

1 MARYLA KORN - TODDLING THROUGH EUROPE FROM CRACOW  
2 TO BUCHAREST, A BABY STEP AHEAD OF THE GESTAPO.

3 Maryla Korn was an infant in arms when  
4 Germany occupied Poland in 1939 and a very wise 6  
5 year old in 1944 when she reassured her mother while  
6 they hid not 10 feet away from German army personnel  
7 in Hungary that they had made it so far and would  
8 make it to their goal. By that time they had  
9 zig-zagged through more than 1,000 miles mostly on  
10 foot through some of the roughest territory in  
11 Eastern Europe often not even a step ahead of the  
12 pursuing Gestapo agents with their directives to  
13 eliminate European Jews.

14 The young mother and child traveled the  
15 underground railroad, an escape route that the Joint  
16 Distribution Committee, an organization dedicated to  
17 helping Jewish refugees in occupied Europe, secretly  
18 financed and operated with the help of local people  
19 willing to take the risks involved in smuggling  
20 humans across heavily guarded borders.

21 Mrs. Korn, married and the mother of two  
22 grown children, now an executive at Washington's  
23 Georgetown University, tells the story from memory  
24 and from the incidents that her mother and older

1 friends have told her. END OF SCREEN TEXT.

2 I was born in June of '38 in Cracow  
3 Poland. A year later war came. My father was one of  
4 six children. He had three sisters, two brothers.  
5 My father was the oldest and the youngest child was 7  
6 years older than I was. He was a little boy. When  
7 war came my grandfather on my father's side and my  
8 father went towards what later was invaded, the part  
9 of Poland that later was invaded by the Russians,  
10 with the mentality at the time that nothing would  
11 happen to women and children as it had in 1914, 1918,  
12 but to the men. So my father who was at the time 32  
13 years old left with his father and they went to one  
14 of my aunts who had just gotten married and who lived  
15 closer to the Russian border. My grandmother with  
16 two daughters, one was in high school, the other one  
17 was -- one was 18, one was 17, and the 8 year old  
18 child at the time remained in KOLBUSHOVA. I stayed  
19 with my mother and my maternal grandparents in Cracow  
20 where my parents lived.

21 1940 it started getting a little hot around  
22 Cracow when it came to the Germans and my mother went  
23 with me to VELICHKA Which is maybe half an hour away  
24 from Cracow. When it became impossible there, she

1 joined her parents who by that time had gone to a  
2 city which had a very large Jewish population,  
3 BUCHNA, which now takes 35, 45 minutes by car but at  
4 the time I guess it took a lot longer. Buchna was a  
5 large city by polish standards and it had a very  
6 strong Jewish community, a lot of Rabbis, a lot of  
7 schools of learning, there was something going on  
8 there. They went there because they assumed that it  
9 would be safer in a smaller town than Cracow or  
10 Warsaw, one of the very large cities.

11 We lived outside of the city in a small  
12 house, a matchbox. Main entrance door, one room was  
13 a kitchen on one side and we lived on the other, and  
14 at that time no bathroom facilities, no running  
15 water, etc. This was done on the out there which  
16 later became part of where we hid, bathroom outside,  
17 the little one house out. We stayed there until 1941  
18 but during that time that I was there was my mother,  
19 my grandparents and my mother's younger brother --  
20 he was taken away in 1941 among the first young  
21 Jewish men, he was 21 years old, and they were  
22 killed.

23 Many times during that time that we were  
24 still outside of the ghetto I was shipped to Cracow.

1 Whenever they heard that there would be an accion  
2 (ph.) to come and take out the children or young  
3 people, they would somehow send me away and one time  
4 the Germans came and they started looking for  
5 children and they had one of these huge German  
6 Shepherd dogs with them and so they decided -- I  
7 don't know what occurred to them but that the only  
8 place to hide me so the dog couldn't smell out a  
9 person was to put me straight up into that cherry  
10 tree, and so supposedly I was sitting there for a  
11 couple of hours. This was 1941. I was 3 years old.  
12 They just put me up there and left me there for a  
13 quite a while until the dog stopped sniffing and I  
14 was allowed to come down.

15 The second episode which she told me -- and  
16 she said to my husband this is what is survival when  
17 somebody has a survival streak in them -- they  
18 decided to send me to Cracow back to a young man who  
19 had been working for my grandfather to hide me  
20 because again they were coming for children. And so  
21 she took me to the railroad station and I was there  
22 with her and suddenly somebody started yelling there  
23 was a Jewish child and a train was coming, they had  
24 heard already the sounds of the train arriving but it

1 wasn't yet at the railroad station, and when they  
2 started yelling this is a Jewish child, supposedly I  
3 took off and started running among the people and  
4 nobody could catch me and when the train arrived I  
5 jumped on the train.

6           Anyway, in 1942 we went into the ghetto.  
7 Now Buchna had a Jewish ghetto but it was an open  
8 Jewish ghetto with no walls. We were put into an  
9 apartment. All I remember my grandmother, my mother  
10 -- and again, you are all very young and you can  
11 imagine, my mother was 27 years old when the war  
12 started. This was a baby and there she was without a  
13 husband and at that point not really knowing what on  
14 earth was happening, although I must admit she was a  
15 lot smarter than some others who were thinking  
16 nothing would happen and she had this instinct in her  
17 of wanting to go away.

18           1942 we were put in there in the ghetto  
19 which at that point was the Jewish part where always  
20 Jews lived but suddenly there was this enclosure.  
21 There was a Jewish military organization running the  
22 ghetto like anybody else's and we were at that point  
23 my grandfather, my grandmother, my grandfather's  
24 sister who had joined us with her daughter, and my

1 mother and myself. I really don't remember either  
2 hunger or sickness and I did ask my mother were we  
3 ever hungry at that point and she said no, it was  
4 just a very different diet. People had money. They  
5 managed to get food from the outside. All I do  
6 remember is that every morning my mother would leave  
7 with a group of women who were going outside of the  
8 ghetto to work and then were brought back in the  
9 evening, and I also remember that a couple of times  
10 when again there were these rumors that they were  
11 coming for children, my mother managed to smuggle me  
12 out with her. All I remember is walking with her and  
13 walking out through the gate and then in the evening  
14 coming back.

15 My grandfather on my mother's side,  
16 although he had been a small businessman before the  
17 war -- this was almost a crazy story, but his store  
18 was taken over by the young man who worked for him  
19 when he was 14, 15, 16 years old helping in the  
20 store. During the war instead of being taken by the  
21 Germans, this young man became the owner and he used  
22 to bring, and I this I do remember, he used to bring  
23 every week, every two weeks little suitcases full of  
24 money into the ghetto, which is of course why we were

1 never hungry because then if my mother smuggled out a  
2 little bit of money outside, somebody managed to  
3 bring in some food and this is how we had it. This  
4 is also the money that finally in the long run saved  
5 us because in 1943 on my birthday, it was a week  
6 before, I managed to get whooping cough and my  
7 mother -- my uncle one was there, as I told you my  
8 mother's younger brother, my mother's older brother  
9 had just escaped through the Carpathian mountains  
10 into Czechoslovakia and then went on to Hungary.  
11 That route was quite used for escape but if you were  
12 caught on any one of the borders, you didn't make it  
13 terribly far. Anybody who was caught on the Polish-  
14 Czech border either was sent to Czechoslovakia and  
15 was shot or sent back to Poland and shot. I mean it  
16 didn't make much of a difference from where the  
17 bullet came. Or they were not -- not only were they  
18 found by the patrol on the borders but they were also  
19 given by the people that were being paid to take over  
20 the border.

21           Anyway, in 1943 in June my mother decided  
22 enough is enough. At that point we had been  
23 separated from my grandfather, because the street  
24 that we lived on was a narrow one so when we were

1 together, it didn't matter, men, women, whatever,  
2 everybody was together. When they separated the men  
3 from the women, my grandfather was left alone on one  
4 side and we were on the other one and at that point  
5 anybody who had some desire to know what was  
6 happening knew perfectly well that at this point  
7 already concentration camps did exist and that this  
8 is what was happening. It wasn't happening yet in  
9 the masses that happened then in '42 -- I mean '43  
10 and '44, but I mean this was it, it was going full  
11 speed and nobody was coming back. I must also tell  
12 you one day I understand my grandmother asked my  
13 mother if they take her, what do you do, and my  
14 mother said I'm going with her.

15           Anyway, '43 June, my birthday is on the  
16 10th and I know I had my birthday in the mountains, I  
17 had these beautiful whooping coughs and this is when  
18 we were going through the mountains. Now these were  
19 15 people going together. Nobody wanted a child. I  
20 mean my mother said I'm not going without a little  
21 one and everybody said "Are you kidding? With  
22 whooping coughs, that's all we need." So they found  
23 somebody who said don't worry, once you get into the  
24 mountains, the height, the whooping coughs somehow



1 disappear. And it did, whether it was magic or  
2 whatever. The funny story is that I was a much  
3 better walker than they were because we were walking  
4 up and down, up and down, and I understand, my mother  
5 tells always the story, she says they were saying  
6 they couldn't make it. I was on the top of the  
7 mountain and they were still at the bottom and I  
8 would come down to pick them up to drag them up.

9 We walked at night and we hid during the  
10 day. We were caught on the Czech side and my mother  
11 was with me, so two women. No way of proving, which  
12 was very easy in Europe, who is Jewish and who is not  
13 but there was not a man with us. Let's say a husband  
14 was with us and the wife had gone ahead a week  
15 earlier or so and everybody met in the jail of  
16 KOSHISETS. We were caught in KOSHETZKA and because  
17 they couldn't prove that we were Jewish, we were put  
18 first of all separated from the rest of the group.  
19 My mother, myself put into one cell and that's where  
20 we saw -- this is one thing that I do remember -- you  
21 see when they were separating the husbands and wives,  
22 it was done on purpose. If one doesn't survive, at  
23 least the other one will. So if there was a husband,  
24 wife and two children, let's say the father would

1 take the son and the mother would take the daughter  
2 and that's how pretty much they went.

3 In that prison in the main courtyard -- I  
4 will never forget it -- there was a group that went  
5 before us. There was a wife and a son, one of our  
6 friends who was with us, they put them on one side  
7 and they put our group on the other and the other  
8 group we never saw them. For some strange reason --  
9 again, miracles did happen -- our group was sent to  
10 Hungary -- no, we were let go, excuse me, no, we were  
11 let go in Koshetzka and the other group was taken  
12 back to the border and was shot.

13 The Joint, which at that point was in  
14 Koshetzka, took care of us and proceeded to send us  
15 on our way to Hungary. When I say proceeded to send  
16 us, we were walking. I mean we walked through  
17 Europe, walked from Poland to Czechoslovakia, then  
18 took a little bit of a train trip closer to the  
19 border, went through the border,  
20 Czechoslovakia-Hungary, and was our luck we were  
21 caught again. We were caught on the Hungarian side.  
22 At that point Hungary wasn't yet as dangerous as it  
23 became a while later and we were sent again to the  
24 main prison of Budapest and we were put with the

1 women, so that the first memory I have of this is on  
2 Sundays the nuns would come with cake and milk, and  
3 also we were with all the Gypsies and because I was a  
4 child, we were -- my mother was in better condition  
5 because of that because at least we were in an open  
6 like, could run around on the balconies and be  
7 there. After a short while one of the fathers, a  
8 gentleman who was with us, was a superb counterfeiter  
9 and he counterfeited some papers that the whole group  
10 was supposed to be released and anyway, we were  
11 released.

12 We ended up in Budapest. We stayed for a  
13 very short time. I must tell you when my mother left  
14 Buchna, she had sewn in her I guess in the top of her  
15 skirt, whatever, the way she was given by my  
16 grandfather quite large diamonds and we left with one  
17 pair of shoes -- nobody was going to carry suitcases  
18 over the mountains -- and he said to her, "Look, when  
19 you get to Hungary with this type of things that you  
20 carry with you, you will be living in super luxury so  
21 just don't take anything, just take those." To make a  
22 long story short, those diamonds were very nicely  
23 taken away in Czechoslovakia which means that we were  
24 totally destitute but the Joint was there and I must

1 tell you, I don't think that a lot of European Jews,  
2 the one that went our route, would have survived  
3 without the Joint being there. It was absolutely the  
4 lifesaver, there was no question. There were the  
5 ones that provided food, they were the ones that  
6 provided shelter, they were the ones that helped  
7 continue.

8           Anyway, we were in Budapest. My uncle was  
9 also caught in Hungary, he made it as far as Hungary,  
10 he was caught there and was let go also. We went to  
11 a small town in Hungary which is called KALOCHA and  
12 at that point the Hungarian Jewry was still in  
13 place. My mother came as a Catholic, I was told  
14 prayers and my mother was kosher with all of this and  
15 the only food available in that little town were  
16 pigs. It does really the trick. We were there a  
17 group of Polish Jews, all of them of the same  
18 background and all of them knowing each other very  
19 well but trying to avoid each other as much as  
20 possible in order not to point. I mean if there were  
21 men there, they were trying to make sure that the  
22 women like my mother were alone, that at least they  
23 were not in danger. And one day my mother was going  
24 on Friday night, she wanted to hear somebody sing a

1 Kiddish. I mean I find it almost hilarious because  
2 on one side she tried to pass for being a Christian  
3 and on the other side she did absolutely everything  
4 possible to point to herself. I mean it really  
5 almost sounds incredible. She wanted to hear the  
6 sounds of the Kiddish being said so she stood behind  
7 the house of the Shochat and from inside she heard  
8 him say to his wife "And what are those Shiksas doing  
9 outside?" I understand it didn't take them terribly  
10 long to realize that all of this group of Poles were  
11 really not Poles, that they were Jews, and that  
12 that's what it was there.

13           Anyway, we stayed there for quite a while  
14 and my mother tells me that they told the Hungarian  
15 Jews what was happening in Poland and they said no  
16 way, it just did not register. By that time the  
17 Polish Jewry was gone because already when my mother  
18 had arrived in Czechoslovakia, was left out from the  
19 prison, we were already then told my grandparents had  
20 died two weeks earlier, that the whole Buchna had  
21 been liquidated. So by the time they came to  
22 Hungary, the Polish Jews were very knowledgeable  
23 about what was happening, there was no excuse but  
24 they were saying and the others reacted as if this

1 was just a story.

2 Beginning 1944 all the Jews were rounded up  
3 including the Polish Jews that were there, excluding  
4 my mother and myself. My mother still played the  
5 role of this Catholic lady, by the way, sending me to  
6 church every Sunday morning while lighting candles  
7 Friday night. I mean when you think about it,  
8 nothing made terribly sense but there it was. I mean  
9 this is the way they proceeded. They were all taken  
10 to a farm, kept there for two, three days on the way  
11 definitely to Auschwitz. There was no discussion,  
12 they were going. And my mother, again using  
13 definitely no judgment but at that point I don't  
14 think it was a question of judgment or just  
15 absolutely from the guts, to put it mildly, were  
16 bringing them food. Now there she tried to avoid  
17 being taken with them to Auschwitz and at the same  
18 time did it. Anyway, it didn't take much time.  
19 Knock on the door and together you go.

20 So we went with them on a truck to the next  
21 main town from where the trains were leaving this  
22 whole group of Polish Jews, I think 30, 40, 50 maybe,  
23 everybody together. Again, don't ask me. The truck  
24 on which they had put us to go to the railroad

1 station broke down and everybody went. Our truck was  
2 left in the back and when they missed the train or  
3 whatever the story is, we were brought back to our  
4 little village for the next time the trip was taken  
5 care of. Well, my mother at that point decided no  
6 more little trips to railroad stations, and all the  
7 close friends were still together. At night she put  
8 on the clothing of a cleaning lady, went into the  
9 mayor's office, and all that we needed were stamps on  
10 pieces of paper that we could leave that place. She  
11 always tells the story there was this round, this  
12 thing where you hang all the stamps on. There were  
13 hundreds of them. Somehow she found the right one,  
14 stamped the papers for the whole group, went out,  
15 distributed this to all our friends.

16 The next day we were on a little boat that  
17 was going on the Danube, because this was on the  
18 Danube, and we went to Budapest back away from the  
19 fire of the small town. Once we arrived there, the  
20 Joint sent us -- asked what my mother wanted to do  
21 and my mother's reaction was I'm not staying here.  
22 Budapest at that time wasn't a haven but it wasn't as  
23 dangerous as it became a little bit later. She  
24 decided she's going forward. No way is she staying,

1 no way is she going backward, she's just going  
2 forward, although some people did go back as far as  
3 Czechoslovakia because at that point there was nobody  
4 there and the Jews that were coming back I understand  
5 weren't -- nobody was looking for them because there  
6 weren't supposed to be any Jews left over there.

7 We proceeded to walk to Romania, at that  
8 point my mother and myself, just the two of us.  
9 1944, at this point I'm the mature age of 6. We  
10 walked over the border into Romania and from the  
11 border then once we were on the Romanian side -- by  
12 the way, all of this was organized by Joint, these  
13 steps, I mean they had the contacts that would take  
14 people from one place to another. One was really  
15 amazing. We were going to take a night train and the  
16 guide that brought us to the train put us in bushes  
17 and closed up these bushes, and this is on the  
18 railroad station with all the Germans and everybody  
19 else parading in front of us, and it was a very bushy  
20 bush, I remember that one, and she put us down there  
21 and my mother started getting panicky and at that  
22 point, that I do remember, I started calming her  
23 down. I say "Look, we have made it that far, we are  
24 going to make it further." She calmed down and



1       somehow we got there.

2                   When we got to the train, they took me -- I  
3       wasn't exactly small -- took me and wrapped me like a  
4       mummy in wrapping paper with string and the whole  
5       package and put me on the rack on the top because  
6       they knew that at some point the control would come  
7       through and my mother would then be taken care of  
8       somehow but definitely not a child. Well, the way my  
9       mother was taken care of was that when they saw the  
10      police coming to check the paper, they put her  
11      outside the train hanging while the train was going  
12      on, which -- and then when it was over they brought  
13      brought her back in and they unwrapped me at some  
14      point and sat me down when we were in Romania.

15                   Anyway we made it to Romania. It was  
16      heaven, we had a very lovely room renting from  
17      somebody. The food was -- every lunch hour we would  
18      go to the Jewish Community Center which was a house  
19      where there was a kitchen and everybody was being fed  
20      and friends met that came from Lodz from the other  
21      side. They would come and my mother suddenly met her  
22      best girl friend with her husband and son that had  
23      just come over from that part of Poland that had  
24      survived and everybody was going to Palestine. Well,

1 not exactly. Three times in a row we ended up in  
2 Constanza or in Sofia and the three times we were  
3 sent back. One time, and I don't remember the name  
4 of the ship -- I always mess it up, this one -- but  
5 we were the last one who were supposed to board the  
6 ship and the man pushed my mother down and at that  
7 point it was a question of saying either I get on  
8 that ship or I die. We knew that the Germans were  
9 not that far behind us and he pushed her down and he  
10 said, Don't be desperate, this boat will never make  
11 it to Israel -- to Palestine, this is an empty barrel  
12 and it's too many people on this. Well, sure enough,  
13 this was the one that was torpedoed off the coast of  
14 Turkey. I think there are two survivors of the  
15 entire boat and that's the one we were supposed to go  
16 on.

17           Anyway, we never made it to Palestine but  
18 we did live out until the end of the war and we were  
19 liberated by the Russians, who were throwing down  
20 fruit and cookies and candies from the planes, and if  
21 you can imagine for people who had never seen it,  
22 especially me -- the children wanted to have  
23 something -- we were forbidden to touch it because we  
24 didn't know whether it was poison or wasn't poison or

1 what the whole thing was. Anyway, we survived in  
2 Romania, stayed there after that for about six  
3 months, went back to Hungary where we stayed a year  
4 to basically find out who survived, and the sad fact  
5 was that except for my father who, thank God, had  
6 survived in Russia, nobody had survived.  
7 END OF TAPE.