

The Rose Temple – Subject Backgrounder: Lucia Weitzman

Born Jewish, Rose Berl's identity was taken from her in 1942, when her parents courageously chose to give away their little girl to a Polish couple in a desperate attempt to save her from the Nazis. Shortly thereafter, Poland's Bochnia ghetto, where they lived, was liquidated and most of its Jews were murdered. Rose's parents did not survive.

Now known as Alicja Swiatek, at age five she discovered she was Jewish when a relative searching for her after the war revealed Rose's true identity. She remained with her adoptive parents, but the revelation reverberated throughout her hometown, where anti-Semitism still thrived.

In her early twenties, distraught about her future in Poland, Alicja discovered American relatives who supported her. This drew the attention of Communist authorities and she was arrested. Released temporarily to the guardianship of her high school headmaster, she fled Poland, tearfully leaving her adoptive parents behind.

She arrived in America in 1962, married a Jewish man, and assumed yet another name, Lucia. She locked away much of her past inside, and focused on family and community. But beneath the veneer of life as a traditional Jewish wife and mother, Lucia harbored a secret and lingering spiritual angst. Years later, deep in mourning following the loss of her husband, long-suppressed emotions rose to the surface and Lucia confronted God at Jerusalem's Western Wall.

Why had God allowed her to be orphaned yet again? Why had she been spared as a child? And what did her experiences reveal about her life's purpose? Unexpectedly, she sensed a comforting response.

Lucia considered brushing the incident aside, but more unexplained experiences followed that seemed to call on her to decipher their messages. She had a choice: Ignore or suppress this uncertain new path her life was taking; or choose to gain greater understanding of its meaning.

Lucia embraced the challenge. At first frightened, she learned to trust her spiritual sensibilities that gave deeper meaning to her experiences while answering larger questions about God's presence during times of evil and suffering. She slowly began to share with her son, Mitchell, her mysterious writings and dreams that were peppered with Biblically inspired symbols and images.

At one point, Mitchell found himself asking: *Who is my mother? Who is Lucia Weitzman?* He was at first wary, concerned about the reaction he thought his mother would encounter by sharing her experiences with the wider world. But as her resolve strengthened, so did his. Together, they set out to tell her story.

The result is the *Rose Temple*, a true tale of one woman's transformation from child Holocaust survivor to spiritual messenger. In an age of escalating hatred and violence, it is a testament to the power of choice that lies within each of us, to transform and attempt to heal both ourselves and the troubled world in which we live.

