

Lily Cohen

June 29, 2010

RG-50.030.0575

Summary

Lily Cohen was born June 15, 1938 (approximate) as Lily Kaczmariski in Warsaw, Poland to Ada Berlin and Yan Oberlandksy. From the Internet, Lily learned her father was in the Polish Army as a Virtuit Militari, the highest rank, and the first Jew to reach it. Lily spoke Polish as a child and German/Polish upon arriving in Israel. She recalls her father was tall and her mother had dark hair (Lily was blond). The war began with noise, shouting and shooting from the street, her dog was shot and a Ukrainian soldier lifted her up. Her mother often hid in a cupboard and one day both parents disappeared. Her father never reappeared but her mother took her to the Hortekoski Hotel where she tried to obtain papers for Palestine. Then they deported on a cattle car to Bergen-Belsen where she saw her mother in a hospital before she died from TB. Lily lived through the war in the camp as she was taken care of by strangers. First, a man was her caretaker but he abused her. Then Bronka Eismann took Lily to her barracks until Bronka was sent to France. Afterwards other women including Nuta Gudkowsky took over her care. There were two other children in the barrack but they were with their mothers. In March 1945 Lily left Bergen Belsen by train which got bombed by the Germans so they hid underneath. Soon the Germans ran away and they were liberated by the Americans. She was taken to Buchenwald where she was alone until Hilda Chooper and her son, Tommy, took her to a nice town of Hillersleben. An Army Rabbi arranged the group's transport to Palestine. First, they went to Paris where they got rooms at the Hotel Lutetia and then went to a rehab in the country for three weeks before taking a ship to Palestine. They arrived July 6, 1945 and were placed in Camp Atleet near Haifa. Hilda and Tommy joined Hilda's husband, leaving Lily alone once again. Soon Aliyah Tenora, a youth organization, had her informally adopted by Bedana and Schlamie Katznelson who had a son, about a year older than Lily, and a two-week-old baby and a third boy when Lily was ten. Lily lived with the children in their kibbutz. The children looked and spoke differently from her. Hilda and Nuta visited her but her uncle, her mother's brother, was the only relative who survived. He had escaped to Paris where he died in 1953. He was a musician and wrote Lily letters and sent her clothes. Lily always felt alone and could not trust adults. She felt she had to prove herself and became a dancer by attending a conservatory in Jerusalem. She served a brief time with the Israeli Army as had to be treated for Rheumatic Fever. There she met her future husband and got married at age 18 and soon had a son. She got divorced and remarried a fellow dancer and had a daughter. Lily lived with her daughter in England. Lily did not speak about her early life until she spoke to her twin granddaughters (her son's children). Her son is Dean of NYU in Israel where she agreed to talk to the students about her experiences. She gave this interview as loves her family and wants them to be written in history.