

EMILIA STERN (ALSO CALLED MINKA)  
RG-50.005.0053. recorded 1984 in LA

Emilia was interviewed with her daughter Antonia. Emilia grew up in a Polish town with 50,000 Jews. She married in 1939 and had Antonia (also called Utusha and Edvarkia) in 1940. The Russian occupied the town until 1941 and when the Germans came in they immediately took 1000 Jews and shot them. Out of a family of 80 there were ultimately only 4 survivors. Fearful for what lay ahead, Emilia and her husband decided to teach their 2-year-old some catholic terms and prayers and then left for in the snow with fake ID papers right near a church. The priest found Toni and took her first to one catholic family and then another where she stayed for the rest of the war. Tonia loved these people and had a hard time separating at the end of the war.

Emilia and her husband hid with some others at the home of the Zazhitsky's whom her parents had previously helped. At night the hidden people could come to the main house, but during the days and other times they hid in a small bunker beneath the ground where they couldn't even lie down. The family also took some neighbors into their house, but when the bombing started they all ran away and in August 1944 they were finally able to get out of the bunker. Emilia and her husband immediately started searching for Tonia, asking the help of the Russians. She says she doesn't think the priest would have helped if he knew that Tonia was really Jewish. Tonia's foster mother by that time loved Tonia and ran away with her so that the Sterns couldn't take her back. But finally, her father found her in fairly poor condition. She cried and screamed, not wanting to leave her foster mother. But finally, Toni recognized her father and then immediately recognized her mother. The Sterns actually asked the foster mother to come with them. But she didn't want to leave her cows.

The family stayed in Krakow in 1945 but then moved to Czechoslovakia because of the Polish antisemitism and the murder of more Jews. Then they went to Vienna, then Baksastein and then Emilia and Toni met her husband in Berlin. A son was born in 1947 in Berlin. Emilia wanted to go to Israel where she had a surviving brother, but eventually they came to the US. Emilia says her husband, whose entire family was killed by the Nazis, has never really recovered and says that Hitler had taken his life.