



Sharing the Art and Story of Holocaust Survivor Esther Nisenthal Krinitz

“MEET ESTHER”: A CLOSE READ RESOURCE

Esther Nisenthal Krinitz, Holocaust survivor, immigrant, businesswoman, and artist, was born on February 8, 1927, in the village of Mniszek in Central Poland.

Before World War II affected her village, Esther had a peaceful childhood. Living in a farming community with both Jewish and Christian neighbors, the years before the war were relatively peaceful. Esther’s father, Hersh, was a horse trader, and Rachel, her mother, raised chickens and geese and sold eggs and poultry at the local marketplace.

Esther attended the village school and had Hebrew lessons with a local rabbi. As a young girl, Esther went to the local dressmaker as an apprentice, starting at age 9. At home she cared for the family chickens and helped her father with the livestock. She had an older brother and played with and cared for her three younger siblings.

When Esther was 12, her once peaceful childhood and calm village were overtaken by German soldiers who occupied her village for three years.

In 1942, when she was 15, the Germans ordered all the Jews to leave their homes and report to a nearby train station. Esther refused to go. Instead she chose to separate from her family, taking her younger sister Mania with her. It would be the last time she saw her family. After being turned away by friends and neighbors too frightened to take the two sisters in, Esther and Mania made their way to another village where they were not known. Pretending to be Polish Catholic farm girls who had been separated from their family, the sisters found work and stayed in the village until liberating Russian troops arrived in 1944.

After the war ended in 1945, Esther reunited with Mania and travelled to Germany, making their way to a Displaced Persons camp. While at the camp, both sisters met the men they would marry. In November 1946, Esther married Max Krinitz in a ceremony conducted in the camp. The following year, pregnant with their first child, Esther joined Max in Belgium, where he had gone to work in the coal mines. After Max contacted a cousin who lived in the United States, she agreed to arrange for sponsorship of his immigration. In June 1949, Esther, Max and their daughter arrived in New York.

Esther raised two daughters, frequently telling them stories of her childhood and war experiences. She went on to open her own clothing store, first in New York and later in Maryland. She continued sharing her stories with her grandchildren.

Esther began her series of fabric pictures in 1977, at the age of 50, with a depiction of her childhood home and her family. Although trained as a dressmaker and highly skilled in needlework, Esther had no training in art and no conception of herself as an artist. Yet, her first embroidered pictures were so well received by her family and friends and so personally satisfying that she would later create another 34 pieces, unveiling a sequential

narrative series of increasing complexity. With the addition of text, Esther's art became an exquisite embroidered testimony to her true story of survival.

In June 1999, exactly 50 years after she left Europe, Esther returned to her village with her immediate family to see what remained. There, she encountered a landscape even more impoverished than the one she had last seen, with few signs of the vitality she recalled. Although the Jews were gone, Esther was able to meet again with some of the friends and neighbors from her childhood.

Immediately following her return from Poland, Esther became seriously ill; she died in 2001 at the age of 74.

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