

Anita Ekstein

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Anita Ekstein is a survivor of the Holocaust with an awe-inspiring story. She was born on July 18, 1934 in Lvov, Poland. Due to her family's fortunate circumstances, Ekstein's life was not impacted immediately following the Russian invasion in 1939. However, at some point in 1941 between the Russian retreat and the German occupation, the Ukrainians went on a rampage and Ekstein's family was endangered. They were fortunate because their landlord offered to hide them in his barn for two weeks.¹ They were also very lucky that they were able to stay together, if only for a short period of time, because many families were divided when in hiding.² Her family lived in the hay for ten days and had to remain very quiet, for the landlord's wife was unaware of their presence. This marked the first of many places where Anita Ekstein would hide over the next several years.

After this incident, Ekstein's family returned to their apartment and lived there as the Germans occupied their town. In the fall of 1941 Ekstein's family was resettled in a ghetto in Skole, but Anita was not forced into hiding again until the winter of 1942. After her mother was picked up and transported to Belzec, a death camp, on October 18, 1942, Ekstein's father knew that Anita needed a safer place to live. He turned to a Polish stock keeper whom he had met at work, asking him if he could keep Anita safe. Jozef Matusiewicz agreed to help and he smuggled Anita from the Skole ghetto to his home in Rozdol, where he lived with his wife and niece.³

When Anita was taken into the Matusiewicz's home, she was given a new identity. She became Anna Jaworska, an orphaned niece whose parents had died of influenza. The Matusiewicz's were devout Catholics, so they taught Ekstein how to be a good Catholic. This was part of her new identity, necessary to protect her when any outsiders asked any questions.

She was not allowed to go to school, but the Matusiewicz's daughter, Luscia, taught Anita how to read and write.⁴

Anita's life at this point consisted of staying inside and hiding when anybody walked by the windows or knocked on the door. One particular day, in February or March of 1943, two soldiers knocked on the door. Luscia ran with Anita to a back room of the house and pushed her through the window into the cold snow. Anita ran to a nearby outhouse, where she hid until it grew dark. When she returned to the house that night, Ekstein discovered that the soldiers had been looking for her and they had killed several other Jews that night. Following this incident, Anita was taken back to her father, who was then working with 29 other men in a slave labor camp.

In this new hiding place, Ekstein was forced to stay in a hole in the commode during the day when anybody else was in the room; her father shared his room with two other men. Anita spent six weeks in that tiny room, living for the evenings when her father would bring her food and she could enjoy his company.⁵ As a young girl it must have been terribly difficult for Anita to spend those days alone in a cramped space with nobody to talk to and nothing to play with; she was not even allowed to look out the small window in the room. On one horrendous day the Germans killed a Jewish man and threw his body into the room where Anita was staying. Luckily, they did not see her in the room. However, she had to remain in that small space for an entire day with the corpse.

During the time that Ekstein was living with her father again, he was still corresponding with Mr. Matusiewicz, attempting to find a better hiding place for Anita. Mr. Matusiewicz had a

nephew who lived near the Russian border, and Anita would be taken there to stay with him. She had to say goodbye to her father once again; this would be the last time.

Upon arriving at her new hiding place where she would stay with the Catholic priest, Micha Sujata, and his housekeeper, Pani Karola, Anita was given another identity. The priest's sister had died and he had agreed to raise her daughter, his niece. While staying there, Ekstein performed several different chores such as churning butter, stuffing geese, and watching after the cow. She continued to learn more about Catholicism, and she went to church when it was required. She knew that she was Jewish, but she also understood that that could not be acknowledged if she wanted to survive. Anita had a neighbor friend while she stayed with Sujata. She even told her friend that she was Jewish, but either her friend did not understand, or she simply did not believe her. Also while staying with Sujata and Karola, Ekstein read as many books as she could; she loved reading and learning. When Anita first began to learn about Catholicism, it meant nothing to her. Over time, though, it became something for her to cling to, and she began to pray for her father's return; she had heard no news from him while she was staying with Sujata.⁶

On March 24, 1944, Russian troops began to reoccupy the town where Ekstein was living. In April of 1945, a young Jewish woman came to take Ekstein back to the Matusiewicz family in Rozdol.⁷

Although the Jews were technically liberated by the Russians at this point and Anita would no longer need to hide, her problems were not over. The Jews were still very poor and did not have sufficient goods to efficiently rebuild their lives. Anita continued traveling around,

searching for any remaining family members, particularly her father. Several months later she learned that her father had been killed on July 15, 1943.

The greatest hardship faced by Anita Ekstein was likely her isolation. In most of her hiding places Anita was very alone. Nobody in these places knew any truth about her. She was given false identities, and she was transported from place to place rather frequently. Ekstein was isolated from other Jews, other children and, most significantly, her family. She rarely had any news of how her father was doing, and she had to live each day with hope that she would be able to see him again someday.

Furthermore, Anita was isolated from the outside world. She was not allowed to look out windows, to see the world beyond her hiding place. It is no wonder, then, that she was so eager to read books and to learn new things, for she had been refused those opportunities for many years during her childhood.

It is truly fascinating that Anita Ekstein was able to survive the events of the Holocaust. She escaped death numerous times, avoiding several encounters with German soldiers who sought after her. Even to survive the emotional hardships that she surely faced as an isolated child is an incredible feat. Her story should serve as an inspiration to all of mankind today and for many years to come.

Endnotes

1. Women and the Holocaust, *Personal Reflections-In Hiding*, <http://www.theverylongview.com/WATH/> (accessed January 31, 2009).
2. Diane L. Wolf, *Beyond Anne Frank: Hidden Children and Postwar Families in Holland*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).
3. March of the Living International, *Survivor's Corner*, http://www.motl.org/survivors/survivors_aekstein.htm (accessed February 1, 2009).
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.

Bibliography

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