One Woman's Incredible Story of Surviving the Holocaust

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Toby Eisenstein knew fear far younger than any child should have to.

The now 85-year-old Brighton Beach resident was born in 1933, the same year that Hitler came to power.

“I remember my mom telling me on Sunday not to play in front of the house,” Eisentein said. “Because Poles and Ukrainians are very orthodox, they go to church every Sunday. Unfortunately the preachers preach hate for the Jews.”

Hatred for Jews was the central theme for Hitler's reign of terror. Toby recalls how her family was targeted when German's took over in 1941.

“Life ended. You don't have rights. You're not a citizen. You don't own a thing. Everything is ours. Everybody has to go to work. Life ended that particular day when the Germans walked in and gave us orders.”

Jews in her town were forced to board trains to Lvov, the Germans said they would be "resettled" in the ghettos of the big city.

“My father comes home, tells my mom the news, and tells her, I don't believe them,” Toby said. “That was the answer to my survival. I don't believe them.”

Toby says her family went into hiding for years in a small backyard barn owned by a local woman.

So, we were nine, and two weeks later she comes in and says, there's not a single Jew left in Chodorov. Jews lived in Chodorov for hundreds of years. Everybody was picked up, put on the train, and taken out. We don't know where they went.
They lived off livestock, and day-old bread bought with fabric her father had hidden when the invaders arrived.

“That was the only food we had,” said Toby. “Three months into the hiding, it was pitch dark and there was nothing we could do there, nothing. We couldn't talk. We learned not to talk, not to sneeze, not to laugh, not to cry. But my father was always positive. He said, somebody has to make it. There's no way there's gonna be no survivors. There will be survivors and they will tell the world. Maybe it's us.”

Her father was right. There were only 31 survivors in Chodorov, and Toby's family was among them. After the war ended in 1945, they made it to the safe American Zone and later to the United States where Toby married and became Toby Levy. But the little girl whose family cheated death will never forget the part of her life she spent in hiding.

“I'm 85, I have not figured it out,” Toby said. “I don't understand the hatred. It comes from very early on, such a hatred. I ask every single group to be my witness and they all say yes. I'm asking it here. I need all of you, the world to be witness. We cannot let it go.”