

# FABRIC OF SURVIVAL

## Images of the Art of Esther Nisenthal Krinitz

Esther Nisenthal Krinitz, along with her sister Mania, were the only members of their family, and among the few Jews in their Polish village, to survive the Holocaust.

In September 1939, as a 12-year-old, Esther watched German soldiers arrive in her village of Mniszek. For the next 3 years, German troops used Jewish slave laborers from Mniszek and the nearby city of



Rachow to build roads and bridges for their Eastern campaign. Once the Nazis moved to implement the "Final Solution" however, the Jews of Rachow and Mniszek were instructed to leave their homes and report to the train station in Krasnik, about 20 miles away.

Esther was by then 15, the second in a family of 5 children and the oldest girl. The night before their departure, Esther decided she would not go with them. On October 15, 1942, her father, Hersh; her mother, Rachel; her older brother, Ruven; and her little sisters, Chana and Leah, set off on the road to Krasnik. It was the last time Esther saw her family.

Esther and her 13-year-old sister, Mania, headed for the house of

Stefan, a Polish farmer who was a friend of her father's, hoping he would take them in and give them work. But after sheltering them for a couple of days, Stefan told them that the rest of the village knew where they were and the Gestapo would soon come looking for them. Esther then decided that they would have to make their way to another village where they were not known. There, they would say that they had come from a part of Poland, where their family, like others in the region, had lost its farm to a German family. With their digging tools in sacks across their shoulders, they would ask for work in harvesting potatoes.

They eventually came to the village of Grabowka, where Esther found work with an old farmer whose wife was ill and bed-ridden. Mania also became a housekeeper for the village's sheriff and his mother. Until 1944, Esther and Mania cooked, cleaned, cared for animals, helped in the fields, went to church, and lived out the daily lives of two Polish farm girls. Once Russian troops arrived and liberated the village, Esther returned to Mniszek. Unable to find the rest of her family, Esther decided to join the Polish Army,



then making its way west to Warsaw and ultimately to Germany, under Marshal Zhukov's command.

After the war ended in 1945, Esther returned to Grabowka to get Mania and in 1946, the two of them returned to Germany, making their way to a Displaced Persons camp in the favored American zone, in the city of Ziegenheim. Esther met Max Krinitz there and, in November 1946, married him 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. While in Belgium, he contacted a cousin who lived in the United States and she agreed to arrange for sponsorship of his immigration. In June 1949, Esther, Max and their daughter arrived in New York.

Fifty years later, in 1999, Esther returned to Poland for the first time, to show her daughters and grandchildren the places they had seen only in her pictures. Two years later, she died.

