

-TITLE-MIRIAM GOLDWASSER
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-NOTES-
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Miriam detailed how she was able to survive the war being hidden by a wealthy Polish farmer. She became very emotional and had to stop whenever she would talk about the uncle who saved her life by finding this hiding place. He did not survive, nor did her mother and sister.

Miriam Goldwasser (nee Colodny) was born in Comenjust (ph), Poland after World War I.

1:00 Miriam states her name and says she was born after World War I. At that time all the Jews were running from the Cossacks who were killing them. Her mother was pregnant with her and she ran into the woods. Her father wasn't there and she was born in a peasant's house. Her mother didn't know if Miriam's father was alive or not.

2:00 Her father had been shot running through the woods and pretended he was dead. After the Cossacks left, he got to a peasant's home. Miriam's parents finally found each other. They all settled in a little village. Her sister was born 7 1/2 years after her. They then went to a town where her grandparents lived. Her parents established a little store. Then her father took sick and died when Miriam was 11 years old. Miriam, her mother and her sister continued their lives until the war broke out in 1939. They lived in Ukrania, but the Poles took it over so it was Poland.

In 1939, they hid what was left in the store and they lived off of that. They reunited with her grandmother, an aunt and her husband and child. They stayed together until the Germans came in 1941. Life was hard. The Germans didn't persecute right away but they were taking things away. One day the Germans put a sign on all Jewish stores saying people could come and take whatever they wanted. In 1942, they began being moved into Ghettos.

4:00 Miriam's mother had a sister and brother in another city where saints were buried and there were no Ghettos. They got set to move there. It was a big farm and Miriam hid in the attic in the daytime and helped on the farm at night. This was in 1942 and the Germans started to liquidate children.

Her uncle smuggled her 4 year old cousin to the farm.

5:00 He was to pick up the child, Florence, in the woods. She was left alone there and he got her. Miriam and Florence were at the farm for 2 more months. A man then came and said he knew someone was in hiding and that the next day the Gestapo would be coming. The farmer said he'd lose his farm if he was caught but he didn't want his whole family shot. That evening the wife gave Miriam's long braids a shampoo. The farmer took her and Florence into the woods. Her uncle didn't know where she was. The Gestapo came in the morning.

6:00 They found Miriam's bedding but the farmer said his brother had been sleeping there. Miriam was hiding in a vegetable garden. She was about 15 or 16 years old. There were no children left in the Ghetto except for Florence. Her uncle had gotten her and Florence back in the Ghetto. They were dressed like peasants.

7:00 They were there 3 weeks when rumors started that the Ghetto was going to be liquidated. A "good" German told her uncle to get out. About 1,000 - 1,500 people were there. There was no water. Every day at 12 o'clock they had to go out of the Ghetto and get water for another 24 hours. Her uncle told Miriam that they'd be shot if they stayed in the Ghetto so they had to get out. He told them when they went to get water to take off their Stars of David and to keep on walking to the lumber place where her uncle worked.

8:00 Miriam, her aunt and cousin were together. Her uncle had been able to travel freely in and out of the Ghetto to the lumber place. He made a hiding place there between some boards. Instead of going back to the Ghetto, he hid with them. When it got dark they had to move on. Her uncle had a lot of friends and he was very familiar with the woods. It was October and there was ice. They walked into a little shack and her uncle asked for food. The man there said to get out by the next day because he was afraid.

9:00 They went from one shack to another. Her uncle said it would be hard to hide a family of four. They had nothing to eat. Her uncle found a frozen potato and warmed it under his arm for his little girl Florence. They went into a swamp area as they knew the Germans were afraid to go there. They got there and heard wolves howling. Now they were safe from the Germans but were afraid the wolves would tear them apart.

10:00 Her uncle said they'd make a bonfire so the wolves would go away. But, then someone would see the fire. The ground was frozen. The uncle had taken along a cleaver. He made a little hut from branches that couldn't be higher than the swamp branches. Earlier, when they had been going from shack to shack, they had met some other people from the same town and they joined together. There were partisans in the swamp and they wished they could join them.

11:00 There were 7 of them altogether in the hut. Two men who had been with them went out and never returned. The aunt and Florence would wait in the hut while the others would go and beg for bread in the village. They never knew if they'd return. The people could turn them in for 2 kilos of salt or sugar. They knew the Germans wouldn't go into the swamp but there were informers who wanted the sugar and salt.

12:00 If they were spotted in a hut they had to change places. This happened often. It was very cold. They had no shoes so when they were in a village, they would take clothes off of clothes lines to wrap around their feet. When summer came, they would steal things from the gardens. Since they had no calendar, her uncle counted the days from one season to another.

13:00 They baked matzos in the woods. They did it a few miles from where they were staying so the aroma would not give them away. They were there 2 winters and 2 summers. They then heard that the Russians came and chased out the Germans. They all went back to the village but not to the city of Comenjust yet. As they were leaving the woods the Russians spotted them. They thought her uncle was a deserter from the Russian Army and drafted him. He went to the front. He wanted to get a "live" German. He was killed but he had saved his family.

14:00 This left Miriam, her aunt and her cousin alone. They stayed close to the Russian Army. There was anti-Semitism there too. The Jews were accused of not fighting. They went deep into Russia, came back, and finally went to the city of Comenjust. When they had left for the Ghetto, everything was given away, even their house. They went to get it back and were shot at by those who hated Jews, Russians and Germans. These were the Ukrainians who wanted a pure Ukrainian state.

15:00 They had worked with the Germans before and now they wanted to get rid of them. Miriam and her family got some of their possessions back, but not all. Miriam tried to disguise herself as a Ukrainian. She spoke Ukrainian without an accent. She and another lady got the Ukrainians some food. The other lady had gold teeth. Miriam said the Ukrainians would see them right away so she pinched the lady who caught on and didn't open her mouth. She played mute. They stayed in the city for 9 months. Then the Israeli underground came to get whoever survived in Poland.

16:00 They were able to get to Austria, then Italy and then Israel. First they had to get to Czechoslovakia and act like Greek Jews. From there they got to Austria. They were in trucks covered by tarp and they couldn't make a sound. There were now 7 women in Miriam's group.

17:00 In Austria, they went to Vienna where they went to a public bath. From Vienna, they went to Linz. Then they went to a place where Hitler was born, Ranshoffer (ph). They wanted to go Israel. Other groups went from Austria to Italy to Haifa.

Miriam's husband went through 5 concentration camps and lost his whole family. He wanted to go to America.

18:00 In Poland, when Miriam was young, Jews were always reminded they were Jewish. She says Poles were very jealous of Jews. They didn't drink and they were hard workers. When Miriam was hidden by the farmer, she was separated from her mother and sister. They were rounded up and killed. She doesn't know if they were taken to camps or just killed. In hiding, her uncle had told her whose parents had been killed. Many young people ran away to the partisans.

19:00 Miriam just picked a date to observe the Jahrzeit. When the war was over, she was in the woods and they stayed with the Russian Army. The man that hid her was Olean Karpec (ph) and his daughter who brought them food was named Paula. She was 9 years old. Her siblings were younger. She hid the food in the buckets with the pigs' food. After they were liberated, the farmer would still give them food.

20:00 Paula had always apologized if she couldn't come with food. She was entrusted with this secret at 9 years of age. She had been delegated to bring the food. After they were liberated, the farmer welcomed them to his house to get whatever they needed. Miriam was always dressed like a peasant in case she came across someone who didn't like Jews. One day she went back to the farm. The farmer's wife was sitting in the barn crying. There were Russians all over. They had chased the family out of their house and took the husband away. The Russians accused him of working with the Germans. Miriam ran into the house.

21:00 She cried when they flirted with her. She said she was a Jewish girl and the man they accused had saved her life.

1:00 When she went into the house and the Russians were delighted to see a young girl, she said she wasn't there to flirt with them. She was crying. She told them the man they accused of working with the Germans risked his life to save hers. They jumped up and a Jewish lieutenant embraced her and said she was the first Jewish person he'd seen since he left Kiev. He said they had to go quickly to where the farmer was since they were going to get rid of him. They jumped into a jeep and went to where he was locked up. He saw Miriam and jumped and cried. He was freed and brought back to his family.

2:00 Right away they got their house and all possessions back. After that they saw each other only a few more times. They used to write, but in Russia in those days, people didn't get their mail. So, Miriam didn't know what happened to them. She thought he might have been sent to Siberia because he was a very wealthy man and the Russians didn't like that. Miriam then says last year her cousin Florence's husband's brother was killed over there and they wanted to put a tombstone on his grave. They went back to where they had been hiding and made a video of the house.

Then it looked like a palace and now it looked like a shack. The husband and wife were now dead. The children were alive and Miriam saw little Paula on the video.

3:00 They were living on a cooperative farm and couldn't accept anything, but the man put some money in an envelope with a picture of Miriam. Paula thought Miriam had been the mother. Florence went to pieces. Miriam wished they could have seen them alive. The farmer was a righteous man. She hopes they'll now be able to help them.

4:00 Miriam didn't want to go to America. There was no Jewish state yet. Everything was done by the underground - the Bruha(ph). Her aunt wanted to go to America because her husband's brother was there and she wanted to make a family for her daughter. Miriam only wanted to go to Israel, but her husband said they should go to America. He had been teaching English in a Displaced Persons camp. He registered people who wanted to go to America. He registered Miriam and himself before they got married just in case she'd change her mind.

5:00 They got married and lived in Austria for 3 years and it was very hard. There was a quota and you had to prove you wouldn't be a public burden. Through a miracle, Miriam says she had her father's brother who had been sent to Siberia. He was married to a woman who had a nephew in Newport News and he assured the American government they would have no trouble with Miriam and her husband. They came to America and her daughter was born in Newport News and also her son. They lived there for 32 years and now she has 6 gorgeous grandchildren.
.END.