

Marsha Albert RG-50.028.0120.01.01
Summary of Interview

Marsha Albert was born on December 19, 1910, near **Dnipropetrovsk**, Russia/Ukraine. Father: **Ipim Sipirin**. Mother: **Liesel Sipirim**. Sibling: Younger brother, **Shoma Shimeon**.

Marsha grew up in a Jewish family. They lived in an industrial city in Russia with a large Jewish population. Her father, a barber, was not very religious because he felt that the rabbis were hypocrites, so he only went to the synagogue on holidays. Marsha's mother died when she was ten years old, and she was treated badly by her stepmother.

By 1939, Marsha had married a Russian, Leonid **Patriesov**, and had two sons. Leonid's brother had previously fled to France to escape Communism, so the authorities falsely accused Leonid of being a spy and arrested him along with the intelligentsia. Marsha thought she might also be arrested and exiled to Siberia, so she kept a suitcase packed and ready, just in case. Her father would stay with them at night so that if Marsha was arrested, he could take the children home with him. Marsha was told that people were not allowed to write letters from Siberia, so she went to the Russian secret police to find out what happened to her husband. They informed her that he had died; he had been doing the heavy work of cutting down trees, and had almost nothing to eat. Because her husband had been accused of being a spy, no one wanted to hire Marsha. She found it very difficult to find work to support herself and her children.

After Germany invaded Russia, Marsha and her two sons went to live with her father near the Black Sea. One day, she saw an airplane that was dropping leaflets to warn Jews to flee because the Nazis were killing Jews. Marsha's father did not believe that this could be happening because, in his view, Germans were the "best people in the world." Local Catholic priests told Jewish people that they could be baptized as Catholics in exchange for their gold and diamonds so that they would not be killed, and many Jews took up the offer. Marsha's father was baptized as a Catholic, but her stepmother refused to renounce her Jewish faith. At one point, from the window of their home, Marsha's brother witnessed the rape of a local Russian girl by members of the German military. Despite being baptized as Catholics, many Jews were nonetheless singled out and arrested by the Nazis. Marsha's father, stepmother, and several other family members were all eventually arrested and taken to prison. They had been told that they would be sent to Israel, but that did not happen. Marsha was considered to be Russian rather than Jewish through her marriage, so she was not arrested.

Living conditions deteriorated as war raged. Due to frequent bombing raids, Marsha sheltered in the basement along with her two children for safety. She had nothing to feed her children, and she had to go out to collect water in buckets. Once when she went out to fetch water, a German military plane suddenly started to bombard the area. She became absolutely distraught when she saw that her home had been hit and twenty-five people in this house were killed. A young boy told her that her older son had been pulled out of the rubble alive, so Marsha was hopeful that at least one of her sons had survived the bombing. With curfews in place, Marsha could not immediately attend to her son. When she was able to go early the next morning, she saw her son lying dead in the snow. Although many blamed God for the deaths, Marsha never did. She wondered if she was being punished for something wrong that she had done. She was so distressed at losing her children that she did not wash nor could she eat or drink. She wanted to commit suicide by jumping into the freezing waters of the Black Sea, but a German military man who spoke Russian grabbed her by the scarf to stop her, and took her back home and gave her food. Once, after clearing up ammunition left behind by the military, Marsha decided to keep and hide a grenade she found to use later. She went out into the street and flung the grenade down, but it did not explode. Marsha did not realize that she had to pull the pin out of the grenade first in order to detonate it.

Women were being rounded up to serve as prostitutes for German officers. A policeman who had known Marsha's father told people to hide Marsha so that she would not be taken as a prostitute. The

only place they could hide her was in a basement where dead bodies were being kept because they couldn't be buried in the frozen ground. For three days Marsha stayed in the basement, blindfolded so that she would not see the bodies. But years later, she had no recollection of the event because at that time she was still very upset over the deaths of her children and 'was not herself.'

In 1942, a German soldier took an interest in Marsha and they married. Young people were forced to go to Germany to work, and Marsha was sent to work in a factory along with other Russian women. Because her husband was in the German military, they were given a small apartment to live in. Marsha had met Toni, who was a Russian Jew that knew of Marsha's Jewish background. Toni challenged Marsha to prove that she was not Jewish. Marsha's husband told her to go to Poland to get documents so that she could obtain German citizenship. While in Poland, Marsha saw Jews behind bars in concentration camps and she felt bad that she could not help them. Marsha was told that she needed a blood test to prove whether she was Jewish or Russian. The result was that Marsha was considered Russian and not Jewish, so she returned to Germany. Marsha told Toni that she would not judge her for trying to expose her as a Jew, but only God could judge her. Before they were married, Marsha's husband had escaped Communist Russia and joined the German army as an interpreter. At the end of the war, he was arrested and killed in prison.

Marsha found work in the Winterling Porcelain factory. As she grieved for her children, she had recurring nightmares where her sons were crying out to her for help before dying. An elderly Russian workmate suggested that they go to see a priest who could pray for the souls of her loved ones. When they went to the church, the priest told her that the charge for the prayers was five German marks per soul. Marsha's wages were five marks per week. So she could only afford prayers for her children, and not for her other dead family members. After returning home, Marsha felt better for a little while, but when the nightmares resumed after a week, she went back to the priest. She told him that this time she did not have any money to give him for prayers, so the priest told her that he was unable to pray for her loved ones.

After the war had ended, Marsha felt completely lost. Thirteen of her family members had died during the war and she was alone in a foreign country. Marsha didn't return to Russia since she had nothing to return to, so she just worked to support herself. She was always sad and never smiled. When Marsha was 38 years old, a coworker at the porcelain factory, Hans Albert, became interested in her. Marsha told him that she was not interested in him and that she could not make anyone happy because she was an unhappy person, but Hans persisted. After three dates, he proposed marriage. Marsha's workmates said she should not tell him that she was Jewish, but she said she could not marry Hans without telling him of her Jewish background. After Marsha told him what had happened to her family, Hans said he felt ashamed to be German. Because Marsha did not have a death certificate for her second husband, they could not get married and she was informed that it might take two years to get the document.

Marsha said that she had always believed in God but did not know much about him, although she attended services at the Catholic church. Hans had been a Lutheran, but was not satisfied with his religion and wanted to find the true religion. He was given a book published by Jehovah's Witnesses. After reading it, he declared, "That's the truth!" He began attending meetings held by Jehovah's Witnesses. He also started to share what he was learning with people from door-to-door. Marsha felt jealous that Hans was attending meetings where there were other young women, so he reassured her that he loved her very much—but that he loved Jehovah even more.

Hans showed Marsha the Ten Commandments in the Bible at Exodus 20:4 where it says not to worship images. As a sincere Catholic, Marsha was confused because she cried each day when she looked at an image of Jesus bleeding. She prayed and asked God to help her to get to know him. One day, Hans told Marsha that he was going to another city to be baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses, so Marsha decided that she would go with him. She didn't know anything about the Bible except that if you were found with one in Russia, you could be exiled to Siberia. Marsha began to attend the meetings of Jehovah's Witnesses where she learned about the hope of an earthly resurrection of the

dead and that her children were not suffering in purgatory because of her sins. The scripture at John 5:28, 29 became her favorite because it is about the future resurrection of the dead. Six months later, Marsha was also baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. She shared what she had learned from the Bible and from Jehovah's Witnesses with Hans' parents.

Marsha invited Brother **Beyer**, a circuit servant (a traveling minister of Jehovah's Witnesses who helped to organize congregations) to stay with her when he was visiting their congregation. Brother **Beyer** had suffered for seven years in concentration camps because his mother was Jewish and he was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. For his visit, Marsha and Hans saved their rations of meat so that they could serve it to Brother **Beyer**. Marsha explained to him that although there were religious images in her house, she no longer worshipped them. She had not disposed of the images because a Russian woman had warned her that if she threw the images away God would kill her. Marsha also confided in him that she and Hans were not yet married because she did not have the needed papers. Brother **Beyer** suggested that Marsha put the images in a suitcase while she researched the Bible to find out what she should do with them rather than merely relying on a superstitious belief.

When winter came and they still did not have the documents needed to get married, Marsha decided that she would burn the images in the coal oven. She threw the images into the oven and quickly ran out, several blocks away, to wait and see if the house would explode. To her surprise, the house did not explode; when she returned, she found that the images had been completely burned up. Two months later, Marsha received the documents she needed to prove her husband was deceased and she and Hans married at the city hall. Afterwards, at the house, a regular pioneer (Jehovah's Witness full-time voluntary preacher) gave a Bible-based talk about marriage.

Hans had been able to help Marsha locate her father's siblings who had emigrated to the United States. They wanted Marsha and Hans to join them there, but she felt she needed to tell them that although Hans was German (and they were Jewish), he had saved her life. In 1951, Marsha and Hans emigrated to the United States. Hans became an elder in a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. In 1956 Marsha became a regular pioneer, so that she could help people see a better way of living. She no longer had nightmares about her children because she had learned from the Bible that they are not suffering but are in a sleep-like state, like Lazarus from the Bible was in. Marsha looked forward to their resurrection by Jehovah God.

Keywords

Jehovah's Witnesses
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Jews baptized as Catholics