

Sonia Kaplan Biographical Information

Sonia Kaplan (Chelemska) was born in 1929 in Wlodzimierz Volynski, Poland. She was the oldest of four children of Rabbi Boruch Moshe and Gittel Hannah Chelemska, who also owned two businesses. Her father died of cancer in 1936.

When the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, Sonia's town was bombed, destroying her home with all the family's belongings. Then her city was occupied by the Soviets, who confiscated the merchandise in her parents' stores. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in 1941, Sonia's city fell into the hands of the Nazis. Sonia and her family, along with 20,000 other Jews, were put into a ghetto. In the course of three raids in 1942 and 1943, Jews were taken from the ghetto, shot, and buried in pits. Sonia's family was killed during the first *Aktion*, but she was spared. During the final liquidation of the ghetto, Sonia managed to escape to a hiding place with a Polish family that her mother had paid with silver and gold. However, in less than two weeks, the family threw her out. A second Polish family hid her on a farm for three months. Sonia then fled to the forest, where she joined Russian partisans for four months until liberation in July 1944. At fifteen she was the only survivor of an extended family of eighty-six.

After German surrender, Sonia traveled from Poland to Salzburg, Austria, to a displaced persons' camp, where she met Kadish Kaplan, a survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Gross-Rosen, and Buchenwald Concentration Camps. Kadish was born in 1913 in Zembrów, Poland. Sonia and Kadysh married in 1945 and immigrated to the United States in 1948, arriving in Philadelphia. In 1954 the couple bought a chicken farm in Mays Landing, New Jersey. Later Sonia was in the hotel business in Atlantic City.

Kadish Kaplan passed away in 1986. Sonia now lives in Smithville, NJ. She has two daughters, a son, six grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. Sonia published her memoir, *My Endless War: My Shattered Dreams*, in 2004. She is also the subject of the film, *Broken Silence*, produced by her daughter Ellen Kaplan Wetzel.