

ANNE LEVY AND LILA MILLEN: STUDY GUIDE

BACKGROUND

Anne was born in Lodz in 1935. Her sister Lila was born there in 1937. Their parents were Mark and Ruth Skorecki. The family lived in a large, comfortable apartment building at Legionow 8. Lodz was a large, industrial city (textiles) near the German border and had a population of Germans, Poles, and Jews. Many Jews lived in desperate poverty, but the Skoreckis enjoyed a comfortable middle class existence. Mark worked in the lumber business - his family had been involved in lumber for several generations and the name 'Skorecki' was well-known. The family lived in a beautiful apartment (with a view of a synagogue) and rented a country 'dacha' in the summer.

WORLD WAR II

The Germans attacked Poland on September 1, 1939, and Lodz was quickly occupied; the Soviet invaded Eastern Poland on September 17th. Mark Skorecki and other Jewish men fled to the

relative safety of the Soviet zone of occupation. They didn't think that the Germans would harm women and children.

KEY TEACHING POINT: The Germans ruled by terror and thusly tried to subdue the native populations of Nazi-occupied Europe. The terror was severe and publicly rendered in Central and Eastern Europe. The purpose was to terrorize, to demoralize, and to break the will to resist.

As Anne tells us in the documentary, the Nazis ransacked and torched the synagogue across the street from the family apartment. That was on November 15, 1939. One day later, the Germans ordered Polish priests, with sledge hammers, to destroy the Kosciuszko (Polish national hero) monument on Liberty Square in Lodz. Frustrated with the slow pace, the Germans dynamited the monument.

IDENTIFICATION of JEWS

The Jews were ordered to register and to wear the 'Star of David' armband, publicly distinguishing them from the non-Jewish population. Identification of the Jews was an early step towards annihilation. Ruth and her two daughters were evicted from the family apartment, ordered to leave 'best china' on the table and 'best linen' on the beds. They were forced to move into the Lodz ghetto.

Ruth and the girls slipped out of the Lodz ghetto (before it was sealed) and reached Warsaw after a harrowing journey. Ruth's

brother Henry Tempelhof lived there. He was office manager at Czyste Hospital; his wife Mery Mejnster was a doctor. Both would perish during the war.

WARSAW GHETTO

The Warsaw ghetto was sealed off on November 15, 1940. “A wave of evil rolled over the city as if in response to a nod from above,” wrote the Jewish historian Emmanuel Ringelblum in his ghetto diary. Five hundred thousand Jewish people were crowded into the Jewish district and surrounded by eight foot walls. Nazi guards, with Polish and Jewish collaborators, guarded the ghetto. Disease, violence, and starvation were rampant.

KEY TEACHING POINT: The purpose of the ghetto was to concentrate the Jewish people in one place. This was a step towards the ultimate goal of annihilation.

Mark Skorecki smuggled himself out of Soviet territory and reached Warsaw where he slipped into the ghetto. He discovered his family on the verge of starvation. In the documentaries, both Anne and Lila describe this moment. The Germans established factories in the Warsaw ghetto that produced goods for the German Army. Mark, with his ‘golden hands’ and keen organizing abilities, was appointed manager at Schultz’s factory, producing wooden soles for camp prisoners.

See: *On Both Sides of the Wall*, by Vladka Meed; *Shielding the*

Flame: An Intimate Conversation with Dr. Marek Edelman, the Last Surviving Leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, by Hanna Krall; I Remember Nothing More, by Adina Blady Szwajger; and Notes From The Warsaw Ghetto, by Emmanuel Ringelblum.

‘VEGETABLE BIN’

Mark built a hiding space in the bottom of a vegetable bin (or ‘campaign chest’) and equipped it with two tiny seats and a ‘potty.’ This was probably in 1942 – when Anne was seven and Lila five. Each morning before Mark and Ruth left for the factory, they hid their daughters in this ‘vegetable bin.’ In the documentary, Anne tells us about hearing the Germans search the room. Lila remembers the German dogs when Anne and Lila (and others) were hidden in the factory’s cellar. The dog smelled them but couldn’t reach them.

In July 1942, the Nazis and their collaborators (the Jewish police were nefarious) began the round-up and deportation of the Warsaw Jews to the Treblinka death camp. Jews in the ghetto were marched to *Umschlagplatz* (loading place) and forced onto crowded cattle cars whence the fifty miles to Treblinka.

ESCAPE to ‘ARYAN SIDE’

In January 1943, about the time of the first Jewish revolt in the ghetto, Mark arranged to smuggle the family out of the ghetto (in a garbage truck) to ‘Aryan side’ of Warsaw (a guard at the gate

was bribed). Mark was helped by a former Polish Army soldier and a Polish manager of a factory. They were paid for their efforts. Once outside the ghetto, Ruth and the girls, 'passing' as Christians, caught a tram to the Praga district of Warsaw, where the Piotrowska family lived at #15 Lochowska Street. This family consisted of a Polish mother Katarzyana woman and her daughter Natalia. Having discussed the matter with the former Polish soldier, and knowing full well that the Skoreckis were Jewish, the Piotrowskas agreed to rent a room to the Skoreckis, telling neighbors that they were 'relatives' displaced by the war. Ruth and Mark paid the Piotrowskas for this arrangement. Mark slipped out of the ghetto eight days later in a German automobile after bribing an SS officer's chauffeur.

"Its like a high fever," Emmanuel Ringelblum wrote, "in which everything is clarified. On the one hand, some Christians offer to help the Jews; on the other hand, bestial anti-Semitism; on the one hand stony hearts, among Jews; on the other, devoted self sacrifice to aid those suffering from hunger."

Because Mark and Ruth *paid* the Piotrowskas for room and board, the Piotrowskas don't meet *Yad Vashem's* definition of 'Righteous Gentiles,' which stipulates that no money was involved in the rescue.

KEY TEACHING POINT: In Nazi-occupied Poland, the penalty for helping Jews was death. This law was well-publicized.

Mark obtained work in a nearby lumber yard. With blond hair

and blue eyes, Lila looked like a 'Polish' girl and was raised a Catholic. She wasn't old enough to know that she was Jewish. In contrast, Anne had 'Jewish features' (curly hair, olive complexion) and was hidden in a closet when 'company' visited the Piotrowskas.

See: When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland, by Nechama Tec; Zegota: The Rescue of Jews in Wartime Poland, by Irene Tomaszewski and Tacia Werbowski; and Righteous Among Nations: How Poles Helped the Jews, 1939-1945, edited by Wladyslaw Bartoszewski and Zofia Levin.

COLLABORATORS

The family was betrayed by a treacherous neighbor who noticed Anne on the balcony and threatened to report the Piotrowskas.

KEY TEACHING POINT: Informers were a 'plague' throughout Nazi-occupied Europe. Warsaw was particularly dangerous in this regard. Scoundrels frequently blackmailed Jews attempting to 'pass' as Christians on the 'Aryan side.'

Mark made arrangements with his Polish boss and moved the family to the lumber yard where Mark built a tar paper dwelling. The Polish boss recognized the name 'Slorecki' from the pre-war period and knew that the family was Jewish. He kept quiet.

WARSAW GHETTO REVOLT

In April 1943, the Jewish fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto revolted against the Nazis and their collaborators and twice on the first day forced them to retreat from the ghetto. The Germans rained incendiaries on the ghetto and burned it down. The fighting lasted several weeks. The last Jewish fighters committed suicide in a bunker beneath #18 Mila Street. During this time, Anne and Lila were 'safely' on the 'Aryan side' of Warsaw (in the Praga neighborhood).

KEY TEACHING POINT: Anne and Lila gave their parents a reason to live – they saved their parents just as surely as their parents saved them.

POLISH UPRISING in WARSAW

After a year and four months after the Jewish revolt in the Warsaw ghetto, fighting again erupted in Warsaw. On August 1, 1944, the Polish underground army (the 'AK' or Home Army) revolted against the Nazis. The Red Army paused on the Vistula River (in Praga) while the Germans (and their auxiliaries) slaughtered civilians and crushed the Polish underground fighters.

Stalin thus allowed Hitler to destroy the Polish elite, the same policy that *both* dictators had pursued since 1939. The fighting in Warsaw lasted until early October. The Polish soldiers were allowed to surrender before being marched off to wretched POW camps. The civilian population was brutally expelled to the countryside. The Germans dynamited Warsaw before they retreated.

KEY TEACHING POINT: Warsaw, once compared to Paris, was completely destroyed during World War II. It was rebuilt by the Communists in totalitarian style – except for the Old Town which was rebuilt according to the original design.

In the autumn of 1944, the Skoreckis left Warsaw and lived (and worked) with a peasant family in the countryside until the Red Army liberated the family.

See: Fighting Warsaw: The Story of the Polish Underground State 1939-1945, by Stefan Korbonski; and Nothing But Honour, The Story of the Warsaw Uprising, 1944, by J. K. Zawodny

POST-WAR

As Anne relates in the documentary, Ruth attempted to register the family, but the registrar refused to believe that two little girls (Anne and Lila) had survived. Very few Jewish children survived in Nazi-occupied Poland.

KEY TEACHING POINT: The Nazis murdered 1.5 million Jewish children; they wanted particularly to destroy children and thus to prevent a Jewish future.

As Lila explains in the documentary, her father bluntly informed her that she wasn't Catholic – she was Jewish. Mark smuggled the family out of Soviet-occupied Poland to Czechoslovakia and to the American zone in Germany. The family lived in the town of Tirschenreuth, Germany. Anne and Lila began their childhoods there. In November 1949, the family took a boat to the United States and landed in New Orleans (at the Poland Avenue Wharf). Holocaust survivors in New Orleans formed the “New Americans Social Club,” providing the survivors and their children with the sense of an extended family.

KEY TEACHING POINT: Record the voices of our elders before it's too late. Oral history is vitally important: ‘When an old person dies, it's as if a library burns.’

In the 1960s, Ruth dictated her war-time memories to a seminary student (they sat at the kitchen table). He typed out a manuscript that became the basis of Lawrence N. Powell's book, Troubled Memory: Anne Levy, The Holocaust, and David Duke's Louisiana.

ANNE CONFRONTS DUKE

She doesn't discuss it in the documentary, but Anne confronted David Duke in 1989. He was a neo-Nazi and former Klansman who was elected to the Louisiana legislature in 1989. He argued that the Holocaust was "exaggerated." In his subsequent run for governor, Duke won a majority of the white vote. For the first time, Lila began talking about her experiences during the war.

Anne and her husband have three daughters. Lila and her husband have two daughters.

In August 2005, both Anne and Lila lost their homes to Hurricane Katrina.

ANNE LEVY and LILA MILLEN: GLOSSARY

NAME _____

Define the following glossary terms and explain their relevance to Anne and Lila's story.

1. Yad Vashem –

2. Lodz –

3. Assimilated Jews –

4. SS –

5. Ukrainians –

6. Polish 'blue' police –

7. Synagogue –

8. Star of David armband –

9. 'Golden hands' –

10. Warsaw Ghetto –

11. Umschlagplatz –

12. 'Resettlement' or 'evacuation' –

13. Treblinka –

14. 'Vegetable bin' –

15. Schultz's factory –

16. 'Work essential' Jew –

17. Jewish police –

18. Jewish Fighting Organization –

19. Judenrat –

20. 'Aryan side' –

21. Babushka –

22. Righteous Gentiles –

23. 'Documents' –

24. Polish Uprising in Warsaw –

25. Red Army –

26. Palestine –

ANNE LEVY and LILA MILLEN: KEY QUESTIONS

NAME _____

Answer the following questions using information and quotes from the documentary and study guide:

1. Describe Anne's family and her life before the war, including the incident with the German shepherd.

2. Describe the steps taken by the Nazis during the first months of the Nazi occupation of Lodz. What happened to Anne's family? What happened to her father? What did her mother decide to do?

3. What are Anne's and Lila's memories of the Warsaw ghetto?

4. Describe Anne's and Lila's memories of the day when their father returned from Russia.

5. How did Mark Skorecki's 'golden hands' help his family survive the Holocaust? Describe the 'vegetable bin' and its purpose.

6. How did Ruth and her daughters escape the Warsaw ghetto? Where did the Skoreckis (initially) live on the 'Aryan side'? Who helped them? What were the risks? What was Mark's job on the 'Aryan side'?

7. In physical appearance, how was Anne 'different' from Lila? Describe how this 'difference' shaped their lives on the 'Aryan side'?

8. Who betrayed the Skorecki family'? How did the family survive the rest of the war?

9. How did Anne and Lila 'save' their parents?

10. How do Lila and Anne describe the actions of their parents during the Holocaust?

11. What happened when Ruth attempted to register the family after the war? Explain.

12. What happened after the war when Mark told Lila that she was Jewish?

13. How does Lila describe her relationship with Anne?

14. How did Anne adjust to the 'Jim Crow' laws in the segregated South?

15. Lila says, "Certain things you can't get over." What does she mean? Explain.

16. What is Anne's message?

17. What is Lila's message?