

Miriam Chen, the Late Marishka

23.2.1931-7.8.2010

Transcript of testimony given on 11.12.1997 by interviewer Esther Carfiol
(Survivor of the Shoah)

I was born in Poland in the town of Wieruszow. When I was about one and a half years old we moved to Częstochowa. My father's name was Menachem Eliash and my mother's name was Hela (nee Altman). When I was a year and a half my father passed away and therefore, Mom and I returned to Czestochowa, Mom's hometown. Mother remarried Yitzchak-Izak Kielczygłowski (ben Catriel) and two daughters (my sisters) were subsequently born. I knew all these years that he was my stepfather, but we had a good relationship. Cesha was born in 1935 in May or June, and Renia was born during the war in September 1940. Grandma, our mother's mother, lived in the house with us. Mother was the youngest daughter in a family of 8 children, three boys and five girls. Grandmother died (a natural death) during the war. Father was a manager in a factory that belonged to my uncle, a brother of my mother. It was a bicycle and ice dispenser factory. The factory was called "Altman". At home Polish was spoken, but the parents also spoke German.

My father's (stepfather's) family came from Danzig and therefore spoke German. In her youth, my mother spent a period in Germany with her brothers who lived in Berlin. The household was average. We were not wealthy, but were financially secure. My mother dressed nicely. We had a live-in maid. Everything was plentiful, and I lacked nothing. In the summer we always went for a two-month vacation in the country. My mother loved to sing very much and was a beautiful singer. It was a happy household. One of mother's sisters lived in Belgium and the other three sisters in Czestochowa. They had a good relationship. There were frequent family visits and happiness prevailed. Father played the violin, and we had a non-Jewish neighbor in the upstairs apartment above, a non-Jew who also would also play along with us from time to time. It was nice. Mother grew flowers. We lived on the ground floor, so the garden was full of flowers, including a large lilac bush. I had a good time

at home. It was a building with many apartments. We lived in a rental with a large inner courtyard for the entire building. Most of the tenants were Jews. In our building from the central courtyard there was a passageway to another yard and at the end of the second yard was a cinema. Many people would pass through the yard to the cinema and back. It was interesting. Behind the cinema was a large garden with fruit trees. The garden belonged to the landlord. I would hang out there a great deal.

I remember that occasionally a laundress would come. They would do a big load of laundry and I, as a child, would join in with the maid and the laundress and then go up with them to the attic where we would hang the laundry. I had a nice and interesting time. My mother did a lot of handicrafts: I learned from her as a child crocheting and embroidering. We would visit our grandfather, the father of my stepfather, who was a religious Jew with a beard. We would go on Shabbat, where we partook of traditional food and would sing in the afternoon. I also remember that on Simchat Torah I would go with my grandfather to the synagogue, where he would put me on his shoulders and I would hold a flag and an apple. Our household was not religious and only on Jewish festivals did we attend synagogue. Our kitchen was kosher to accommodate our Orthodox grandmother who wore a sheitel (wig). Pesach, I don't recall celebrating Pesach at home. I believe we went to Grandpa because we were on very good terms with them. As a matter of fact, I have a cousin living in Los Angeles whose mother was a first-cousin to my stepfather and we continue to keep in touch with each other. Life was good there and we had several items of silver in the apartment. I recall that when the war started, my family slowly started to sell off any valuables.

There were connections with non-Jewish children, especially with the upstairs neighbors. They had a daughter older than me but we were very good friends. We made all kinds of handicrafts together and we had a good relationship.

I went to school only for two years and I didn't have the opportunity to form relationships with other children. I cannot tell you if the school I attended was a Jewish school or a general community school. I do know that it was named after a Polish writer: Orzhashkova. I do not I think I would have been able to tell the difference between Jewish and Christian

children. Even though Czestochowa was a very anti-Semitic city (because of the sanctity of the city for Catholics), I did not encounter this phenomenon of anti-Semitism. Occasionally there were demonstrations by Poles to boycott Jewish shops, etc. They had a song they used to sing in rhyme. We lived not far from the holy area "Jasna Gora". The pilgrims to this holy shrine would approach the church while crossing three avenues all the way on their knees! A Catholic Christian city. Maybe because I was very little, I did not know what to make of all this. Our maid was a Christian.

A few days before the war broke out, we left the city of Czestochowa and traveled to a town whose name I cannot remember. There we had a family relative who said that in a small town, everything would be fine and that after everything passes, we could return home. We traveled with the whole family and also with a cousin of my mother's eldest sister, who himself was already almost father's age. They had gotten married a short time before and they came with us. When we were in the town, there was bombing. We slept all day and night (maybe even more) in the orchard and we heard bombs. We were a few days before the war and then the Germans came in and everything calmed down relatively. Our relative in the town had a central department store. At some point, we wanted to go back home to Czestochowa but there was fear. Father and the cousin decided that they would travel and see what the situation was in the city of Czestochowa. I don't know if they drove or walked. They left and for a very long time they didn't come back and we didn't hear anything from them. At some point, Mom organized a cart of peasants with ladders on the sides. We loaded everything we had and all of us climbed on board and that's how we returned to the city of Czestochowa. On the way, there were not too many problems except for the fact that I lost a shoe... I cried a lot because the shoe was beautiful. We got back home. Everything was in place and then it became clear (perhaps my mother found out first, but I was not told everything) that on the way from the town to Czestochowa my father and the cousin, were stopped by the Germans on the grounds that they were deserters from the Polish army (apparently because of their age). They were put in a detention camp and there they were for a few months. So Mother started selling things from home, probably to arrange for money to release them. Eventually, they both returned.

In the city of Czestochowa, life was no longer the same. They would catch Jews with beards and humiliate them. I once saw how they beat someone in the street. People were afraid to leave the house. We no longer went to visit the family on Shabbat.

Later they made a ghetto - one day they said that all Jews from the age of 12 had to wear a ribbon with a light blue "Star of David" and they set up an area that would be a ghetto. Our house was the first house in the ghetto, "Alia" (Shadra) 12, but the ghetto was not closed, and there were Polish policemen and maybe even Jews, standing at the entrances. It was possible to enter and leave relatively freely. I think it was in the winter of 1939, the end of the year. Inside the territory of the ghetto was a church that continued to be active all the time. People who had to get out of the ghetto or were brave enough to go out – went out. I, for example, went out. They would send me on all kinds of errands, deliver a package, return something, etc.

During the initial ghetto period, for those who were aware and able, we organized in groups and studied at each other's homes every day. (It was forbidden). The funny thing is that we continued to study Polish and Polish history as if everything was in order and normal. In the summer, inside the ghetto there was a big garden. I remember all the children would gather in the garden and we studied there in the garden. I recall that I would busy myself preparing homework and this continued until the liquidation of the ghetto.

Father no longer worked. The factory was confiscated, and was lost to the Germans. We lived in great austerity. Father worked in the maintenance of the tennis courts in the city, which immediately upon the onset of the occupation passed into the hands of the Germans. There was food at home, but it was simple and reduced in quantity. We weren't hungry but there were a lot of things that weren't there. There was no sugar, there was no coffee, there was no cocoa. There was bread but there was nothing to heat the apartment even at 20 degrees below zero. Every room had a huge, built-in, porcelain-coated heater, but there was no way to operate it. We lived in one room where we attached to the heater a tiny oven on which they also cooked. And of course there was no longer a maid.

At the beginning of the war we still had contact with family members from the Polish city of Lodz, but later - the contact was lost. My biological father, Eliash, had two sisters in Lodz. I loved them. I would visit them and sometimes I even traveled there alone. My parents would put me on the train, hand me over to the conductor and at my final destination, the family was waiting for me. My mother had a very good relationship with family. When the war broke out I had two aunts, with one of whom I remember having a good relationship. This aunt had two daughters, one a little older than me and the other already an adult. I don't remember their names! The younger girl arrived during the war from Lodz to Czestochowa and she said the whole family wanted to move. She brought a lot of clothes and the whole family was scheduled to come but they never came and I know nothing about them. I don't remember their last name even though I used to spend a lot of time with them. Not a trace of them remains, as if they never even existed!

We remained in the ghetto until Yom Kippur 1942. Life became less good and less bearable every time. Curfew, restrictions, desperation, no money and no food. There were poor people on the streets (more than usual). Jews were brought from all the surrounding towns Jews to the Czestochowa ghetto. There was nowhere to live. It was crowded. On Yom Kippur my father went to the synagogue. I sat with my mother in the synagogue. Grandmother was no longer there, after having passed away previously. A rumor spread that at night the Nazis would come and take everyone out for an "aktzia" (roundup of Jews from conquered territory for transport to death camps). I didn't know anything. All the time there were whispers and I was a girl, and I didn't understand anything. When I would enter a room, they would stop talking and this was their behavior. In the afternoon my father returned from the synagogue, he talked with my mother and ate something. I remember this well. They called me and told me, "Listen, we are worried because tomorrow there will be an "aktzia" here and the children are not in a good situation. We want you to leave the house." And I said, "Why should I go? Why shouldn't my little sister be the one to leave?" So they told me that she was too small. "You're the only one who can go. You have already had the experience of leaving the ghetto and we want you to go to this and that place." They gave me an address and told me to go. I really didn't want to go, but at some point one of our neighbors came downstairs. I remember her

name was Mrs. Reich. She survived the Shoah. I met her in Israel after the war. She was a very smart woman, and she said I should go. At least that's how I understood things . She wasn't pretty (funny, she had a very handsome husband; even I realized he was handsome). She had a son my age whose name was Dudi, and she said, "I sent my husband and Dudi to some place." And she said to me: "Will you remember?" and I answered, "Sure. They are in this place and that." She gave me the address and convinced me that if Mom and Dad say it's okay, then it's okay. In short - I went.

The weather was good, summer-like. I reached the woman to whom they sent me at a destination almost outside the city. A house with a garden. I stayed there. She said I could stay. I slept, and in the morning I got up. She had wooden shutters in the house with heart-shaped openings and a beautiful garden. I ate breakfast (I think). Towards noon she told me that they (the Nazis) were looking for Jews and they would also kill anyone hiding them and she said: "You have to go. I can't keep you here anymore." I got up and left. I don't think I begged for mercy or anything like that. I went to the place where Mrs. Reich said I should go. I came there, and they told me: "That's right, they (Mrs. Reich's husband and son) were here." These were really country peasants, not like the woman from whose place I had just come. "We thought it wasn't safe to keep them here so we sent them to the village. You can sleep here." It was already evening. "But tomorrow morning you have to leave". I stayed there, slept outside in a coop or something, with rabbits. In the morning they gave me food and also something to eat on the way and I decided that I would return to the ghetto in Czestochowa. What could I do? I was but an 11-year-old girl. I arrived. Our house number 12 was the first house in the ghetto. After this was house number 14, a corner house and that was the end of the first "Aliya" (street). But Jews lived in number 14 even though it was outside the ghetto. These were what the Germans called "the useful Jews", the best tailor in town, the best bootmaker in the city etc. Some professionals. It was on the corner, on the other side. It was a very wide road, with train tracks running below train and on the other side stood crowds of Poles who would peer into the ghetto. There was no wall. There was an avenue in the middle of the street with big trees and benches, and on both sides - houses. The train was on the left. Our house when you came out of the ghetto was on the

right side. They led people and a lot of Gestapo soldiers and people in black uniforms and the captive people walked in the middle, on the boulevard, and there were shouting and beating all the time and beatings and the Poles stood and looked and talked. They didn't see that they were shaken. And I'm standing too. I leaned on the railing near the railroad tracks and I considered the situation and decided that I could not go back to the ghetto and enter because there were a lot of Gestapo there. I turned left and left the city... and since then, I wandered. I don't know how long I was alone. I do know that when I got to the family I was with and that they were finally ready to shelter me, then it was already really winter with snow so I guess I was wandering for something like two months. I wandered through villages. I don't know where. I don't remember the names. I remember the details. I remember I would say that my parents were taken to work in Germany because a lot of Poles were taken and that's why I ran away. I don't think anyone believed me. I didn't look Jewish, but I wasn't dressed right. I wore a pink dress that I remember it as if it were today, pink like the heather flower. The dress had little blue flowers sewn on the front and it had a lot of pleats. I wore over it a blue coat and I had long braids with wide blue silk ribbons. I do not believe that they believed me. There were those who sheltered me for a night or two and there were those who immediately kicked me out and told me that I was Jewish. There were places I even worked. There was one place where I slept for several days and I even slept inside the house but there were days when I couldn't get at all to any home and I would sleep right outside and there was nothing to eat either. There were a few more (in winter) berries and I would eat roots. You could find potatoes and sometimes carrots. I was in terrible condition. I was hungry but I never thought, "I will sit here and I will die". I had no feeling of such a thought. I thought that someone would take me in after all. I learned to pray Christian prayers. I would listen and then repeat what I had heard. To cross myself I already knew from my family's live-in maid and that's how I would knock on the door. I was once with a family who kept me for a few days and I would go out to herd geese and another time I came to a family - wife and son- and she said: "We won't bother her." She also must have known that I was Jewish and she let me do household chores. I slept at their home on a mattress on the floor and the night I was there her son, a young man in his twenties, tried to rape

me. He shut my mouth and told me, "Don't be afraid, nothing will happen" and I was terribly afraid and just said, " No", and I didn't shout. The old woman heard, came and drove him away. The next day she told me to leave because she wouldn't be able to guarantee my safety. And I went and it was already really, really cold. What I remember is that I was cold and wet all the time and I went on and again I slept outside and slept in the field and one day I arrived in a town and I was so cold. I entered the town and to the left was an inn. It was actually an inn with a tavern and I went inside and there were Germans sitting inside and I asked, "Can I get something to eat?" and the owner of the establishment said to me: "Come in." and he let me into the kitchen. He immediately knew I was a Jewess. He questioned me and I told him everything that had happened to me and he said, "I can't keep you here because Germans always come." But he had food - some sausages!!! And he let me drink vodka for the first time in my life because he said, "You are completely frozen." But he said, "We will find a place for you. We will hide you. Stay with us." As far as I know, he only had sons and that's what fascinated him so much. They were older than me, in their twenties. I was there until night-time. At night, he took me and accompanied me inside the village. I do not know if it was a big village. He led me to some place and told me it was his sister and he told me she was married. Apparently they were Communists. Her husband had tuberculosis and they had no children. They lived in a rather isolated place on the edge of the village and I don't exactly know. All the information is not clear to me; maybe they told me? He was once the librarian of the village and when the Germans came in they didn't allow there to be libraries for the Poles either, not just for the Jews, so the whole library was in his house and since he was sick with tuberculosis, almost no one went in there and I stayed with them. They made me a hiding place inside a large closet and throughout the day I sat there in hiding. In the evening, they would take me out and me I sat there and celebrated by reading everything I could starting with all the Polish writers and of course others as well. Lots of novels, Dostoyevsky, everything.

My hair was cut. My hair had a huge amount of lice. For the first time in my life I had short hair. I ate every day until I was full. I slept inside a big blanket. The innkeeper took care of his sister anyway and would come

and bring food and would stay and talk to me. I wasn't even scared. I knew there was no real danger and I was there for a long time. I was there for at least two months. They were very good to me. I was treated very nicely. I was loved and at some stage I started asking them if they knew what had happened. They said there were more Jews in Czestochowa and I made up my mind to return to see my family. It was clear to me that they had stayed. It was so clear to me, I had no doubt about it since they were young. I didn't really know what was going on. And then I remember they dressed me in new clothes and a white knitted handkerchief which they tied around my waist. I left in the morning. I traveled in a buggy. I'm trying to think how far was it from the city of Czestochowa. How far had I gone? Or perhaps I went in circles. I have no idea. I traveled for a few hours, and we arrived in Czestochowa in the very early afternoon. There was snow. It was probably the middle of winter, January-February, I didn't know exactly, and I arrived. What seems so strange to me, how I thought and considered - to this day I do not understand. I decided to go to the tennis court because that's where my dad worked so maybe he was still working there. I came to the tennis court. Jews were working there, but he was not among them, but they told me they would take me back to the ghetto. No real problem, because at the entrance they did not keep track of numbers so much. I returned with them to the ghetto that evening and of course there was no one at home. All the family had "gone away". They perished in Treblinka and there were even people who managed to escape and told me that Father and Mother went and actually they wanted to transfer Father. In Treblinka, there was a large group from Czestochowa that worked after the big "aktzia" in whatever work was done in Treblinka, but Father held his little daughter in his arms and he walked together with her and with Mother.

So they told me to go to some committee that sort of ran things. They told me to go to a meeting and from there they sent me to some address and they told me that is where I would live. There were three small streets: one street only boys lived in, a street where only girls lived and one street in the middle where families lived. In particular, there were families of all the Jewish policemen that remained. There were some families of doctors. There were families who had hidden and probably had emerged from hiding. So they sent me to some place where only

young girls lived and then it started to be very difficult for me because I was walking around and I didn't know what to do with myself and I didn't have anything to eat either. There was a "soup kitchen" (for free food) so I would go eat there and sometimes there were they would put me to work and at some point they took me to work in sorting. The entire large ghetto was still closed. Poles did not enter into the homes of the Jews they had evacuated. Work groups would go from apartment to apartment and sort the belongings that remained which would then be packed and sent to Germany, apparently, and so the apartments were slowly being evacuated. I worked at this for a while and one time in one of the places I worked I even found a photograph of one of my cousins from her wedding.

Then I got typhus and got scabies - something that got under the skin and all my hair fell out and I was in very bad shape. There wasn't much medical service. I connected with some girl from Warsaw who was a redhead, maybe a year older than me. A "daredevil". She was able to get everything. We were very good friends and she took care of me. I don't remember her name. It's terrible that I don't remember so much and it bothers me so much and I have the feeling that I don't even know who I am. And my daughter would say to me, "Mom, are you sure you were born on this date and that... you don't seem at all to fit the profile of one born under the Zodiac of Pisces." And that's why I really tried to get my birth certificate. We were good friends, we lived in huts....it was such a bad situation in the ghetto. People lay in the streets and died. I don't understand how I too did not die! It is really unexplainable. There was nothing. What did happen was that I was always looking for the possibility of going to work somewhere. And it was really very hard and I don't understand how I managed to survive. You want me to tell you about the small ghetto where the Gestapo commander had a Jewish lover? His name was Degenhart. He was the commander of the Gestapo in Czestochowa and her name was Helenka. A very very beautiful girl and they said he loved her desperately and he would come to visit and the whole ghetto knew and I knew too. I heard stories. Anyway, I survived. It's amazing to me. Really, I had it so bad. Each time I was sick with something else. Here I had an infection and pus oozed out from my ears I contacted typhus twice during my time in the ghetto, but I stayed alive. At some point, we were picked up. Inside the ghetto, I found family, the

cousin who was with us at the beginning when we ran away from Czestochowa, but in truth we really didn't have much connection with each other. Everyone took care of their own welfare and later it turned out to me that he was in the Underground that was apparently there in the ghetto. One day they gathered all the people and apparently wanted to send them to the death camp in an "aktzia". I do not remember precisely because I wasn't in the first rows and in general when there was an "aktzia" I was always at the end because people didn't like being in the same line with me so much because when the line stops then it's not good for all the people in the line and I was very small, very thin, very neglected, without hair, so they stood there for many hours. At some stage someone from the Jews started shooting and some German was wounded, I think, or maybe even killed. And one more thing, I only know that at the end of all this commotion they took every tenth or twentieth person and simply shot and killed them. I don't exactly recall. They also shot my cousin. I literally saw the incident before my eyes. His name was Shmulik Vygotsky and he was a young man, nice and handsome.

And after that, after this uprising, they decided to take us to work in a Hasag munitions factory near Czestochowa. When I started working there, a little earlier, I would go to work in the morning and then return to the ghetto. At work they gave us a hot meal. I worked in the vegetable garden and took care of the geese. Everything was in the confines of the factory. In June 1943, we went to work in the morning and in the evening when we were about to return, they told us: "You are not going back." We stayed there in the factory. We lived above one of the halls. There was an iron staircase on the outside, leading to the hall where the women slept. In the evening there were girls singing, and there were straw mattresses on the floor. There was a girl in the group both in the ghetto and in Hasag who studied with me at the (improvised) school in the ghetto. Her name was Sabinka and she was with her mother. During the "big aktzia" they managed to hide, but since then both had gone out of their minds. They weren't... I was neglected but they didn't know... one night a German soldier came looking for something, maybe he was a sexual deviant because when he came to me, I don't know why, I had no hair and I said I was a boy after all. He went and took Sabinka and her

mother with him. We never saw them again. Afterwards they said he was a pervert.

After a not long period, they built us barracks. There were about 1,000 women in each hut. Three-level bunks on both sides. In the middle - an oven. Those who lived at the extreme ends of the shack were the luckiest. I got a low level, which was not as good. Mrs. Cohen "lived" in the corner. She lives here in Israel, but I have to say this: she was the wife of a police officer, but she had a child, a baby named Dudi. She hid during the "aktzia" on the roof behind a chimney. She was in good condition but I heard that she came back to herself (?). The baby was one or two years old. He was the "gem" of the hut. He was very cute. They would ask him, "Dudi, do you love me?", "Yes". "How much do you love me?", "Like potato soup."

The SS commander was Stieglitz. He was a dwarf about 1.40 meters tall and had a dog about his height. He knew that Dudi was there. He would come, look at the child, pinch him, laugh and leave food. This is one of the wonders of the war. I had a girlfriend my age. I have a girlfriend, she was still sleeping, who was there in the Hasag with her older sister. We were friends like girls can be. They lived above me so I initially worked at the factory. They would bring used munitions, especially 20-30 mm. ammunition from airplanes and there were huge machines that would wash the ammunition and then they would clean and paint and once again fill the casings with gunpowder. We worked there. They would call this place "The Laundry", and in German, "Washrai". We would sit there and wooden crates would be delivered with tin inside. We would move the crates and take out the casings that were inside cardboard packages. I didn't understand what it was. But first we had to bring the crates. Sometimes we would build hiding places from several crates, and tell ourselves stories. There were also Polish women who sometimes brought books and sometimes there was one book that would circulate for reading among the girls. I was a big "narrator" already at that time and so was Rania, the friend. At some point there were "aktzias". It wasn't heaven but what was happy and good was that we weren't dirty. We bathed in the water and the "Washrai" detergents. It wasn't a terrible camp. It was a labor camp, but there were "aktzias". The head of the Gestapo (perhaps his name was Bernstetter) had a scar on his face and the dwarf and they organized "aktzias" and sent people maybe to

Treblinka, maybe to Auschwitz, to all kinds of places and every time there were people who would arrive from other camps. There was some factory not far away for the manufacture of gunpowder. A shipment would arrive from there and the forced laborers were all yellow-orange in color from the materials they were working with to make the gunpowder. I don't know how much longer they could live in such a situation. And we worked. The selections were the terrible thing because, as I said, I was always pushed to the end, to the last line. I wasn't pushed, I wasn't angry either because I understood, yes. That's how I was treated very nicely. They would ask if I had eaten and if they had arranged something to eat in the shack they always gave something to me to partake of to eat. Then whenever I was with my girlfriend, her sister would take care of me all the time almost like her sister.

But, at some point, there were probably fewer people so they took me to work inside the factory in shifts. It was very difficult. I was 12 years old at the time and I worked day and night shifts near machines that worked quickly and you had to constantly be on guard, otherwise something could happen. There was a machine that was spinning fast and on top of the machine the ammunition casing had to be put on it and inside there was a brush which would clean the rust. It was really hard work and required three shifts and I worked all shifts, both day and night, like the adults.

There were two German women who were in charge of the work room and they were terrible. They were very tall and thin. For one we gave the nickname "parsley" and to the other "carrot". In Polish it sounds better. They were thin and very bad, shouting and beating. It was very difficult for me but we would get food. The food was nothing to write home about, but it was passable. The fact is that we were able to live and survive. Little by little they saw that the young girls had friends and loves. I mean, life seemed to go on and on. This girl had a friend and this one had a boyfriend and they would try to look pretty and good and even once or twice there was one dancing, but it was in the ghetto (?...)

This was life in the labor camp. Except for the fact that I worked very hard and it was very difficult for me and except for the fact that the "aktzias" were scary - we thought we would survive.

Then Polish women would arrive and they would work with us and they would tell us that the battle front was getting closer and that the Russians were on their way (to free us). We... I don't really know how we related to this. We lived - we didn't really die and we didn't really arrive...we went...and in December 1944. Wait, more before that, I want to say that in the very beginning, even before I worked in the actual factory, every time there they would give me another job, but in this "laundry", where we hid and where these cases always fell on our legs and I still have marks to this day because they were so heavy, so they also took me to work for the Germans. They had there in the vegetable garden I worked and I'm a brave person. I thought I'd steal a potato. It was like what the boy Dudi said we could cook a potato in the shack. That was the highlight. In short, I stole a potato and the Germans caught me in the act and beat me so much! 25 lashes. I literally crawled back, but then again, maybe they could have killed me too. And the potato fell. I mean I did it on a whim. It immediately fell on me and they jumped on me and they beat me viciously. For a potato I had to go through that. It's terribly hard to understand now, but on the other hand, I am amazed at myself that I dared to do it.

When we arrived at this camp, everyone would come to work in the morning. Not that I had it so good in the ghetto, but at least we had a change of clothing. So they brought clothes from the ghetto that they probably collected from the big ghetto and distributed the clothing to everyone. I received an orange coat made of woven fabric that was so large that the whole town knew whose coat it was. And I went with this coat all this time. It was wool in such a coarse weave and at the end it was so frayed that in some places only the lining remained. And everyone would say, "Oh, that's Yurka's coat." The whole town knew whose special orange coat it was. How many girls have in their possession such a bold orange coat? And that's how I got through the whole period. Even clothes we got. It was a reasonable situation. Once we had a rag in our possession, so my friend's sister cut it and made some shirt out of it. The Polish girls...there were some nice ones amongst them. They would bring threads and they would also sell, to those who had money. I didn't even dream of it...and there were things they brought like a thread and needle and that's how our life went until the end of 1944. By then the Russians were really getting very close.

Apparently, at some point they decided to transfer us. I don't know if they decided to move all the workers in the whole factory. I don't think so. It was already too late in my opinion. They decided to take the laborers and transfer them to Germany. They called us to go to "Appel" (commander) and while we were standing in the line-up shelling or bombing began. I think it was a shell (they were really close). There was an alarm. Everyone, both the Germans and the prisoners fled. When the shelling was over, the Germans said to leave, but a large number of the people elected to stay, the feeling being that because it's so close then maybe they should stay, but I left (laughing) because they told me to go out so I went out. I met up with people. There was one here who told me that she also went out. The German called us, "Come on, come on kids" kindly I went out. My friend and her sister, her sister held her and she would not come out. I met my girlfriend in 1951 - here in Israel - on Allenby Street by the Peel Shoe Store. It was if we had parted from each other but half an hour ago and when I came home to her sister, then she said to me, "And why did you run away and why did you not follow me?" That was the first sentence. In short, I left and they loaded us onto transport trains. It was the end of December 1944 and there was nothing in the railroad car, no toilet, no bucket, no heating and nothing, but there were many people because a lot went out and we supposedly started to move but we didn't really move. Each time we would travel an hour and stand still for five hours on some side rails. We didn't know where we were headed. In the cold of Poland in December-January 1944-1945, in filth, infection that cannot even be described because how long can people hold back, yes? And crowdedness, in despair, even I don't know how to explain it. These are people most of whom knew each other and tried to act with some humanity toward each other, but it's hard to be human in a situation like this. And we stood for hours and then once again we proceeded onward and then we traveled backwards and then we moved forward and during the whole period - I think we were 8 days on the journey. Once they had us disembark and distributed a piece of bread to each of us and they also said that it was only due to the fact that inside the factory was one of the "meisters" (masters). The story went that he was American, (I have no idea if this is true), and that he was a German who lived in America and returned during the war to participate and they said that because he was

American then he is good. Once during the eight days we disembarked and he distributed bread and they said it was due to him. At night we arrived, in the middle of the night, it was completely dark, the snow was about knee-deep, I'm not exaggerating. And we, they took us off the train and we started walking, I think maybe five hours. Maybe the distance wasn't that great but that's what the amount of time it took us, that's what we were able to move forward. Then we arrived in Bergen-Belsen. They put us in the showers for real. They removed our hair, again everything that had grown back was once again removed. We came out of the showers and there was a capo Slovakian and she threw an article of clothing to anyone who passed by. I got a chiffon dress. I had nothing on underneath and it didn't seem to me that I would be able to stay alive in a chiffon dress. Bergen-Belsen is in northern Germany, and it's terribly cold. Slowly from the transport that came from Czestochowa, they put us not in the barracks but in a concrete structure and we slept on the floor. I think in the first days they took us and let us move bricks from here to there and from there to here. But in fact we did not work in Bergen-Belsen. We just sat and waited. Once a day they would give us something warm to eat and a slice of bread. We sat there and did almost nothing. I ate once a day. They would bring a pot, a huge vat, and all were running. In Hasag, there were some ingredients in the soup. Even there they didn't give chicken and nutritious food but they gave food of a kind. I don't know what it's called in Hebrew, a type of pumpkin, kind of like a radish that is cooked, but here, in Bergen-Belsen, even that we did not get. The bucket contained water like water used to wash dishes. The bread was often stale and sliced very small and I kept thinking that I would die from the cold because I wouldn't be able to survive ... and I had to go to the toilet, which was kind of something round made of concrete that people sat around. And there was no shack or building of any kind of a place to bathe. There was nothing. There was a straw mattress and everyone got a cup or a plate and I thought about what I would do and how would I survive and someone said she could get me a dress but that it would have to "cost" 6 or 7 portions of bread and I thought I had to do it and collected the portions of bread. Each time I gave a piece of bread to her and at the end I received a blue dress that I remember like now with rough seams and inside the seams were terribly thick and full of lice. Not that I didn't have my own problem with lice. I

did because I got them from the trip and at that point I was already sick, but I had a dress. And I had a cup and I could still come and go and I would go out. Water was not always there. Sometimes there was water in the taps and sometimes there wasn't. And in general no one related to us. At first, we were still called to stand for line-up in the morning, but later I think they didn't even bother to call us for line-up and little by little all the people who came from Czestochowa died. I don't think there's one left. Maybe there was, but they were very few. I'm exaggerating, but little by little they died. And this drinking cup continued to accompany me. One night, they didn't let us out of the barracks, but it was cold so people ran to the bathroom. One night someone urinated into my cup...I was sleeping and she peed. In the morning I poured it all out and continued to use my cup because it was my only chance to survive. I was in Bergen-Belsen between three and four months. I think I arrived at the beginning of January 1945 and we were released on April 15, 1945. The English set us free. It was like this, there was deep and considerable snow outside. When we stood in the line-up to be counted, we stood and we stood and stood and stood. There were female Slovak capos there and they were as bad as the Germans if not more so and they would administer beatings and then you would enter such a state of apathy that you don't at all... you know you can't help yourself. I think the last act I did with a clear mind was to get the dress. I do not I know if the dress saved me or not, but the rest was this. You're lying there, you couldn't lie down in the day. They told you to get out. Then the snow started to melt and there were puddles like that, It was apparently a very low place. Now that I think about it logically, there were puddles and they became stale with green on them and there was no water at all anymore so people drank from these puddles and at this point I contacted typhoid again, and again all my hair fell out, the very hair which had was already been growing back a bit slowly and every day dead people would be taken out of the shack. We didn't live in a shack but in a building. There were a lot of women in the structure. There weren't even bunks to sleep on, just sleeping room on the floor. They didn't ask if there are already, for example, 30 people, then we won't let them in. People would come in and take out and come and never come back. It was such hell that no one managed it and no one knew what was going on and day by day it got

worse and worse. And at a certain point, they stopped even ordering people out to the line-up. They lay down. There was no one who wasn't a Musselman [a term used amongst prisoners of German Nazi concentration camps during the Holocaust of World War II to refer to those suffering from a combination of starvation (known also as "hunger disease") and exhaustion, as well as those who were resigned to their impending death]. When they left (the shack), then the corpses were in piles, I don't know, did they stop burning? There were piles and piles of naked corpses, because where did I get the dress? I imagine that they stripped the dress from someone and sold it to me, someone who still had strength. Now I hear that there was a Dutch camp in Bergen-Belsen. I didn't see anything. I just saw our barracks and building, the piles of corpses, the stale puddles and slowly it was no longer possible to reach the bathroom. I couldn't even walk anymore and how much can you crawl? I crawled a little and I crawled a little more and did so where I was. And once again I crawled if I managed to crawl in, yes I succeeded because until the end I was inside this building. There was no mirror, I don't know what I looked like but I know we were- it wasn't human at all, it was like a hell that no one even tried to manage. They stopped handing out food. I think they didn't distribute food for at least two weeks. For the last two weeks they distributed no food, no drink, no bread, nothing, nothing, and simply every day people died and people died and in general I don't know if they took out (the dead). Then in the middle of all this I came down with typhus and everyone had diarrhea. People couldn't get up and walk. Where they were there they remained amidst filth and stench.

I don't know how to describe it, it's something that no one deserves, an animal, no one deserves to live like this, not even for one hour. And I sometimes hear that there are people who say that they knew what was being perpetrated and they knew who was coming and going. I didn't know anything. I can only say that it was something that cannot be described in words. I always say that when I was in Hasag it was like a convalescent home and it was just a difficult labor camp that many people did not survive. But that was not... it was the human being at the very bottom of existence. Not of life because it was not life and then I could no longer move at all. Also, I could not crawl because I had no

strength at all. I weighed 17 kg when I was released. I had Musselman's legs, bone with some skin on it. I had big swollen knees full of fluid. I had pressure sores on my sides to the point where my bones actually protruded. And that's probably what saved me because when the English forces entered, they probably were shocked beyond description. I know there were many horrible camps and Auschwitz was something else. First of all, the Russians came in and the Russians relate to these things differently. The English are different after all. They didn't know what to do. They brought food, the food they themselves ate and I remember like now, how people came in to serve us with food, with bowls of pea soup, with huge pieces of pork inside. Whoever in my situation ate it - did not survive even one day. And a lot of people died after the English arrived because they just weren't ready and didn't know how to cope. I didn't get to the food. I didn't get to the pots. I stayed put. I lay in a state of semi-consciousness and they started to evacuate the camp and at least they didn't even evacuate me. I guess maybe because I was in such a bad state that they didn't think it was worth evacuating me. They burned some of the barracks and some barracks-cabins they cleaned and sanitized and for that purpose they moved the people they decided there was nothing to move to another place. At least I think so...and I lay at least two more weeks in the camp in disinfected barracks where doctors came and nurses and they saw that I wasn't intending to die (laughing...) and then they transferred me to a hospital in the city of Bergen-Belsen. There was a hospital of the German S.S. It was called "Romad House", a round house. A very luxurious hospital, very well equipped, German nurses and English doctors and to there they brought me and there they really started treating me and discovered that I had tuberculosis and water in the knees. After typhus fever, I lost part of my hearing in one ear and that's it! I was hospitalized and they started treatment. I was probably given penicillin and they did a scan and registered me and they were interested in who I was. And they asked what my name was and if I knew my name and I did. And there I lay until I more or less recovered. And at some point they came and asked me if I wanted to go to Sweden and I said yes. I had never before been to Sweden... (laughing).

I was transferred with clean clothes, overalls and on a hospital train they took me to Lübeck. And there was a huge building that housed us in it.

Everywhere they stationed disinfection and D.D.T. stations. Not only for immigrants from North Africa and Iraq. And the Swedes administered a cold shower and a hot shower and we were there for a few weeks. I remember I had overalls and one day there were Polish soldiers from the British army and when they heard the voices of Polish children, they came and asked me "Boy, how old are you?". I had no hair at all, after my third bout of typhus. We were then transported to Sweden in a magnificent ship of the king that they converted into a hospital ship. It was during the summer vacation and we were housed in the vacant schools of different cities. That's where I lay until I convalesced further. That's where I met on the ship a girl a little older than me from Czestochowa who had been in the same transport as me, arriving in Bergen-Belsen. She was with her mother. The mother passed away in Bergen-Belsen and she was very sick and I sat by her a lot because I knew her and talked with her and also at the hospital in Sweden we were in the same place and I used to visit her and she died in Sweden in Nurchefink in hospital. She appears in the lists of all the people who came to Sweden, even those who died. Of those that arrived on the transport from Czestochowa not many people managed to survive. There were other people from Hungary who were right there with us But I had no idea that there was a camp for families, etc. This is what I hear now. In Sweden, after my period in the hospital I was sent for further convalescence. The Swedes took care of us in an unbelievable way. Really, they came and volunteered and would come to visit and they didn't know how to communicate because of the language barrier, but they still wanted to adopt the children and even two families tried to adopt me too. One family in Norchpink and then another family in the convalescent home. The first family had a daughter and they were ready to adopt me and the other family lived in the small village I was in. They were childless and really wanted to adopt me. I think it's interesting because I didn't have much Jewish identity. My Judaism wasn't that rooted or, no I felt, we were not a religious family and I don't know why I stuck to my Judaism so much and at the time, I wanted to to be with Jews. I didn't want to go to this family. I kept in touch with them after I immigrated to Israel. Two years after I left Sweden and arrived in Israel, I corresponded with them for a long time. During the period of austerity measures in Israel in the 1940s they would send me packages. While in

Sweden, I was with them every holiday and every weekend and I also went to them for Christmas. After my period in the convalescent home, they gathered all the children of school age and sent us to school. The first school was in the village which was called Sufta Baron (or something similar). There were only girls there. We stayed there for quite a long time, a few months until the summer. We lived in a boarding school. A large building with many rooms. Classrooms were downstairs and we lived upstairs. When I arrived there was no more room and across the road there was a small building with two rooms so I lived in the small building. There were four of us girls in each room. We had an oven to heat the room and there was a janitor who would come early in the morning and light the oven before the girls got up so we wouldn't get cold. His name was Gustav. We were really taken care of. For the winter everyone got a suitcase with clothes. Coat and dress and underwear and socks and gloves - everything. Outstanding. In the summer they took us to some island. In the meantime, some of the children left because they were too old for the institution. In the meantime they probably set rules about the age and who would be eligible to study there and who would not, and the younger ones were gathered on an island on one of the lakes. We numbered more than 200 children and they divided us up and towards the beginning of the school year they assigned us to different schools according to the groupings they had already determined. Again a boarding school, principal, teachers and then also came "shlichim" (emissaries) from Israel and teachers and Holocaust survivors who had formerly lived in Sweden. All kinds of teachers and that's where we stayed. I was in Sweden for two years. I knew a little Swedish because of my connection with this family I had befriended, but I forgot everything. I slowly stopped corresponding. It is possible I neglected it more than they. Yes I spoke Swedish fluently and wrote Swedish. In school, because they were students from Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia and even one girl from Greece, so they spoke German and we studied Hebrew. They started from the beginning. The future was immigration to Israel and indeed a good number of us came to Israel. Before the war I did not know how to write even one single letter in Hebrew. I barely spoke Yiddish. There was no talk at home about the possibility of immigrating to Israel. I am I don't know if I knew or heard or...that my biological father, not the one who raised me, was a Revisionist (a Zionist

of the right-wing persuasion). And if I think about it, my birth certificate says "Miriam", so maybe there's something to it because I'm named after my grandfather. I was the firstborn after he passed away. My mother's father's name was Mordechai, so actually I'm Motka (laughs). But my name is Miriam, I have no idea where I heard that.

Speaking of which, I want to tell you something. I went to Poland in 1988 for the first time with a full delegation. My husband and our daughter and well, I won't tell, it was terrible. I thought I would experience emotional closure but I didn't just close anything. I tore myself to shreds because I arrived in Czestochowa and as I said we lived on the main street of the city. And the whole street is standing, the whole of it, the houses and the house next to us #14 are undergoing renovation and so the whole length of the street is one house. And secondly is that it is completely destroyed, and only the "facade" (face of the building) remains. This is our house. It was as if I didn't exist. There is nothing to show. I thought I would take pictures and I have a friend who is also from Czestochowa and we were together in Sweden and France and on the same kibbutz and he said, "Will you photograph my house?" And I answered him that certainly I would do so and so I took a picture. I brought him a picture of the entrance to their apartment. I didn't go in and mine, as if it didn't exist. As if I don't exist. So it was terribly frustrating and it rained all the time. It was like I didn't finish anything. I also thought I might find those Poles who hid me and were so good to me, but I don't even know where I had been and in which village and what was their name. And after I returned, I tried to get my birth certificate and I wrote through the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs to our embassy and I actually received it. Only then did I learn that I was born in another city. I mean, all my life you are alive and you don't even know where you were and who you are. And now I'm trying to get to them through the genealogical society. I posted on the internet that I was looking for the Poles who saved me but I haven't found anything so far.

(End of tape, section 1 missing)

....During the war, the German Gestapo sat there in the building and the district. It's not far from the Loire, not far from the city La Ware (perhaps La Wall) and we were there until March. We arrived in July and in March

1948 I immigrated to Israel, right before the outbreak of the War of Independence.

In Sweden our last "madrach" was from Kibbutz Afikim and upon arriving to Israel some of us went there. There were some who left the group to live with family, but a large part of the group went to Kibbutz Afikim. We were the youth group. We continued to study part-time and then the war broke out and in the Jordan Valley where we resided it broke out early, so everything went topsy-turvy. The girls and children were removed, and the males remained. Then we enlisted in Nahal as a group with the first class of the Nahal in 1948. I served in the Nachal for 3 months of basic training in the Camp 80, not like now. Afikim was our home and Afikim paired us up with Kibbutz Hatzerim because the founders of Kibbutz Hatzerim were members of the Palmach who had undergone hachshara (training) in Afikim. Kibbutz Chatzerim was looking for additional members, so Afikim said it would be a good fit. I was in Nachal in Chatzerim. Meanwhile, I got married and no one told the Army because we were a kibbutz anyway, and it made no difference. I got married In December 1949 and I was discharged only in August 1950. It wasn't, it was all chaos as well. Kibbutz Hatzerim didn't report that one of the female soldiers got married in the meantime... (laughing) I got married in Kibbutz Hatzerim. My husband was a member of Kibbutz Chatzerim, one of the founders of Kibbutz Chatzerim (somewhat sarcastically). He carried the fence on his back on Yom Kippur 1946 from Beit Eshel to Kibbutz Chatzerim. He was in Afikim in the Palmach and in the Youth Aliyah on Kibbutz Givat Brenner and he immigrated to Israel in the year 1943 from Romania. Also what a story. A children's train that left Bucharest and arrived in Haifa via Bulgaria, Greece, Syria, Turkey. Wonders. We stayed on Chatzerim until 1952 when we decided to leave the kibbutz go live an independent lifestyle. Many left the kibbutz at that time. Many members left.

We arrived in Tel Aviv, and we rented a room with the Der family in the Yemenite Quarter. A Yemeni family that was the fourth wife of the husband and we were there for two years. They were very nice and it was the cheapest you could get. I think the rent was 60 lirot per year.... Then we gradually got to get on our feet. We started working at a regular job. I worked at various odd jobs including washing dishes in some factory, but I knew to read and write Hebrew well. That was the reality

Expensive, so at some point I worked in the elections at Mapai, and then they arranged a job for me at a "Kupat Cholim" (sick fund), but I didn't like the job that much because they actually wanted to arrange a job for me at "Hasneh" Insurance Company. It seemed like a much better job for me, but the Labor Bureau said that I was such a "genius" (knew Hebrew), so it would be better if I went to work at Kupat Cholim. Because in Zemanhof they needed someone and they didn't want to give me the job. I think it was just because I obtained the employment through "protectzia", so they actually did it to spite me. I worked at the Kupat Cholim until I got tenure and then I left....and then we both worked (our dark period) for the Shin Bet (internal security service), but in those days it was simply called "the service". I worked there for 7 years until I gave birth in 1957. My husband stopped working there a little earlier. I raised my daughter for three years and then I was at the beginning Secretary to the VP and later I was the manager of an Amidar building which was an 8-story building in the "Hadar Dafna" neighborhood. Responsible for the entire building, personnel, procedures and maintenance. Then we moved to Beersheba. My husband got a job in Beersheba as a plant manager. Before that, he was the principal of a school of the Histadrut (labor union) for training clerks called "Ginat" And then he got a very good job managing the "Beersheba Sheva Textile" factory. I worked in Amidar. I was the Deputy District Manager and his substitute. A large district in the Negev. When we left Beersheba in 1975, I resigned from Amidar. We lived in Jerusalem for two years and I thought that in Jerusalem it was not worth my while working, but rather it was worth touring, but still I worked for a while in sales at Padani Jewelry, at the Jaffa Gate. After all this, we came back to live here. Unfortunately, livelihood in Jerusalem did not work out. We wanted to stay. We moved back here. My husband worked at Peker Plada (iron works) first as a department manager and later he was the manager of the plant in Kfar Saba and I started working in Ta'asiya Tzva'it (military industry). I worked in the marketing department and was in charge of management and human resources until I retired in 1993.

Question - was there an influence of your childhood and what you went through on your daughter?

Yes and no. There were things I was very strict about. I never hindered her steps. Never had that thing that "Don't go out at night", "Don't go on

a youth movement hike". She was in the Scouts Youth Movement and she took part in every hike they organized and traveled from sea to sea and went out on every every Passover and Sukkot hike, etc. On the other hand, maybe she is too attached to us. We are a very, very warm family and she is my best friend. We are very good friends. We traveled abroad to London together, to shopping and the theater and a few years ago, first of all to Poland she traveled with us without hesitation. A few years ago we went to Scandinavia which was also a bit of "roots" because it was Sweden and then she happily joined. I don't know, we have a very, very good relationship, so it could be that sub-consciously there was an influence. She is a lawyer and not married. Maybe that is also an influence. I don't know, but not consciously. A few years ago there was a program with the singer Shlomo Artzi and young people who are second generation survivors and I heard there stories. Such a subject never entered into the discussion. There Shlomo Artzi tells about his mother that if they hadn't eaten what they were served she used to say that if Hitler didn't finish her off, the children would finish her off...we never had such episodes in raising the family. Always when my daughter asked, she was very interested in the subject without my influencing her directly. To my delight, she didn't get into it as far as I know. There are those who see it as a purpose in life, but she is absolutely free from it.

Question - what do you think, thanks to your having been able to survive?

Look, it's hard to say that it's thanks to my wise decisions because I don't believe that at the age of 11 it's possible make wise decisions. I don't want to say luck because today I heard a fantastic story from a lecturer who gave a lecture to the "Na'arai Raful" (a special IDF program for at-risk youth who were trying to be accepted into the Army). They wanted to make an experiment. They bought two potted plants. One was looked after and the other was not. After the one that was not cared for became withered and the other grew because it was taken care of, the plants were brought to them in their pots and the recruits were asked what they had to say. So they said that the dead plant was unlucky! So I don't want to say yes, I don't think so. For all these years I didn't think I was going to die. Even in Bergen-Belsen when I really was a perfect

Musselman, I didn't think I was going to die. I always thought, and even now I have the attitude that "Tomorrow is a new day". And maybe that's why.

I want to say why I was interviewed: because it's not exactly easy and I also have a bit of reluctance. I don't like it when there are those who make a living out of telling about the Holocaust. I mean I live with it, how can I not? I am an orphan from age 11, but what scares me terribly is that now there are people who don't believe what I am saying! And you (the interviewer), you told me about such a case and it's like, I'm not saying that because I'm telling and other people are telling then it will never happen, but what I'm saying is that terrible things happen - Biafra and Yugoslavia- but they have to understand that the Holocaust is not the same. It's because of wars, it's because of religious conflicts, it's because people don't get along and human nature is fundamentally bad. But never before (as in the case of the Holocaust) was a complete, planned, documented system ever established, Terrible things happened in Russia too, but there everyone can fall. Also the Russians and the Latvians, the Chechens - all of them. Here, a terrible system was established just to destroy the Jews. It's not like anything, what happened since and before that.

That's why I want it documented. I'm sure there are people who have had worse things happen to them than what I experienced, but this is my story.

English translation by Stephen Glazer