



Marion Weinzweig

Marion Weinzweig (Mania Sztajman) was born in Opatow, Poland on January 3, 1941. When she was just 18 months old, her heroic young parents realized that the only way to save Mania's life was to hide her as a non-Jew. A Polish landowner's wife agreed to take Mania until it was safe to return her.

Three weeks later, Germans and Ukrainians surrounded the ghetto. Mania's mother, 25, and most of the extended family were sent by cattle cars to Treblinka, where they were murdered. Mania's father was a slave laborer in Starhovitz, and then was taken to Auschwitz finally ending up in Buchenwald, another concentration camp.

The Polish farmer's wife claimed Mania (renamed "Marisha Repolefska") was her niece. But after the Gestapo visited her home, prompted by rumors that she was harboring a child, she told her carriage-driver to leave the child on the doorstep of a convent. There, Mania soon developed a keen sense of survival by responding chameleon-like to her drastic life changes. Always hungry and scared, for three years she remained in a dark, gloomy convent until it was bombed in 1945. Amid many dead bodies, Mania ran for her life and was transferred to a second convent.

Her father survived and was liberated from Buchenwald on April 11, 1945. He went back to Poland and located the convent Mania was in. The nuns refused to give Mania to a Jew without demanding an impossible ransom of 5000 zlotys. Desperate, he begged the money from an aide agency, possibly the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Mania at first refused to go with him, having been taught that Jews were the Devil and they had killed Christ.

In 1946, father and daughter fled ongoing pogroms in Poland's Russian sector, dodging bullets at border crossings. Reaching Bavaria, they lived with her paternal uncle and aunt, also survivors. Bloated from malnutrition, Mania's lice-infested head was shaved. In late-1948 the four relatives immigrated to Toronto, Canada. Mania, 9, spoke Polish, German, and Yiddish but no English; she was placed in kindergarten.

After years of painstaking and emotionally difficult research in Poland, Marion pieced together the history of her life, and she celebrates her survival with her three incredible children and five grandchildren.