

## **Summary of Oral History: Dora Gutterman**

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**This Summary was written by a USHMM Volunteer on [05/2022]**

Dora was born in 1914 in Vicelitz (?), Poland, as the only daughter with three brothers: Pincus, born 1908, Chaim, born 1911 and Menasha born 1917. Her father had a successful leather business and her family was wealthy, orthodox, and charitable. Her friends were Jewish. She completed Polish public school at 13 and helped in the store with her brothers. She was not sent to a gymnasium due to anti-Semitism there. Their village was several blocks long and a train ride to Krakow took several hours. In 1928, her father felt the anti-Semitism getting worse and attempted to get a visa to Palestine but found out that you could not take any money with you. When Hitler came into power in 1933, the Poles hired people to stand in front of Jewish stores and chase customers away. March 25, 1938 Dora married Bernard Hochstein and obtained an apartment in Sosnowiec near the German border as Pincus lived there with Paula, his wife and their two girls and had a leather business. War started and city hall was burning documents, so Dora decided to take her jewelry and silverware to her parents as she thought their village was safer. She returned to Sosnowiec where they recovered some flour from a mill they owned in partnership with three others. When the men were ordered to report to City Hall, her husband and Pincus ran to her parents and returned home January 2. Dora bartered the flour for other goods with the Jews in Sosnowiec, which was annexed to Germany. Her husband went to the area near the mill and she returned home to Vicelitz (?) but soon decided that she was concerned about her furniture in Sosnowiec and took the train back.

### **Part 2**

Dora explains that the Gestapo thought she was Jewish and threw her off the train so she returned to her parents' home where her brother, Chaim was living. Chaim said he would take her another way to Sosnowiec and they succeeded and found her apartment and furniture were not disturbed. Again, Dora returned to her parents and told Pincus to move one piece of furniture at a time to his attic. Soon she received a letter from Pincus that the Germans had taken her furniture. Dora remained with her parents, Chaim, Menasha and Pincus' two girls. They had sufficient food by trading leather with the farmers for food. The synagogue in Vicelitz (?) was burned so the Jews used private homes for services. Pincus missed his two girls and they were taken to Sosnowiec. Dora's daughter, Sheila, born April 16, 1940, cried as she stayed with her aunt and wanted her mother. The Gestapo visited her parents daily searching for leather and hit her father when none is found as it had been hidden with the farmers. Their village was too small to have a Ghetto. Dora's husband had been sent to a labor camp. In 1941 Dora's brother, Chaim, paid someone to take his place in a labor camp and in May 1942 he married Paula. Dora's parents were afraid the Germans would hear Sheila in their hiding place so had Chaim take Dora and Sheila to Joshlitz (?) in October '42. Dora was happy to receive a cake and letter from her mother but then heard there was a transport at Vicelitz (?) so could not go home.

### Part 3

Dora learns that the Jews from Vicelitz (?) and neighboring towns have been collected and placed on farmer's trucks and taken by train to Treblinka. She felt lost at this point as she was alone with her baby. In Joshlitz (?) she kept looking at the road and hoping someone would come to tell her that her parents are hidden with a farmer. Finally, she learns that her family including her husband, Menasha and her parents are hiding in a house in Joshlitz (?) so she joins them for a month. Menasha became a Jewish policeman in November of '42 as he thought it might be helpful to their situation. Dora is concerned that there will be a second transport so Paula obtains a hiding place for her. Her father has difficulty getting Dora a Polish ID card and obtains one for Dora as Sofia Boychick (?) and for Sheila as Celina Boychick (?). Dora explains her difficulty traveling with Sheila and a suitcase by train and a couple help her by having her walk between them and they arrive in Slommick (?). Difficulties include being recognized as Jewish by those who know her and by Polish children. Finally, Dora reaches the safe farm, Linkoff (?), where she remained a month until December '42. Maria, a Polish woman, teaches her Catholic prayers so she can fit in and tells her to go to her daughter's farm in January '43 where Dora serves as cleaning lady. She is requested to leave when the authorities come to the farm and request a list of names and ages of residents. Sheila gets sick and Dora takes her to a Jewish doctor and leaves her with Marie at night while she sleeps in a cold room next to a bakery as she received permission by using her ID card. It is March '43 and Dora has not heard from her parents so hires a man to search for them.

### Part 4

First they went to the farm where they thought her family was hiding and were told they were not there and they should look further. Then they tried the farmer who was a shoemaker and he indicated her family was there and they should return later. They returned to the original farm and went into the barn and found a door leading down to the basement. They went down and found her mother, father, husband and Menasha. Dora had to know they were all alive but realized she could not remain. She returned home and received a letter from Marie to buy a few items to make their apartment cozy. It was March or April '43 when she took the train to shop and returned home. To obtain money for her family, she obtained clothes from them and got money for them from the mill owner or from Krakow. Dora learned that her brother, Menasha, had been killed by the Polish Police. Her difficulty to find a hiding place for herself and a shelter for Sheila became desperate when two policemen visited Dora and said that someone anonymously claimed she was Jewish and checked her ID and returned it. In April '43 Dora left the baby with Marie and took trains to Stravnitz (?) in the mountains in hopes that it was safer there. The resort closed so she returned home. The next month she learned the Gestapo was looking for her so she rented a room in the empty Kielce ghetto. Soon two Polish policemen questioned her about Marie and her religion and she replied that she was raised Catholic, bribed them and ran away. She found a Children's Home to care for Sheila. Later she took Marie to Germany where she died after liberation. Dora spent the night in a wagon where the owner thought she was Jewish. Her ID was taken away, and she was placed in jail with prostitutes.

They insisted she was Jewish and would not let her sleep. Finally, a Gestapo took her to her room and said she was attractive and wanted to be her friend.

### **Part 5**

Dora talks about her Polish girlfriend, Selena (?), in elementary school who gave her the homework assignment when she was absent due to observing the Sabbath. They graduated in 1928 and when they saw each other in 1940, Selena said, "Get lost, you dirty Jew." Dora responded to the Gestapo person that she liked him and was careful not to speak German. She remained in Kielce for months and then took a horse and wagon to Yengio (?) and found Rabinik (?) who reported that all the towns were cleared of Jews and Paula was shot. She remained in Yengio (?) until liberated by the Russians on January 15, 1945. She was told that Chaim was dead and Pincus was in Auschwitz. Dora visited Sheila, who was three, and told the director that her family did not want Sheila and they should continue caring for her. She visited Sheila monthly in Smelnik (?) and spoke to her in Polish so she would not know Yiddish. Dora remained in the house with the six men who needed money and she traded American money for Polish money from the miller. They were permitted use of the bathroom once daily (but no bath) and received a loaf of bread monthly and oatmeal daily. When liberated, Dora weighed about 50 pounds and had many blisters.

### **Part 6**

Dora explains that she had to be careful with correspondence as she did not want the landlord to learn her parent's address. She was in hiding for one and a half years and they talked about food. They could hear the Germans and Russians fighting in Yengio (?) and knew the war was ending. Some people left but she and the six men remained. She waited three days to hear from her parents but no one came so she went to their farm and was told they had left. Her father's tefilim (prayer equipment) remained so realized he must have been killed. After searching for her parents without finding them, she picked up Sheila and decided to go to Sosnowiec in hopes of finding photographs but found nothing in her or Pincus' apartments. She returned to Vicelitz (?) until April '45 and went to Radom where she contacted a cousin in the leather goods business. She sold the goods in small towns and rented a room. Dora was overjoyed when Pincus arrived from Auschwitz in July '45 and they rented rooms in Sosnowiec until July '46. Her parents, Chaim and Menasha, and her husband had been murdered. She went to a DP camp in Stuttgart, Germany in summer '46 and met her second husband and they got married in '48. On December 24, 1969 she visited Pincus in Australia.

### **Part 7**

Dora felt she must leave Poland but she could not leave legally as the border was closed. She desired to go to the American zone in Germany which would enable her to go to Palestine or the US. She found the DP camp was too full and obtained permission to live with a German family as they were required to take in those from the DP camp. She remained there for three years where she had one room and shared the bathroom and kitchen. Using the black market to trade leather, gave her some income. After she got married, Pincus married Eva. Dora did not want to follow Pincus to Australia so she prepared to go to Israel. Her new husband, Sam Gutterman, had been liberated from a concentration camp (Tanetz?) so he could go to Israel, but not the US.

They packed their furniture and dishes in boxes. In 1949 she gave birth to Ruth. Dora had been strictly orthodox before the war, lost her faith during the war and after recuperating in Sosnowiec, believed in G-d and attended synagogue. Even when she lost faith, she was proud and happy to be Jewish. She wanted to see Hitler and the German nation dead. Dora is angry that the world permitted the innocent to be killed. Finally, her husband obtained a letter that he had been liberated by the Americans and they went to the US on October 29, 1949. They arrived in NY which she found too noisy and settled in Norfolk, Virginia with help of a Jewish organization. For eight years she attended a Thanksgiving meal for survivors sponsored by a Jewish organization. Dora found that those who were not survivors looked down on her so she did not discuss her Holocaust experiences with them. She has received some reparations. Since living in the US, Dora speaks Yiddish at home except she speaks English to her children and speaks Polish at business. Although Dora feels that the US is wonderful and gave her a home. She feels that Israel is her land. Dora believes that a Holocaust can happen here. Her values include being proud of being Jewish, getting an education and having ambition. Dora gave this interview with hopes that people will know what happened and it will never happen again.