



My Mother, Miriam Chaskelewicz

As I mentioned already, I was not able to hear, from my mother's own mouth, about the terrible tragedy that befell her and her family, about the tribulations she went through in six years of war, about the escape, about her little daughter who perished, about the anxious moments of meeting the German soldiers, about living in the cellars of the peasants' homes where she was employed [and] about her husband who did not survive.

My mother, like hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors, chose silence.

Yet, she would speak about her family's achievements in Lututów before the War, in which she took pride - but she recounted [only] this, adding nothing further.

Through the details which she gave to Natan, my brother, we learned a little about her parents. She gave additional details, also sparingly, to my youngest son Zohar, when he spoke to her in preparation for the roots project that he was asked to submit as a primary school pupil - and I shall touch upon that subsequently.

My mother Miriam was born in Lututów in 1914, to her parents Jona (Taube) Halperin *née* Goldhersz and Mojsze Halperin.

Jona and Mojsze Halperin were wed before the War and they had ten children. Opulence was evident in every corner. The family engaged in commerce. They were the proprietors of a large emporium. They dealt in the export and sale of leather and fur wares and also in the marketing of fowl and eggs.

Their solid financial situation enabled them to assist their neighbours, regardless of their origin and religion, in providing funds or loans. They helped the Jews and their Polish neighbours also. Therefore both members of the Jewish community and their Polish neighbours greatly appreciated them.

The Halperin family went about dressed in traditional garb. The men wore black coats and, on holidays, they wore a special hat with a visor, which testified to their belonging to a particular religious group.

My mother received an education and completed her studies at the *gymnazjum*, which included learning languages - German, Polish and a little French. She led an active social life and was a member of the Betar youth movement. In preparation for the holidays, the members would go on a fundraising campaign amongst the town's Jews. The donations were intended for the benefit of Zionist activity in the Land of Israel. My mother, whose external appearance resembled that of a Polish girl, also managed to reach out to Christian homes, including that of the local priest. She proudly told me how she persuaded them to make a donation, which they did generously - without even knowing what the money was for.

The list of donors was published in local newspapers, which were printed in Yiddish, and published in cities and towns that had Jewish communities. Mr Monic presented to me with the list of donors from Krzepice. In it, I found the names of my grandfather Mojsze Chaskelewicz and my father Majer Chaskelewicz.

When my mother reached adulthood, she married and had a daughter. As mentioned already, due to her silence, I was unable to obtain information from her regarding her husband and daughter and I also heard no details, from her, about the day the Germans invaded Lututów. Due to its proximity to Krzepice, I assume that the conduct of the German Army in the two towns was similar.

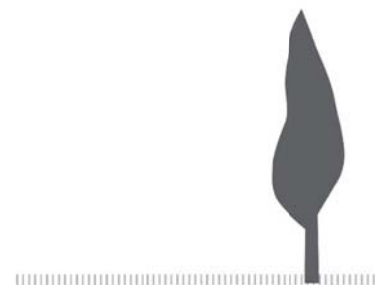
Until 1940, the Germans allowed the Jews to continue living in their homes. In 1940, a turning point occurred. In that year, the Germans imposed severe restrictions on the Jews. Entire families were forcibly expelled from their houses, which were confiscated for the benefit of the German Army, to be used as headquarters and as living quarters for the officers and soldiers.

That same year, Jews began to be evacuated to the ghettos. My mother was transferred to the Sokołów Podlaski ghetto and remained there until 1942 - the year the ghetto was dismantled and its residents sent to the Treblinka concentration camp. On the way to Treblinka, my mother attempted to escape. A German soldier, noticing her, aimed his rifle at her and fired. Being convinced that he had killed her, he left her in the field. Luckily, she was [only] wounded and a Christian doctor, who was passing by, treated her. After recovering, she wandered from place to place under a false identity. She lived in peasants' houses and, sometimes, in the woods - in the open air.

What was the fate of her daughter, and what happened to her husband? No one knows. The assumption is that, for some time, my mother Miriam clasped her daughter to her bosom and tried to save her. We do not know when the little daughter died or whether she was murdered by a German trooper.

Over the course of her wanderings, my mother was recaptured. She was transferred to a camp called Kolce [Dörnhau], where all the Jews who had tried to escape and had been captured were rounded up. Most of the camp's inmates were taken to work in Germany, on farms and in factories. The elderly and the children were sent to Treblinka. My mother worked alternately in factories and on farms - arduous, backbreaking labour in terrible conditions.

In February 1945, she was liberated by the Russian Army. She sensed relief, accompanied by grief and pain over the loss of her daughter and the lack of knowledge regarding the fate of her relatives. She hoped that she would be able to meet them. She embarked on a journey back to her hometown, not imagining that reality would be too hard and painful to bear - of all her extended family, only her brother Juda (Lajb), his wife Alte, and her son Zvi (Hersz) survived.



Extracts from Reparations Claims Forms for Jehuda & Hersz Halperin

Jehuda Halperin, born on February 10, 1906 in Lutotow, Poland, presently residing in Nandlstadt/Freising nr. 15, was interned as follows:

Open forced labor	1940 - Apr 1941
Ghetto Chenstochau	Apr 41-Oct 1942
Forced labor camp Hasak- Chenstochau	Oct 42-Jan 17, 1945

Hersz Halperin, born on July 2, 1933 in Lutotow, Poland, presently residing in Nandlstadt, Freising Cty/Obb. nr.15, was deprived of his freedom as follows:

Ghetto Chenstochau	Apr 41-Oct 1942
Illegal hiding in Razin, Poland	Oct 42-Jan 19, 1945

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INTERNATION REFUGEE ORGANIZATION
AREA VII HQ MUNICH
LEGAL DEPARTMENT/BRANCH STARNBERG

Today on February 1, 1950 appeared before me Dr. W. Komarynskyj, Area Legal Officer, IRO, Area 7,

Mr Jehuda Halperin, born on February 10, 1906 in Lututow, Poland identified thru his identity card Nr. B 583 216 as guardian and father of his not of age son Hersch Halpern born on July 2, 1933 in Lututow, Poland,

and as witnesses:

Mr. Alja Korn, born on March 2, 1910 in Lututow, Poland, identified thru identity card Nr. B 532 850.

to give the following sworn statements:

First, Mr. Jehuda Halperin declared that:

To authenticate the fact of the imprisonment of my son Hersch Halpern, for purposes of reparations I declare under oath: My son Hersch Halpern was placed with me into Ghetto Tschenstochau in April 1941, where he remained until October 1942, at which time he was taken out of the Ghetto by my wife and placed into hiding until liberation.

Whereupon the witness declared:

1. Alja Korn:

I know the family Halpern from before the war. I was interned with Jehuda Halpern and his son Hersch Halpern in the Ghetto Tschenstochau from April 1941 until October 1942. I know that the child Hersch Halpern was hidden after October 1942 because I picked him up from peasants in the village of Razin on January 19, 1945 after liberation.

When the consequences of false statements were brought to the attention of all participants in this statement, they all declared under oath that all their statements were made to the best of their knowledge and conscience.

(Followed by various signatures, legalisations, etc.)