

## Rose's Story

A needle, a single needle, meant for Rose Steinberg the difference between living or dying. Rose, a slave laborer in a French fur factory during the occupation of the Nazis, was allotted five needles per day. The skins were tough and it was not easy to pull the needle though hour after hour, day after day. Many is the time Rose broke two or three or even four needles, but she never broke the fifth. Those who broke five were immediately sent outside to "the wagon" never to return. Rose's life was full of such escapes.

Rose Steinberg was born in 1917 in Pinsk, Poland to Michel and Tauba Steinberg. After five years in Pinsk, the family moved to Warsaw, where her father was a furrier. Rose attended a school for the deaf in Warsaw, but the Steinbergs were not happy with the quality of education they offered. Through a Russian doctor and friend of Michel's, he was led to Dr. Felix Reich, director of the Israelite Institute for the Deaf in Berlin and requested enrollment for his daughter. Rose worried at first that it was too far from home but rode the train with her father to see for herself. "I started to fall in love with the school when I saw big dolls in one of the classes," she said. Rose stayed at the school until she graduated in 1932, when she turned 15. Berlin seemed like home to her, so after graduation she returned, living in a home for girls, and entered a private high school to learn French. In 1933, as the Nazis began restricting the Jews, Michel Steinberg decided it was time for Rose to rejoin the family in Warsaw.

In 1935, as life for Jews became increasingly difficult, Michel and Tauba decided the best plan was to leave Poland, for Paris. Michel was first, taking with him several sewing machines to start a new fur business, and hoping later to get visas for the rest of the family to join him. Tauba was the next to leave, boarding a boat in the Polish port city of Gdansk, which took her through the Baltic Sea to the North Sea, and eventually to Paris and reunited with Michel. Rose and her two sisters, Clara and Sara, stayed behind to sell their house and furniture and for two more years lived with a kindly family while Michel managed to send them money to live on until it became possible for them to leave Poland. Meanwhile, things were escalating in Warsaw and after careful planning, the three sisters left by train for Brussels where their father had arranged a rendezvous with a famous Belgian movie actor who was a friend of his. On a stop-over in Berlin, Rose had a chance to look up Max Feld, an old friend from school, for whom she had a great fondness. Once arriving in Brussels, more planning was required so they stayed for ten days posing as tourists, and going to the World's Fair. But their real agenda was to purchase Belgian papers in order to secure safe passage. At the end of ten days, their Belgian benefactor drove Rose and her sisters in his "big beautiful car" (as Rose describes it) to Paris. However, their trip was not without incident at the German/Belgian border. They were ordered not to speak a word of Polish and even though their benefactor was recognized as a famous actor, the three girls were ordered to get out of the car and remove their clothing for inspection. Suffering only humiliation, they arrived safely in Paris later that evening and were all once again reunited.



Rose continued to corresponded with Max after their short visit in Berlin and by the end of 1937, learned that the Felds were leaving Germany and heading for South America, but would stop in Paris on the way. In these times things happened quickly since one really didn't know what the next day would bring, so this stop-over resulted in an engagement between the two lovers. The Feld family wanted to take Rose with them to South America but the Steinbergs wanted them to stay in Paris, which they did. But, the Nazis were growing stronger and bolder and in 1939 occupied Paris. In the middle of a bombing attack Max and Rose were married. Three months later Rose realized she was pregnant and considered an abortion as the whole world seemed crazy to her. But Max convinced her otherwise. So amid all this chaos, on December 22, 1940, baby Esther Feld was born.

The Germans entered Paris and life changed quickly for the French people and especially the Jews who were forced to wear a yellow star on their clothes and live in a special part of the city. The Gestapo seized Michel Steinberg on the street in Villepigne where he was arrested for not wearing his star when he went out for a pail of milk. His factory was seized and Rose was forced to work as a slave laborer in her father's fur factory while deaf non-Jewish friends of hers and Max's took care of their baby. Soon after her father's arrest, the Gestapo came to Rose's apartment and arrested Max.

They both perished in 1942, Max in Birkenau and Michel elsewhere.

When it came time for Rose to renew her passport, she reported to the Immigration office. In spite of her short stature and her heart pounding in her chest, she stood her tallest and spoke with authority that she was deaf, Jewish, working hard for the Germans and wanted her passport back! They detained Rose for 24 hours without food or sleep until the proper Gestapo authority arrived to interrogate her. Upon his arrival, she held her head high, threw her keys to the floor and demanded to know why she was being detained. He must have been impressed by her demeanor and released her.

Friends urged Rose to hide since the Gestapo was actively arresting Jews daily. One day as Rose and her mother were walking to the factory, a French policeman staring at them, secretly signaled with his baton for them not to enter the factory. They went back to their apartment, gave Esther to a French family for safe-keeping and fled to the farmhouse of another friend where they lived in the basement until the war's end.

After many months of living in a dark, crowded basement, apart from everything familiar, the war was over. They slowly made their way back to Paris by horse and wagon and returned to find their home completely ravaged; everything was either stolen or broken, right down to bare walls. But their neighbors were so ecstatic to have them back safely that they provided necessities to stay in their home. Mourning the deaths of Max and Michel, they began to make plans to leave Europe for Venezuela.

In 1947, Rose, Tauba, Esther, and Sara were ready to leave. For many months, every day brought a new barrier to their departure. Changed destinations, canceled tickets, lots of waiting, broken promises, and a constant string of disappointments. Finally, they boarded a small freighter that they thought would take them to New York. Eighteen days later they arrived in Galveston, Texas, a surprise for everyone. Max's brother, Alfred, took a train from New York to pick up the family, but upon his arrival was arrested and jailed. After a police investigation they were all released and headed to New York with three month visas.



Three months passed in the blink of an eye. Rose was reunited with several Berliners from the Israelite Institute for the Deaf. Rose was astounded to find old friends who had survived and were now here together; it didn't seem real. But Venezuela beckoned, where they lived until 1950, when Rose and Esther made their way back to New York City on a visitor's visa which allowed her to stay in the US for another three months. While in New York, Rose met Ted Rosman, who offered to marry her so she could stay in America. In 1952 Rose became an American citizen.

Ten year later, Esther married and settled in Los Angeles. No more separations for Rose! She followed her to California in 1963. In 1979, Rose and Ted divorced, but they remained good friends until his recent death. Rose joined Temple Beth Solomon where she won the hearts of its entire membership with her strength, stamina and generous heart. She devoted much of her time working with the deaf-blind community in Los Angeles and currently resides in Carlsbad where, at age 84, she can be closer to her daughter.