

## Summary of Oral History: Helen (nee Wygodny) Meisels

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**Helen (nee Wygodny) Meisels** b. 5/1/1917 Chmielnik, Poland, daughter of Issack (Icek) a merchant & Necha Wygodny, 2 sisters, 2 brothers; Jewish & Polish education/Śladków; Icek owned land, grain mill, youngest of 12, Icek's father married again after wife's death, 6 children from each marriage; Helen's mother had 2 sisters, one a widow with no children, brothers of her husband's family prevented her from remarrying according to Jewish law; Helen's family had some Polish friends; Helen's education completed age 14, becomes dressmaker/Śladków; anti-Semitism experienced, sister's rheumatic fever prevents fleeing to Russia as many were doing; ghetto formed, sisters taken into forced labor 1 year, mother had died from typhoid prior to ghetto formed; with rumors of ghetto's liquidation, father only age 42 acquiesces to surrender but rebellious Helen wants to take a chance so she acquires false papers & three sisters pose as Aryans but all still placed in forced labor, two sisters sent to Oberschlesien, Germany & Helen placed near Essen; heads shaved, Helen & one sister appeared Aryan but other sister endures suspicions as Jewish; youngest brother had joined partisans, killed by Polish, other brother would survive concentration camp; in Helen's textile factory, 40 Russian girls, 10 Polish girls & for 3 years Helen's slave labored, food minimal, coffee made from burnt grains; local Polish family invite Helen to sew for them, able to obtain more food for girls in factory; still under guise, Helen solicits from boy if his mother could hide her & boy's mother accepts but requires Helen to confess to priest; overhearing Anti-Semitism during slave labor, Helen is certain Polish girls would turn her in if her Jewish identity is disclosed; liberated by Americans; return to Chmielnik, skepticism of local rumor that Jewish people had killed Polish children; brother sells property of grandfather; 3 sisters & 1 surviving brother enter German DP until US immigration 1949 (met future husband in DP), brother settles in Israel, believed that brother's dental tech skills kept him alive in camp; Helen/husband immigrate US assisted by Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, stay in Clinton, Indiana then move to Chicago; happiness in having children, grandchildren; no desire to return to Poland but brother visits; discusses return Helen's mixed feelings on religion; she shares moment of joviality having deftly navigated an Anti-Semitism in her small village; Helen has no awareness of other Jews having survived in her village, attributes her survival to "taking a chance."