsberg am Lech, a displaced persons camp near Munich, where they remained for the next three years.

In September 1948, Nechama went to Israel and was immediately drafted into the army. There she met Gabriel Shneorson, and the two were married in March 1950. After her marriage, Nechama was given permission to leave the army, and she worked as a travel agent in Israel. In 1954, the couple had a daughter, Edith. In 1964, the three immigrated to the United States, where Nechama worked at a department store and then in the textile industry for twenty-five years. At the time of Nechama's interview in 1995, she and her husband were both retired and living in New York City.