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Summary

Mira (Miriam) (née Fleishman) Wallerstein was born September 6, 1919 to Ernst and Riva Shulhoff in Ugly, near Minsk, which was then in Russia. Mira had a younger sister, Clara, born in 1921. Her father was from Pilsen. He had been drafted into the Austria-Hungarian Army, but defected while serving in Russia. He then worked to support an independent Czechoslovakia. Her mother was 17-18 years older than her husband. After the war, the family moved back to Pilsen, living with his mother and her father (Mira's great-grandfather). Her mother, for unclear reasons, was sent back to Russia alone. Mira was not positive that her parents were married. For ostensible reasons of poverty, Mira was sent to stay with her grand uncle married to her father's aunt in Prague. She describes how unpleasant her childhood was.

Mira's father remarried a non-Jew after his mother died. Clara, who had remained with her grandmother, then lived with her father; she died of TB at age 14. Mira attended her sister's funeral, but rarely saw her father, until her father came to Prague after Hitler came into Czechoslovakia. Mira's foster mother revealed that her mother had not died, as she'd originally been told, and helped them exchange letters. Her foster family was not strongly religious, but retained a Jewish identity.

After Hitler's takeover in 1939, her foster parents were temporarily arrested by the SS for holding an overseas bank account in Holland. Mira describes how she experienced the German takeover and how she decided to immigrate to the U.S., which she did in February, 1940. Her birth in Russia was more useful to access U.S. quotas than her Czech citizenship. She also had critical help in Prague from a Mr. Traubscher, a father of a close friend.

Mira traveled to the U.S. through Trieste on tickets bought by Jewish sponsors in Holland. She met and joined a Viennese family (Gross) in Trieste, also traveling to the U.S., with whom she became very close for the rest of her life. Mira went to her uncle's sister in Great Neck who had come to the U.S. before WWI, working as a mother's helper, and then went to school for practical nursing. She married in 1943 to a man from Kassel, Germany who came to the U.S. before the war. They had two children and settled in Paramus, New Jersey. Mira visited Prague in 1990 with her daughter, Ruth.