

## **RG-50.030.1005**

### **Summary**

Gertrude Shafer (née Burstyn), born in Brookline, Massachusetts on May 29, 1957, tells the stories of her parents' survival during the Holocaust since her mother found it too painful to be interviewed. Gertrude had four siblings, including an older sister born in 1947 in Munich. Gertrude grew up in a warm and loving orthodox family who spoke Yiddish at home. Her father spoke about his and her mother's experiences during the last twelve years of his life when he was laid up with severe arthritis. Her mother did not like to talk about what happened, though she frequently bemoaned the loss of her parents and siblings. Gertrude came to the story of her parents as an adult largely through the stories her father told and those of her oldest sister. Gertrude started with telling the story of her father. Both Parents were born in or near Chelm, Poland. Her father, Abraham Burstyn, was born around 1900 and was many years older than her mother. He had a positive attitude despite his experiences and the deaths of siblings during the Holocaust and regularly thanked God for his survival. He was one of twelve or thirteen children, some of whom died before WWII. He learned cement work before the war, and though he experienced much antisemitic harassment by fellow workers his work helped him survive the war. After a year or two of slave labor, her father was herded into a ghetto with his family. Instead of being deported to a death camp like two of his brothers he was put to work by the Nazis on building cement roads. When his future wife, at around fifteen years old, came to the labor camp where he was working, he protected her. They stayed in the camp for about a year and a half but then escaped into the woods with three of his brothers, his mother, and his future wife. Life was difficult in the woods, and they survived in hiding until the Russians liberated them.

Gertrude's mother was born in 1925 as Leah Aller into a loving but poor household. A younger sister died before the war but an older sister, brother and her parents were killed by the Nazis. In 1939 she was sent to a labor camp and then went into the ghetto where she saw her mother and father killed. She and a sister escaped to a labor camp where she was to meet her future husband. Her sister, however, was killed. Gertrude's mother later escaped into the woods with her future husband. She, her future husband, and his three brothers and parents were sent to a DP camp in Landsberg Germany. They were fortunate to have a distant cousin in the Boston area to sponsor then to come to the United States in 1947. Her experiences and the killing of her parents and siblings remained very painful after the war.

Asked about how being the child of survivors affected her, Gertrude responded "in every way." Her mother was very protective and did not allow the children to waste food. Gertrude also felt very protective of her mother, especially after her father died. She felt guilty about remaining in the Boston area when her mother moved to Florida in later years. Still, Gertrude felt that she grew up in a warm and loving family and never wanted to rebel against her parents.